

Lesson Study and Curriculum Politics in Contemporary Japan

Shigeru Asanuma*

Department of Education, Tokyo Gakugei University

Abstract

In this paper I analyze and evaluate the changes which have occurred in the curriculum policies and lesson studies of twentieth century Japan. Formulated and implemented in the late nineteenth century as part of the social reforms of the Meiji era, lesson study was much influenced by the Western pedagogy of the time, and was intended to increase bureaucratic control and promote research among teachers. Under the influence of Pestalozzian developmentalism and Herbartianism, Japanese education became more progressive during the Taisho era (1912-1926). Progressive education and its lesson study practices have developed into a grass-roots movement in Japan. Despite of its popularity, progressive education has been criticized for lacking empirical evidence, and though it is not an American-style quality circle, some try to explain it in those terms. For instance, progressive education has been labeled as a cause of the “mediocrity” of Japanese students. Another cause for concern in contemporary Japan is widening inequality, and many scholars of educational sociology see a link between social class differences and the practices of progressive education. Nonetheless, even though lesson study has mainly been developed by progressive educators in Japan, it has not been targeted by these politically motivated attacks. In the final part of this paper I delineate the contemporary forms of lesson study in terms of newly elaborated concepts such as the behavioral objectives approach and the learning community.

Keywords: lesson study, Herbartianism, progressive education, learning community, behavioral objectives

1 Introduction

When the new curriculum was implemented in 2002, the media hailed it as marking the dawn of new era of education in Japan, i.e., the third major educational reform to be implemented since 1872. However, it also marked the beginning of a frontal attack on progressive education in Japan, an attack so effective that the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology

(hereafter shortened to the Ministry of Education) withdrew its support for progressive curriculum reform, the results of which appeared one and a half years later. From April 2002 to March 2008, curriculum policies have drastically changed in terms of goals and basic principles. In those six years, the goals of the national curriculum have been changed from progressive education to rote learning, disguised by the euphemism “back-to-basics.” So far, no clear-cut explanation has been offered on this shift in emphasis.

The professional development practice of lesson study has been adopted by numerous schools in the US, where it is treated as a pedagogical theory. However, in Japan “lesson study” usually means the teachers’ meeting; with neither substantial theory nor a prescribed methodology, it signifies just a form of group discussion for teachers. One of the reasons why it has become popular in the US is that the concept originated in Japan, and the foreign-sounding term “lesson study” has a mysterious ring to it. It is often assumed that students learn exactly what a teacher teaches. Yet, this is usually not the case, and this is why teachers need to meet after class to explore the reasons for this discrepancy between teaching and learning.

Curriculum is not a dead cultural artifact, but is rather a living spring. Those who assume that curriculum policy is like a pendulum which periodically swings between the progressive and conservative poles fail to recognize the evolution of the stable forms of teacher collaboration. Lesson study is one of those stable forms.

This paper analyzes and evaluates the changes which have occurred in curriculum policies and lesson studies in contemporary Japan. Progressive education in Japan and its practice of lesson study was actually developed as a grass-roots educational movement. It is neither an American-style quality circle nor systematic management, though some have tried to explain it in those terms. I will try to clarify the reason why lesson study has been taken for granted in Japan, despite the fact that educational policies have always opposed teacher autonomy.

For instance, progressive education has often been vilified as a cause of the “mediocrity” of Japanese students, a keen concern not only among the Japanese masses, but also among many educational researchers. A number of researchers see this mediocrity of Japanese students as a

* Corresponding Author: Professor Shigeru Asanuma (asanuma@u-gakugei.ac.jp)
Professor, Department of Education
Tokyo Gakugei University

result of two of the major tenets of public education in the early 1990's: a passion for life and a relaxed mind. Another concern for the Japanese public is the widening inequality in Japanese society.

