

変化の時代におけるカリキュラム改革
マルコム、ウェイン^{*1}

Curriculum Reform in an Age of Change

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カリキュラムの開発とは、生徒が成功するために必要なものだけでなく、教師や教育界全体が必要とするものについても、常に探求し、実験し、実施し、考察する包括的なプロセスである(Richards, 2001)。カリキュラム・ドキュメントは、コースを受講する学生のためのガイダンスであると同時に、教育機関全体のビジョンやミッション・ステートメントとしての役割も果たす。これは、教育界を率いる管理者、教師、一般教育者といった現役の専門家によって、より多くの部分に分割される。彼らはこれらの部分をより管理しやすい部分に洗練させ、最終的にはすべてを具体的な授業目標、内容、教材に成形する。どのような状況であれ、アイデア出しから実施、そして反省、また戻るというプロセスがある。これは絶え間ないプロセスであり、どの段階においても積極かつ批判的な関与が必要である。しかし、たとえその既知の快適なプロセスに機能不全の要素があったとしても、既知の快適なものを繰り返すことには危険が伴う。本稿は、外的要因が漸進的な変化を求めているにもかかわらず、組織の風土や風潮が、内容にとどまろうとする場合に、カリキュラム改革の課題を明らかにし、それに立ち向かう試みである。

Key Words : カリキュラム開発、改革、プラクシス、マクロ・コンテキスト

Developing a curriculum is a comprehensive process that involves constant exploration, experimentation, implementation, and reflection of not only what students need to succeed, but also what teachers and the overall educational community need as well (Richards, 2001)⁽¹⁾. A curriculum document serves as a vision and mission statement for an entire institution. The document is divided into more parts by the active professionals – administrators, teachers, general educators – who lead the educational community while also being instructions for faculty and guidance for students. Eventually, the curriculum document becomes specific classroom objectives, content, and materials that are consumed by the student body. This is a constant process that requires active and critical engagement at every stage because curricula will need to be adjusted based on specific educational communities and the external factors that impact their environments. There is, however, a danger to repeat a process that is known and comfortable, even if it has dysfunctional elements. This paper is an attempt to identify and confront challenges to curriculum reform when tendencies and organizational cultures can lead us to remaining content even while external factors demand progressive change.

Key Words : Curriculum Development, Reform, Praxis, Macro Context

1. Introduction

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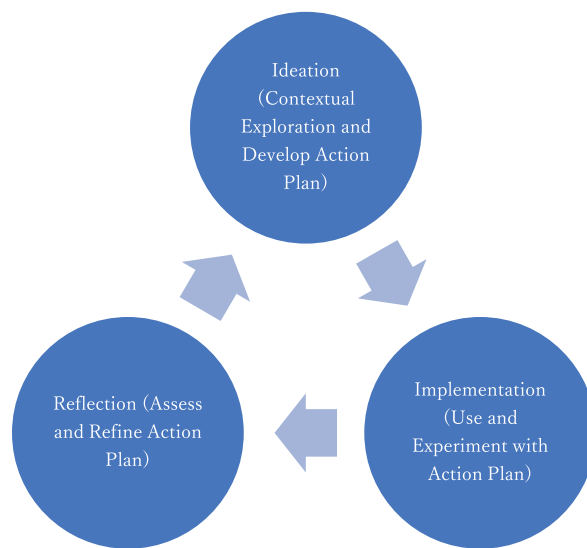
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as well (Richards, 2001)⁽¹⁾. A curriculum document serves as a vision and mission statement for an entire institution. The document is divided into more parts by the active professionals – administrators, teachers, general educators – who lead the educational community while also being instructions for faculty and guidance for students. Eventually, the curriculum document becomes specific classroom objectives, content, and materials that are consumed by the student body. This is a constant process (see Fig. 1) that requires active and critical engagement at every stage because curricula will need to be adjusted based on specific educational communities and the external factors that impact their environments. There is, however, a danger to repeat a process that is known and comfortable, even if it has dysfunctional elements. This paper is an attempt to identify and confront challenges to curriculum reform when tendencies and organizational cultures can lead us to remaining content even while external factors demand progressive change.

