

7. Study on Curriculum Development Aimed at Fostering Students' Social Skills

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1. Background at the time of commencing the study

We conducted a study concerning students' qualities and the skills that the future school education is expected to enhance, for the period of three years from FY2004 to FY2006, as a project study of the National Institute for Educational Policy Research. This study, aiming to further continue our study, revealed that among various types of qualities and skills required for students, social skills are now considered to be extremely important, not only in Japan but also in many other countries.

Considering that it is important to develop teaching methods and curricula to foster such skills, we conducted a door-to-door survey on advanced learning activities in this field at each educational stage, mainly focusing on various hands-on learning activities at elementary and secondary schools. Furthermore, we did research on the Key Competencies Project by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the service-learning and contextual learning being conducted in the United States, an area where many achievements have been reported.

2. Purpose of the study

The information and communication technology and science have been advancing at an unexpectedly rapid pace, and the necessity has arisen to consider children's learning at school from a new point of view. In order to build a sustainable society and obtain success in life in the future, what types of qualities and skills are required for children? How should schools foster such qualities and skills? These issues are recognized as urgent and significant and various measures have been taken in many countries including Japan.

Under such circumstances, the OECD has been promoting a project to foster key competencies that individuals are to acquire. Bayern, Germany positions these competencies in curricula for basic schools, and Finland has developed, based on those key competencies, original curricula to foster children's capacity to utilize their acquired knowledge in their daily life. They both have achieved excellent performances.

This study intends to clarify the trends of curriculum development in OECD member countries, which focuses on the fostering of key competencies, especially the social skills of children. We also examined concrete examples of their activities for fostering such skills, the positioning of such activities in the entirety of curricula, and problems that need to be solved, through the analysis of various reports and on-site surveys. Furthermore, we did research on

service-learning (learning to give back to the community) and contextual learning (learning in the context of daily life) in the United States, which are support programs to foster children's social skills, with a view to clarify their usefulness and problems. From the results of these studies, we expect to obtain basic data for promoting curriculum development that fosters the social skills of children for Japanese primary and secondary education.

- (1) We will analyze reports by the EU Directorate General for Education and Culture, which provides various data through surveys on key competencies in EU countries, as well as those on the OECD Program Definition and Selection of Competencies (DeSeCo), and thereby compile the outline of the overall efforts taken in the OECD countries.
- (2) We will study documents and conduct field surveys in Germany, northern Europe, and the United States, so as to clarify the details of various programs and curricula for fostering children's social skills in respective countries, as well as their concepts of program/curriculum development and the problems therein.
- (3) From the viewpoint of fostering Japanese children's social skills, we will select example cases of advanced curriculum development by Japanese elementary and secondary schools from reports and analyze the details thereof. We will also conduct a door-to-door survey to examine how they are making efforts, what means they have devised, and what problems they now face.

3. Results of the study

- (1) Programs to foster social skills in European countries (Key Competencies Project, etc.)

The term "competence" was originally used in the context of vocational training, meaning the ability to perform specific duties. However, in recent years, the term has come to be used also in the world of ordinary education, meaning the specific ability or potential to act effectively in a prescribed context. In other words, knowledge has come to be recognized as what is to be utilized, not just as what is to be taught, and the establishment of competence is defined as individual's acquisition of the ability to transfer, apply, and integrate his/her acquired knowledge under complicated, diversified, and unpredictable circumstances.

The EU Directorate General for Education and Culture publicized the "Key competencies: A developing concept in general compulsory education" and pointed out the following: "Developments during the second half of the 20th century have brought radical social and economic change to Europe. Globalisation and its manifestation in the cultural, political, economic and environmental fields have been the major force behind this transformation. Scientific and technological progress, especially in the communications industry, have promoted international integration and cooperation but also intensified international competition. In order to develop quick responses to the challenges of this new order while safeguarding and

improving their socio-economic standards, European countries have recognized knowledge as their most valuable resource for fuelling economic growth. Increased production, distribution and application of knowledge in all its forms are instrumental in the creation of economic and cultural prosperity. Knowledge is recognised as the driving force behind personal and occupational development. Where people acquire knowledge, learn skills and transform them into competence for meaningful use, they not only stimulate economic and technological progress but derive much personal satisfaction and well-being from their endeavours.” The report continues, “There is frequent talk about the need to ‘upskill’ the workforce to ensure sustainable development... This upgrading is considered an open-ended process, which starts with a solid basic education and is sustained through lifelong learning. Subject knowledge is rendered obsolete with increasing rapidity by the pace of technological progress.” The EU Directorate General for Education and Culture naturally recognizes the importance of the acquisition of knowledge and skills, but at the same time, positions competence, the ability to utilize such knowledge and skills, as one of the key abilities indispensable for individual adults in their social lives in today’ rapidly-changing society.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) also presented recommendable vocational training plans for acquiring these abilities indispensable for professionals, suggesting that such plans should be incorporated in the labor policies of its respective member countries. Key competencies have thus been attracting attention in various fields.

At present, a unified definition of key competencies has yet to be established, but the OECD explanation of the term encompasses the following three categories: (i) the competency to utilize social, cultural, and technical tools in an interactive manner, (ii) the competency to formulate human relationships in diversified social groups, and (iii) the competency to act independently.