Many scholars of educational sociology have linked this widening inequality with the practice of progressive education in Japan. Yet, lesson study has largely been left out of those political attacks, even though it has mainly been developed by progressive educators. Prior to World War II, the political attacks on lesson study in Japan came from the far right; the more recent attacks, however, have come from the left wing. Those who are concerned with the equality of education are always in conflict with those who pursue freedom in education.

2 The Influence of the Teaching Theories of Pestalozzi and Herbart during and after the Meiji Era

Lesson study was first implemented in 1873 as part of the educational reforms of the Meiji era (1868-1912). During this time bureaucrats from the Ministry of Education were sent to supervise the practices of local school districts (Inagaki, 1982, p. 15) and oversee the implementation of three types of teaching methods. The first type was M. M. Scott's one-way didactic. The second was the method of E. A. Sheldon's Oswego movement which originated from Pestalozzi's object lesson. The third was the developmental method based on the Pestalozzian method, and which was introduced by Hideo Takamine, a professor at the Tokyo Normal School. The third method was particularly important because it dovetailed with the idea of the modern civic society advocated by Hobbs and Rousseau, both of whom saw the modern state as the basis of the independent individual who entered into the social contract. *Principles and Practice of Teaching*, a book by J. Johonot (1878) introducing the work of Pestalozzi, F. Froebel, and J. L. R. Agassiz, was translated into Japanese and had a widespread influence in Japan. This book also presented the concept of using the "objective teaching" to teach modern sciences. Encompassing induction, deduction, synthesis, and analysis, objective teaching was designed to develop the skills of observation and analysis. However, this idea was implemented in a way by which students were forced to identify the observed objects with the prescribed concepts and ideas presented by the teacher, without any input from the students. As Inagaki (1982, pp. 104-107) has noted, such a method lacked the values of modern science.

At this early stage, teachers were expected to reflect upon their own teaching methods in terms of the formula provided by bureaucrats and the scholars who translated the books describing modern pedagogy in the West. The

minutes of an elementary school retained by Nagano Prefecture's normal school (*Chikumaken shihan gakkou* ed. 1-2; *shougakkou jyugyohou saiki*, 1874) and presented by Inagaki (1982, pp. 98-110) sheds light on how teachers had already started reflecting upon their lessons in terms of the standards prescribed by the Ministry of Education, i.e., whether or not their lessons were based on the standards of modern science. This implies that they had already incorporated lesson study into their collaborative activities. However, it should also be pointed out that lesson study was initiated by bureaucrats whose main goals were to modernize Japan and bring it out of its long period of isolation.

In the place of Pestalozzi's developmentalism, Herbartianism was introduced between 1891 to 1893. The Ministry of Education issued its Guidelines for Elementary School Lessons (*Shoggakou kyousooku taiko*) in 1891, and a book introducing Herbartianism was published in 1894. These guidelines stated that a school principal or a head teacher was supposed to prescribe a lesson design (*kyoju saimoku*) which was to be followed by individual teachers when preparing their lesson plans. This bureaucratic and hierarchical approach to controlling the details of the lessons given in the individual classrooms reflects the centralized and bureaucratic educational system of the time. Moreover, Herbartianism was used as a rationalization for controlling the teacher's didactic approach in the classroom, with the five steps of instruction formalized as follows: preparation, presentation, comparison, integration, and application. As Inagaki (1982, p. 174) has noted, such a rigid and formal approach has an adverse effect on teacher creativity. Despite the fact that Herbart addressed the dialectical development between object and intuition, the lesson plans actually used by individual teachers prevented the students from exercising their imagination.

As implemented in Japan, then, the Herbartian teaching method failed to encourage students to develop their perception and imagination on the basis of the observed reality. However, it should be noted that lesson study was practiced by teachers even when their voluntary collaboration was dominated by the centralized teaching design which did not allow them to freely develop their own pedagogical methods.