Fig. 1. Curriculum Development / Reform Process



Ultimately, educational communities of practice should develop a praxis framework that offers guidance for curriculum reform. They must be willing to recognize debilitating characteristics within a system, have the humility and wherewithal to investigate those issues, and have the intellectual and organizational leadership to develop and execute a reform path. Paulo Freire (1970/1996)⁽²⁾ asserted:

It is only when the oppressed find the oppressor out and become involved in the organized struggle for their liberation that they begin to believe in themselves. This discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection: only then will it be a praxis (p. 47).

While Freire's context was steeped in a liberation movement his ideas of what constitutes praxis has been relevant to the field of education since the day he articulated them in his seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire's experience was one where the roles of oppressor and oppressed were clear and tangible to the common person; such language was necessary. The context of the current discussion is 21st Century Japan, where the argument of there being an active oppressor class and oppressed class could be seen as hyperbolic and extreme. However, praxis, being a simultaneously active, intellectual and reflective commitment, can be applied to a variety of contexts. The following sections present macro contextual challenges within Japan, the description of a case university being used to illuminate the various challenges posed by reform in a time of greater change, and recommendations for how to move forward in the current environment. In describing and discussing the case university, I will specifically focus on the English language program at the undergraduate level, as this is my area of specialty and one I can speak about with a great degree of precision.

The objective of this discussion is not to cast doubt on or vilify the current English language curriculum, but instead to shine a light on it to gain greater awareness of what can be improved given the current external pressures the university and Japanese society are facing. Often decisions are made excluding ever present external pressures. Kezar (2001) ⁽³⁾ explained how institutions of higher education (and organizations in general) succumb to their own echo chamber, meaning they allow their systems to grow content because what they had been doing seemed successful and thus comfortable; why change? This contentment causes a certain atrophy to occur throughout the institution, and when leadership and the greater community become aware, it is often too late, and drastic measures need to be taken to return to a trajectory of positive progress. I believe Japan as a nation finds itself at this inflection point, and as a result, institutions of higher education need to be more proactive and radical than previously required. We can hear, see and feel the closing of Ivory Towers as new structures closer to the masses are being called on to be built with an equal amount of blood, sweat and tears from everyone in society.

2. The Macro Context

Leaders, specifically, and the average person, generally, need to take all the information at their disposal and make sure they are building a global population with the global competence to engage issues on local, regional, and international levels (Malcolm, 2018) ⁽⁴⁾. Nations are trying to implement ideas based on the goal of shared global sustainability because globalization has thrust us into a position of hyperconnected relationships that recognition of our shared dependence and individuality. The United Nations Sustainability Goals is the ubiquitous example (see <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>) of share globalized goal of working together to build a better future, but as of the writing of this essay, there are wars happening in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, parts of Asia, and political upheaval in North and South America. Places with vital natural resource reserves are experiencing compounding socio-economic and political challenges – again, see Africa, the Middle East and South America. Global economic powers, whether national governments or multi-national corporations, are trying to control and exploit markets, all the while attempting to bring large and diverse populations into greater economic prosperity. Japan is not hidden from or immune to the challenges of globalization.

In his keynote address at the 24th International Conference on Education Research, Gerald LeTendre (2024)⁽⁵⁾ stated, “Globalization itself is neither static nor a linear process. Globalization is part of a cultural dynamic that is not generated solely by transnational organizations, but is increasingly elaborated and altered by the interaction of national politics and international organizations.” In every way, Japan is experiencing what LeTendre termed, “Global Cultural Dynamics.” The population is in decline spurred on by a rapidly aging society and stagnant birthrate. Monetary policies are in constant flux because the value of the currency and subject to complex market forces. This has caused household budgets to lose value and purchasing power. Regional security issues such as Russia’s claim to Japan’s northern islands, missile launches by North Korea, more island disputes with South Korea and China, and China’s increased show of force in the Taiwan Strait place constant pressure on the government to form alliances that will solidify societal needs. All of these challenges require all institutions and organizations to provide solutions for the short, medium, and long-term health and survival of the nation (Malcolm, 2018; McKinsey & Company, 2011; Ohmae, 2005)⁽⁴⁾⁽⁶⁾⁽⁷⁾. Institutions of higher education are those organizations directly responsible for preparing the population to manage and solve the challenges of the nation. Teachers are tasked with preparing young minds and bodies to meet these challenges. Holliday (1994) said, “The macro context includes the wider societal and institutional influences on what happens in the classroom” (p. 13)⁽⁸⁾. Ultimately, all of this comes to the classroom. The question is, are our curricula capable?