In Germany, conventional career education conducted in many federal states, such as internship programs at the lower secondary education stage and dual systems introduced mainly at vocational education schools at the upper secondary education stage, has achieved a lot in the field of fostering children’s social skills. Furthermore, various rules determined at the regular Education Minister’s Conference define, for respective subjects, what competencies students should acquire by which school year. There have been moves to try to prepare educational standards for competency models.

(2) Efforts in the United States

In the United States, efforts to foster students’ social skills have been made under various programs centering on career education and other hands-on learning programs. In particular, service-learning has been promoted across the nation and has attracted people’s attention in

recent years, showing usefulness not only as a program to raise students' motivation and academic abilities but also as a program to support the enhancement of their social skills. In the Chicago school district we surveyed, the service-learning program is being conducted mainly at upper secondary schools, in collaboration with various local government agencies and private companies, based on curricula developed by the boards of education and various types of NPOs. These curricula will be a great model for Japan in developing similar curricula.

The documents for promoting the service-learning program in the Chicago school district explain the effects of the program, stating "The program helps students find the answer to the age-old question 'why should we learn this?' The service-learning program will provide a good opportunity for educators, students, and their local communities to build a long-lasting relationship." The documents define the service-learning program as "the teaching/learning method to select problems and needs of respective local communities and connect class curricula with those problems and needs." Furthermore, the following are cited as concrete effects of the service-learning program, which is expected to contribute to local communities and at the same time foster students' social skills and academic abilities.

The service-learning program will

- Connect students' volunteer experiences to their goals for subject learning
- Help students understand practical benefits of their learning in a classroom
- Connect students to local communities they belong to
- Serve as a bridge between schools and other organizations with the aim of having them cope with significant social problems
- Build a productive relationship between schools and local communities

The service-learning program is thus being conducted in almost all upper secondary schools in the Chicago school district, showing enormous achievements in fostering students' social skills as well as raising their motivation for learning. It was impressive that students, who we interviewed at several schools, all replied that the class under this program was very meaningful in that it helped them understand the importance of their connection to society and the meaning of learning. It is also reported that these activities have improved students' basic academic abilities.

(3) Efforts in Japan

Some excellent practices for fostering students' social skills have also been found at elementary and secondary schools across Japan.

At elementary schools, under the framework of integrated studies, various efforts are being made in such forms as hands-on learning activities for agriculture and forestry, regional studies, and career education, including workplace experiences, so as to facilitate children's social

development. Such efforts include learning activities that involve growing vegetables and selling them at early-morning markets, agricultural experiences learning to grow crops in abandoned terraced rice paddies, and working experiences at local shopping areas.

Also at lower secondary schools, similar efforts are being made. In particular, in technical service and domestic science classes, activities to make students aware of their connection to the local community and the society through *monozukuri* (manufacturing) have been carried out, and have proved effective. Experiences of making planter cases from waste materials or cushions from scrap cloth and selling them teach students the meaning of *monozukuri*, and at the same time make them aware of the responsibility they owe to what they have made and their connection with the society. However, although the significance of such learning activities has been widely understood by educators, schools are not often willing to adopt them into their curricula as they have to prioritize students' advancement to upper secondary schools.

Regarding upper secondary schools, we conducted a survey targeting specialized upper secondary schools where the Japanese-style dual system has been introduced. The Japanese-style dual system provides, unlike conventional internship programs, longer-term company apprenticeship and gives students opportunities to learn the details of the job, severity of working, necessary techniques and skills, and various manners required for a member of society, as well as a lot of things concerning human relationships. Through such an experience, students can clarify their vague image of the job and understand the meaning of what they learn in specialized courses at school, and eventually start to give serious consideration to their future career. These programs seem to have given considerable experiences and pointers to the students who took part in them.

In this way, various hands-on learning activities have been conducted at elementary and secondary schools, although with certain differences in their levels, and have contributed significantly to the enhancement of children's and students' social skills, proving to be very effective in encouraging individuals' social independence. However, such activities have yet to prevail nationwide, often due to the lack of sufficient proof that they do indeed enhance students' academic abilities. It is important to prove that hands-on learning activities help children understand the meaning of learning and will heighten their motivation for learning.

(4) Conclusion

In foreign countries, when formulating school curricula, consideration is given to when, where, and how to foster children's social skills in the course of school education. Various efforts have been made based upon an acknowledgement that these viewpoints are significant. Such trends are very suggestive for Japan as we consider curriculum development for fostering students' social skills in the future.

Also in Japan, many education-related parties are fully aware of the importance of fostering children's social skills, and various forms of learning activities have been tried in integrated studies classes and special activity classes, as well as through *monozukuri* in technical service and domestic science classes at lower secondary schools. These efforts have born results to some extent. Furthermore, the Japanese-style dual system introduced into specialized upper secondary schools, which prioritize vocational training activities, has also contributed significantly to the fostering of students' social skills. Nevertheless, these moves have only been observed in limited areas or schools and have not prevailed widely. In the future, also considering the improvement of basic academic abilities, further efforts should be made urgently to develop curricula aimed at fostering students' social skills by incorporating various hands-on methods already proven effective both in Japan and abroad at each stage of school education, from elementary schools to upper secondary schools.

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