Inagaki analyzed a typical lesson study session held in Iwate Prefecture in 1905 (Inagaki, 1982, pp. 296-306) and recorded as a demonstration class in moral education. After the class, the teacher and his colleagues had the following discussion:

The teacher commented about his own lesson plan: (1) The lesson was planned to last for three school hours, with apperception and application constituting the third period. The teacher felt that the preparation stage was a little too long; he also mentioned that he intended to

integrate ordinary life activities related to patriotism. (2) The results of the lesson: The students were more quiet but less attentive than usual, and the teacher left out one part of the presentation that was originally planned.

The chief teacher asked in which period the teacher was planning to let the students read. The commentator evaluated the speaking and attitude of the teacher as adequate. He continued that the students were quiet, but not motivated by the lesson, showing their usual inactive attitude toward school. Their language was in the Tokyo dialect, but their last words were fussy. The preparation was too much, and the teacher should have aroused the students' interest by recounting the story of how the Japanese repelled a Mongolian invasion in the thirteenth century. The map was too big to teach smoothly. It was disappointing that the teacher spoke about the frigate before presenting General Michinari. The teacher should have told the story with more emphasis on the idea that the entire nation was in danger at that time. The teacher should have used catechism. The picture should have been enlarged so that the students could have better understood the hierarchical status.

The other teachers commented on his lesson as follows:

(1) The instruction materials were too complex to give the students a deep impression. There was too much catechism. (2) The presentation should have been more detailed. There were more heroes in the west of Japan than in the northeast, so the teacher should have encouraged the northeast to catch up. (3) The teacher should have printed *cana* over the name of Kouno Michinari. (4) It was good to see the students being quiet instead of their usual wild behavior.

The principal concluded that the prominent figures of the Russo-Japanese War should have been cited in the comparison, though the teaching was mostly good. The teacher's diction and attitude were good, as was the silence of the students', who were inactive because it was an afternoon class. The teacher should have given more emphasis to the bravery of Prime Minister Tomikune during the Mongolian invasion.

As has been noted, the lesson study was organized according to the Herbartian teaching stages as follows: preparation, presentation, comparison, application, apperception, integration, and others. In later years these stages were reduced to five, and then three. The features of Japanese lesson study were classified into these formalized categories, what Inagaki calls "formalized teaching." As Inagaki points out, there was no room for creativity. Although the teachers carefully examined their teaching, their discussions after the lesson were unlikely to go beyond the pedantic pursuit of the wording, for no changes to the curriculum were allowed.

3 Democracy, the Free Education Movement, and Lesson Study during the Taisho Era

Culture and education in Japan drastically changed during the Taisho era (1912-1926) as a result of the "Taisho Freedom Movement." The changes in education during the Taisho era were essentially a reaction to the oppressive ethos of the Meiji era. Kanjiro Higuchi (1896) was a pioneer critic of the oppression of Herbartian pedagogy. In the late Meiji era, he advocated an activism which sprung from the students' instinctive distaste for oppressive education. Nakano (1968, pp. 30-31) asserts that the goals of Higuchi's activism harmonized with those of national socialism. Tomeri Tanimoto (1898) emphasized the educational value of craftwork, and was influenced by the idea of progressive education of Goeling and Dewey. Nakano (1968, pp. 48-49) assumes that progressive education was an idea of the bourgeois which mediated the transition from capitalism to national imperialism. According to Nakano, all efforts promoting progressive education were devoted to national imperialism in Japan. Nakano (1968, pp. 114-115) also claims that even political leaders like Masatarou Sawayanagi, who believed in the value of democracy in opposing national militarism, were advocates of capitalism pursuing private interests. Nakano recognizes a number of educators in the Taisho era for their belief in the value of a child-centered curriculum, including Heiji Oikawa, Sawayanagi, Takeji Kinoshita, Kanae Yamamoto, Kishie Tezuka, Entarou Noguchi, Motoko Hani, Kuniyoshi Obara, Entarou Noguchi, Yonekichi Akai, Kinnosuke Ogura, and Enosuke Ashida. But Nakano also sees these educators as ameliorists who did not fight against Japanese imperialism. Amongst these educators, Ogura and Ashida were regarded as leading the fight against the traditional oppressive curriculum. Yet, even these two leaders did not attempt to speak against imperialism. However, there was a gap between these leaders and ordinary school teachers in terms of social class, for most of these leaders were affiliated with the normal schools. Thus ordinary public school teachers were likely to be confined to the traditional oppressive curriculum (Nakano, 1968, pp. 249-251).