3. The Case University

I present a university as a case for exploring and illuminating the challenges of curriculum reform within the macro context described above. It is a small private university in a prefectural capital near the Sea of Japan coast. Currently, it has three separate undergraduate faculties – Engineering, Environmental and Information Sciences, and Sports and Health Sciences – as well as two graduate-level departments – Applied Science and Engineering, and Social Systems Engineering. These faculties

and departments are subdivided into specific departments and courses of study. For example, the Faculty of Engineering has four separate departments – Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Architecture and Civil Engineering, and Applied Nuclear Technology. There is also a fourth quasi-faculty – Organization for Fundamental Education. This houses various liberal arts subjects that undergraduate students are required to take to complete their graduation requirements. The English language program – Special Program for English Communication (SPEC) – is located within this faculty. This faculty has no major or minor. The university organization also has an adjoining high school, junior high school, two-year nursing college, and vocational school.

Stake (1995)⁽⁹⁾ said that certain cases can be used to make a larger point thus being instrumental to society and the issues being addressed. An example of what places this university in a position to gain further understanding of complex societal issues is that it has adopted the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals as guiding principles for not only university management, but also curriculum reform throughout the various departments (Malcolm et al., 2023)⁽¹⁰⁾.

In a sense, the hard sciences brand of the university was appropriate for the time the university was founded. As times have changed so too has the culture of the university. The core mission has basically remained the same that said the university is opened to including a more international student body and diversified faculty. From 2019 the university sought to rebrand itself a cutting-edge institution that remains proactive in its reforms. An institution that changes with the times to prepare the youth of Japan with the knowledge, skills, and capabilities to make sure Japan overcomes the challenges it faces. In this regard, the UNSDGs platform may have come at a perfect time because Japan is re-examining its approach to education and its path moving forward. The case of this university is ideal for uncovering and illuminating how the larger forces in society – political, economic, cultural, and globalization – affect what happens in the language classroom (p. 229).

The university management instructed faculty to find ways to incorporate the UNSDGs into their courses. This was no minor directive, however, faculty teaching the English language courses found a way to incorporate these ideals, that seek to address global challenges through local action, into the curriculum. By working within the existing curriculum structure, teachers were able to develop a new course that sought to have students engage complex issues using simple English to express their ideas through discussion and presentation. Before elaborating on this particular point and its connection to the macro context as well as curriculum reform process, I want to describe the English language curriculum.

4. Current English Language Curriculum

As of the writing of this essay, the current curriculum for English language education begins with matriculated students taking a placement based on the TOEIC Bridge[®] (Test of English for International Communication) – Listening and Reading (see <https://www.iibc-global.org/english/toEIC/test/bridge/about/format.html> for full details). This particular version of the test is a modified version of the full test designed to be taken in one hour and targeted to beginner and lower-intermediate English language learners. The scores from this abridged test are used to place students into sections for their first-year English classes, which are *Basic Communication* and *Listening*. There are sub-levels within each section to provide more stratification and smaller class sizes. As students progress through their subsequent years they are constantly recalibrated into new levels using a listening achievement assessment score. This score does not affect their grade and only used quantify their English language listening ability.

In their second year students are required to take *Advanced Communication* and *TOEIC[®] Preparation* for their English language course requirements. Further stratification in the *Advanced Communication* course determines which textbook students use and the general difficulty of the course. Students placed in the “A” sections, work with a textbook based on the UNSDGs. This is the discussion class based on generating, communicating, and understanding complex ideas using beginner

to lower-intermediate English. The “B” sections use a conversation-based textbook centered around general English conversation topics.

Year Three students must choose either *Technical Communication* or *Business Communication*, along with *TOEIC® Preparation*. Sections for each of these are divided into “A” and “B” depending on the number of students signed up for each class. Generally speaking, these classes are larger than year one and two classes. By the end of year three, students are generally finished with their university course work and into the process of job hunting (*shukatsu*). Year Four students are entering their final course requirements before graduation and generally focus on their major thesis, job hunting, and two mandated English classes – *Business* or *Technical Communication*, and *TOEIC® Preparation*. These English classes may be the only formal classroom-based courses many students have to attend and pass in order to fully complete graduation requirements (see <https://www.fukui-ut.ac.jp/introduction/learning/spec/> for a complete guide to the curriculum for the SPEC).