The Taisho freedom movement brought some positive results, but Nakano's evaluation is pessimistic. Teachers gradually formed their own culture and curriculum distinct from the national curriculum. From mathematics to art education, their curriculums contained various non-standard methods and contents. Moreover, their curriculum development was always accompanied by lesson study which included the records of the lesson plan, practices, and pros and cons. Their records were highly detailed so that others could easily review their classroom practices

later on. For instance, a teacher at the Nara Women's Normal School recorded all the questions asked by a teacher in one lesson, as well as all the answers given by the students. This practice is still used in almost all schools in contemporary Japan, including not only the schools attached to universities, but also ordinary public schools. All demonstration lessons were observed by other teachers and discussed afterwards. Although these educators had no idea that their collaboration would later become a teaching tradition in Japan, they were conscious that their unique practices deviated from the oppressive traditional curriculum.

4 Lesson Study under the Name of "Curriculum" after World War II

Nakauchi (1971) is a prominent researcher of education best known for his work on the measurability of the results of curriculum practices. It has been gradually recognized that the outcome of a given curriculum should be measurable. Katsuta (1972, p. 172) also emphasized the importance of the measurability of the learning outcomes of curriculum practices, proposing that measurability is a way to guarantee that students are gaining the knowledge and skills they need.

The period following World War II was a time for reconstructing not only the entire Japanese political system, but also the core of its education system. In the 1950's the concept of ability gradually became the focus of curriculum design, a period in which modernization was the main agenda of the new curriculum movement. In particular, the term "core-curriculum" came to represent the progressive perspective. In the 1950's the word, "curriculum" implied an experience-based curriculum or an activity curriculum. However, following the Sputnik Crisis in 1957, "curriculum" began to imply a structural academic discipline (Bruner, 1960). The curriculum as a structural discipline was called *keitou gakushu* (sequential learning), which emphasizes factual knowledge and rote learning. The heuristic approach to education has yet to gain widespread acceptance in Japan.

4.1 Lesson Study by Japanese Phenomenologists: Beyond Orientalism

The 1970's were a time of drastic change in the concept of curriculum. Educators started considering the "subjectivity" of the individual. Curriculum studies use subjectivity to identify what we understand and how to measure the results of our educational efforts. When Yoshida (1978, pp. 70-73), a cognitive psychologist, analyzed classroom teaching, he used the phenomenological method of inquiry to determine how to integrate concrete

reality with abstract knowledge. Because phenomenology is a way of understanding the reality we face in our life-world, as opposed to the abstract world, he focused on the subjectivity of a child's experience. Attempting to use the phenomenological approach to understand the intersubjectivity of teachers and students, he illuminated their internal worlds. Before ethnography became a popular tool in the field of education, he was making use of the concept of subjectivity. Although he doesn't use the term "lesson study," he demonstrates how to adopt the point of view of one's colleagues to take a look at one's own attitudes.

Milon Atkin's approach to illuminating the intersubjectivity of the individual classroom situation became popular in 1975 (Atkin, 1975). Yoshida's approach was also important in the curriculum development of Japanese lesson study, though those new approaches were not widely accepted by Japanese educators. Yet, due to its complicated terminology, phenomenology never became popular among Japanese educators, who saw this intellectual movement as an abstruse sort of discourse sealed off in the ivory tower of philosophy.

The various attempts made to create a distinctively Japanese version of curriculum study which includes lesson study have turned out to be "Orientalism." All theorizations of Japanese scholars have to be formulated in terms of Western notions. For many Japanese scholars, the interpretation of the Western notion of curriculum is critical. Contrary to the Western perspective is the practice of Muchaku (1995), a well-known school teacher outstanding for his non-theoretical approach. Going against the prevailing Japanese tradition, he initiated various positive practices without any preoccupation with Western educational theories. There are a number of other examples of lesson study based on the reality of classroom practices.

4.2 Japanese Realism, Populism, and Curriculum Theories

In general, Japanese scholars are enthusiastic about importing ideas, rather than exporting their own ideas to other countries. Moreover, in the field of Japanese education there are a large number of hidden factors influencing Japanese scholars.

In response to *yutori* (relax) and *ikiru chikara* (passion for life), two major tenets of the educational policy prevailing in the early 1990's, a number of researchers started discussing the "mediocrity" of Japanese students. Class differences are another concern for Japanese researchers of education as well as the Japanese public (see Kariya, 1999; Sakurai, 2000; Wada, 1999). Although Japanese curriculum researchers are not heavily burdened by elitism, they are eager for publicity.

Thus most researchers choose to study topics which have the most mass appeal, giving scant attention to the implications their arguments may have in the future. As a result, education in Japan continues to move in the direction of rote learning and simple, basic skills, while, the competition for admission to the prestigious schools and universities intensifies.

There have not been many attempts to analyze the current state of curriculum studies in Japan. In general, there are few theory-oriented educational practices in Japan. Instead, there are a number of descriptive educational practices, which are interpreted by researchers in terms of the prevailing popular concepts. For instance, the word “lesson study” has become popular in the United States and Europe, based on the misguided assumption that this educational practice is based on a particular Japanese theory of curriculum.

4.3 Mediocrity and Rote Learning

The mediocrity of Japanese students is a major concern to both the Japanese public and curriculum researchers, who are obsessed with improving the position of Japanese students in international rankings. It may strike some as strange that issues of importance to education are first recognized by the general public, and only afterwards picked up on by the curriculum researchers. Thus, when it comes to determining the important issues, it is clear that few Japanese curriculum researchers take the initiative, and seem content to leave this to the mass-media and other non-educators.

A survey conducted in 2003 (National Institute for Educational Policy Studies, 2004) found that Japanese students were decreasingly competent in various subjects, leading the mass media to gleefully announce the defeat of Japanese students in international competitions. Of particular concern was that the ranking of Japanese students in reading ability dropped from the 8th place to the 14th place. In mathematics, Japanese students dropped from 1st place to 6th. In science they dropped from 1st place to 2nd place. In a new subject called “problem solving,” Japanese students were ranked fourth. Reacting to the questions raised by the media, a spokesman of the Ministry of Education concluded that (1) Japanese students are generally still in a good position; (2) the direction of their scholastic competency is down and no longer at the top level; and (3) student motivation and learning habits are problematic. Most of the media reports attributed the deteriorating rankings to the “softness” of the new curriculum.

In fact, the rumor of the mediocrity of Japanese students originated not from the reality of the classroom, but rather from a misunderstanding or misinterpretation of teaching. Despite the fact that there is no concrete evidence

proving the mediocrity of Japanese students, the rumor mongers kept alleging that the mediocrity of Japanese students had been caused by “relaxed education,” one of the two major tenets of education in Japan in the 1990’s. This rumor started in the middle of the 1990’s and has continued into the 2000’s.

As expected, the major outcome was a “back to basics” campaign. Since December 2003, the national policies concerning curriculum have been swung drastically from the soft curriculum toward a rigid, goal-oriented curriculum which is mediated through prescribed goals. In the short term, the Ministry of Education has retreated from the fundamental reform of traditional Japanese educational values. The mass media has started an “anti-soft curriculum campaign” before the soft-curriculum has even been implemented in the whole country. The Ministry of Education suddenly changed the direction of educational policies towards high achievement. Lesson study has been popularized to make up for the lack of popularity of Japanese educational achievement in the place of arguments of achievement test scores.

4.4 The Behavioral Objectives Approach

Interestingly enough, the behavioral objectives approach is the most powerful and influential curriculum theory in Japanese lesson study. Yet, in Japan as well as the United States, there are many criticisms of educational policies based on the behavioral objectives approach. The basic ideas of the behavioral objectives approach were further developed in Japan, and Tyler’s (1949) goal-means model of curriculum and instruction has been extensively implemented in classrooms in Japan. In particular, the “integration of instruction with evaluation” has been adopted as a slogan by many educators. However, a large number of school teachers are preoccupied with the concept of *hyouka kijun* (evaluation criteria) when preparing their lesson plans (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2008). The basic idea of this model is to monitor and control instruction on the basis of prescribed educational goals. Despite the fact that many school teachers sincerely write the evaluation criteria, most of them do not use these evaluation criteria in their actual teaching practices, instead relying on their own intrinsic criteria when they have to make judgments and decisions. In effect, they use the prescribed evaluation criteria to write out their lesson plans merely as an otiose formality intended to satisfy the bureaucrats.

In the 1970s, Kajita (1980) was a leading exponent of contemporary lesson study and the well-known “formative evaluation” in the sense of Bloom’s feed-back evaluation. Evaluation became a method for controlling the instruction process in the classroom, which is limited to the goal-

means chains but not to the creative development of human interaction. This concept was further elaborated in the idea of “mastery learning,” a method controlling a teacher’s instruction in segmented steps. In other words, teachers were required to introduce small, segmented tests in order to monitor the teaching method and content of the instructional materials used in each instructional hour. In this model it was almost forgotten that Tyler’s behavioral objectives approach was initiated as a way of assessing intangible educational goals. The segmentation of the instruction into small steps seems similar to the small steps in Skinnerian conditioning. Despite the fact that Kajita’s idea was rational and was accepted by educational administrators, it has not been used for assessing students’ achievement of intangible objectives. Instead, it has led to changes in the categories of the teachers’ reports to parents. Japanese teachers used to provide marks on a five-point scale in each subject, but they were now required to mark the subsidiary categories of each subject; e.g., national language was divided into speaking, reading, and writing. This was the main impact of the behavioral objectives approach in 1970’s. Teachers were trained to make more explicit what abilities they were trying to develop, so this training functioned like lesson study in that it required teachers to reflect on what they were trying to do in their classrooms.

4.5 The Behavioral Objectives Approach Revisited

In the course of the new era of individualized education, neo-liberalism was considered to be a basic national tenet of education in the 21st century, and education for individual dignity became a slogan for neo-liberalism in a new social structure. Under the guise of this tenet, the behavioral objectives approach was revived in the new course of study implemented in 2002, which explicitly states the necessity of clarifying evaluation criteria. The implication of this statement is that it requires teachers to write their lesson plans using the structure of the prescribed educational goals. In the new course of study, evaluation criteria must be described in behavioral terms, and lesson activities have to be organized using those criteria. Outcomes of instruction are also to be assessed with the same prescribed criteria. In this framework, instruction has to be monitored in advance in terms of the goals, but not the outcomes themselves.

The behavioral objectives approach was widely used in the 1970s and still remains as an important strategy of educational evaluation in Japan. The introduction of project-based learning has facilitated the use of evaluation in the classroom situation, because there is no significant alternative to this approach, and this approach is easier and simpler than other approaches to evaluation. Tanaka (2008),

a contemporary proponent of educational evaluation and lesson study, wrote a book titled *Educational Evaluation* in 2008, which consists of historical and comparative overviews of current and classical educational evaluation in Japan.

He presents a number of criticisms leveled against the behavioral objectives approach, including Tyler’s soft-linear approach. For example, Elliott Eisner has criticized the behavioral objectives approach as likely to impede curriculum development in creative areas, which Tanaka admits, but only partially (Tanaka, 2008, p. 60). Adopting goal-free evaluation, the concept of the “connoisseurship” in educational practices, and *rashomon*, Tanaka believes in the effectiveness of the behavioral objectives approach, even though it is likely to lack effective observation of student changes. Their value consists in the consistent pursuit of observable outcomes of educational practices. There is an underlining assumption that the persistent pursuit of making intangible educational goals into tangible ones is admirable, but even if it sounds rational, a fundamental question still remains: Do the prescribed objectives still help to measure the intangible effects in education?

4.6 Lesson Study and Grass-Roots Movements in Japan

I will now introduce one of the grass-roots movements in Japan as a typical model for lesson study. It is not an exaggeration to assert that the most popular banner held up by school teachers in Japan is emblazoned with the words *Manabi no Kyodotai* (Learning Community), as advocated by Manabu Sato, for whom this notion clearly took in shape in 2006 (Sato, 2006). Sato introduced Japanese schools to the American interpretation of Japanese educational practices. Such phrases as “cooperative learning” and “collegiality” have been made popular by American scholars who have observed Japanese classrooms. Once those phrases were popularized in the United States, they were reintroduced in Japan to provide Japanese educators with fresh inspiration.

Manabu Sato states that a community of learning in a school consists of three pillars: publicity, democracy, and excellence. He says that publicity means that a school is organized as a public sphere with a mission of democracy. In his words, democracy means “a way of associated living,” and a school is a society where the individuals, including children, teachers, principals, and parents are “protagonists” (Sato, 2006, p. 12). Excellence does not entail competition and comparison with others, but rather means that the individual pursues the very best in his/her own individual life (Sato, 2006, pp. 12-13). Under the pillar of publicity, individuals are required to listen to others as equal partners, i.e., children, teachers, principals,

and parents are encouraged to talk to each other. These theoretical tools are so simple that almost all teachers can understand them. This simplicity is necessary for understanding lesson study.

In addition to these principles, there are other practical teaching techniques for the classroom; e.g., students' desks are organized into several connected groups and the students are encouraged to discuss topics and help each other in various ways. Such a style of learning is considered "cooperative learning" (Sato, 2006, p. 20). Further investigating the expansion of cooperative learning in Western countries and Asia, Sato found that the idea has a close sympathy with the Asian concept of the family or community. Students are to be inspired by mutual encouragement in small groups as a way of building self-confidence.

If Sato's theory were composed merely of this theoretical framework, it would not have been widely accepted by ordinary school teachers in Japan. In fact, it's his charisma that inspires many educators to believe in the value of collaboration and face-to-face relationships. In other words, quite a few teachers suffer from a feeling of isolation and inability when confronted with student violence, absenteeism, and deviance.

Teachers need relief from their predicament, and Sato serves as a sort of psychiatrist. Isolated individuals find much relief just by having somebody listen to them talk about their difficulties. Thus Sato encourages teachers to have dialogues in their own school communities. Teachers need to have a feeling of being linked with colleagues, even though they may not be at the same school. It should be noted that by "community" he means the community of the school as a whole, and not an isolated classroom. So even a school's principal is encouraged to teach in a classroom as one of the protagonists.

There are a number of charismatic educational leaders in Japan. Sato's influence is largely due to his style of story-telling. In other words, a theory should not be overly theoretical if it is to be influential in the ordinary school situation. The idea of a community of learning functions positively when we feel a sense of intimacy and possibility. It should be noted that theory never influences educators as much as inspiration and passion, while bureaucratic rationality does little to motivate educators to work together.

5 Conclusion

As has been stated, there is no ends-means rationality in the field of curriculum practices, except for the behavioral objectives approach in Japan. When we focus on curriculum practices, we find that theories are always formed post

hoc. Curriculum practices and lesson study are developed in a contextual background apart from theories. Political hegemony and orthodoxy could be helpful in understanding lesson study in the real context of curriculum discourses. On the one hand, curriculum policies are likely to be made as part of a political agenda at the macro level. On the other hand, curriculum making is the duty of individual teachers. How a curriculum is actually practiced is always based on the life-world, rather than on theories. This life world is oriented towards the individual's interests, rather than the individuals' ideals. That is why we need to understand the role of individual subjective interests in curriculum practices.

In this paper, I found three influential factors in lesson study and curriculum-making. The first is that the media has a significant influential on lesson study. The evidence does not necessarily have to be concrete to be believed by the general public, and lesson study is the phrase which exactly fits the current political atmosphere.

Second, the behavioral objectives approach has become the favored theoretical tradition used in lesson study in Japan. The behavioral objectives approach is theoretical at least in the sense that teachers are required to write out the goals towards which they are trying to lead their students, and the simple and clear-cut steps of its goal-means chain fits nicely with lesson study. However, there still remains the important task of assessing the intangible educational outcomes beyond the formality and rationality of this approach.

Third, the phrase "learning community" has become very popular among teachers. There is no theory or rationality in this slogan, but it has a power to inspire individual school teachers' belief in this popular curriculum movement. Publicity, democracy, and excellence are the major pillars of this belief system. We cannot identify any linkage between theory and practice, except the fact that there are a number of teachers who believe in it as a possibility.

As has been noted, the power of the individual's belief is a significant condition for expanding one's ideas about lesson study. In lesson study, practice always precedes reasoning, while theory doesn't lead to practice.

References

- Atkin, M. (1975). Two approaches in curriculum development. In Ministry of Education. (Ed.), *The tasks in curriculum development* (pp. 49-55). Tokyo: Printing Office of Ministry of Finance.
- Bruner, S. J. (1960). *The process of education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

- Inagaki, T. (1982). *Meiji kyouju rironshi kenkyu* [The study of teaching theories in Meiji era]. Tokyo: Hyouron-sha.
- Kajita, E. (1980). *Gendai kyouiku Hyoka-ron* [Modern educational evaluation theory]. Tokyo: Kaneko Shobo.
- Kariya, T. (1999). Gakuryoku no kiki to kyoiku kaiau [Academic achievement in crisis and educational revolution]. *Chuo Koron*, 114(8), 36-47.
- Katsuta, S. (1972). *Nigen keisei to kyoiku* [Human development and education]. Tokyo: Kokudo-sha.
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. (2008). *Shogakko gakushu shido yoryo* [National course of study for elementary school]. Tokyo: Author.
- Muchaku, S. (1995). *Yamabiko gakko* [Echo school]. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.
- Nakano, A. (1968). *Taisho jiyu kyouiku no kenkyu* [The study of Taisho freedom education]. Tokyo: Reimeishobo.
- Nakauchi, T. (1971). *Gakuryoku to hyoka no riron* [Theories of scholastic achievement and evaluation]. Tokyo: Kokudo-sha.
- National Institute for Educational Policy Studies. (2004). *Knowledge and skills for life: OECD program for international student assessment*. Tokyo: Gyosei.
- Sakurai, Y. (2000, July 15). *Kyouiku houkai to monokasho no sekinin* [Educational ruin and the responsibility of the ministry of education]. *Shukan Shincho*, 52-56.
- Sato, M. (2006). *Gakko no chosen* [The challenge of schools]. Tokyo: Shogakkan.
- Tanaka, K. (2008). *Kyouiku hyouka* [Educational evaluation]. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.
- Tyler, R. W. (1949). *Basic principles of curriculum and instruction*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Wada, H. (1999). *Gakuryoku hokai* [Collapse of school achievement]. Tokyo: PHP Research Institute.
- Yoshida, A. (1978). *Jugyo no kenkyu to shinrigaku* [The study of instruction and psychology]. Tokyo: Kokudo-sha.