This English language program was created within the context of a World in the throes of globalization. I posit the current English language course offerings do not adequately address the complex nature of the global, regional or local society. Japan faces transnational challenges with it being part various international groups like the G-7; regional tensions with Russia, China and South Korea challenging territorial integrity; and local issues with how to handle recent increases in foreign tourists traveling to Japan because of advantageous exchange rates. These issues as well as the ones mentioned earlier call for educational institutions like this case university to review its curriculum to see if it can be adapted to meet the current macro context.

Unfortunately, changing a curriculum is seldom easy. Changing a curriculum is more than just adding or subtracting courses. As I previously stated, a curriculum is more like guiding philosophy. Changing one’s intentions and objectives can be a long and arduous process. The university has a specific process it must go through to change, take away, or add courses to the offerings presented to students. The process is guided by an overall structure from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) and formal higher education accrediting agency. Multiple levels of bureaucracy need to be scaled before adequate curriculum reform can take place to address what takes place in a single classroom. This is a major impediment to change, but if we look within the current structure, we can find policies that can provide immediate and substantive change in classroom teaching and learning, allowing the educational community to keep pace with societal change.

5. Recommendations and Paths Forward

For the current situation, we know that internal and external factors have placed constraints on immediate change. Be it teaching faculty and administration staff turnover to lower-than-average student recruitment numbers to calls from companies for globally competent human resources to bureaucratic red tape, there are seemingly myriad impediments to reform, but as the world stage changes so must institutions (Ohmae, 2005)⁽⁷⁾. Not being able to act as swiftly as one would like requires more creativity and better leadership. Instead of creating new course offerings to keep pace with competing institutions, we need to augment current course offerings using different textbook choices, encourage teachers to use different pedagogical methods in class, and provide more in-house professional development so teachers can share and acquire competencies that will improve students’ classroom experiences.

This university allows teachers to change textbooks on regular basis; after an academic year if teachers feel necessary. This requires the teachers to meet as a collective and decide. This is easier said than done because even teachers who teach the same course often implement different practices. Changing a textbook may be great for one teacher’s style, but not the other, and thus cause resistance to change. Ultimately, if a decision amongst the teachers cannot be made, the section director will have to decide. The hope is though that if the department leader provides a good framework for textbook decisions the faculty will be able to decide without much friction and in a timely manner. I recommend department leaders use a process of ideation, implementation and reflection even at this stage. Provide time and space in their schedules to brainstorm – this could be at department meetings. Encourage teachers to explore textbooks by sending weekly messages about local bookfairs, or other opportunities to engage publishers. Finally, provide a deadline for textbook choices with the understanding that if no decision

is made then the status quo will continue. Placing an expiration date on the process could motivate teachers use their non-teaching time to meet, discuss, and decide on textbooks.

While a new textbook can change a lot for teachers and learners, not all teachers embrace change the same way, so an active program of in-house professional development should be implemented to encourage teachers to reflect on, share, and assess their own teaching. Teachers could schedule monthly meetings with the specific objective to share successes, challenges, and solutions regarding how they are implementing the overall curriculum. Coming into any professional development environment teachers would need to enter with a non-judgmental stance (Hiratsuka & Malcolm, 2010)⁽¹¹⁾ towards the endeavor. This means people would remain flexible, stay open with their beliefs, embrace reflective practices, and encourage each other as critical friends ready to provide constructive critique in a non-threatening or non-demeaning manner (Uchida & Rothman, 2023; Hiratsuka & Malcolm, 2010)⁽¹²⁾⁽¹¹⁾. To provide a lasting structure for this kind of professional, the group of teachers could strive to become a professional learning community – “educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve” (DuFour et al., 2008, p. 14)⁽¹³⁾. This is vital because a culture of professional development needs to be nurtured in order for positive and effective growth and change to hold. Ultimately, we want to try new techniques and develop new approaches, eventually reach a situation where we exist in a flow state (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990)⁽¹⁴⁾ while in the classroom. Good professional development can provide the means to achieve flow. Without a proper culture, meetings and discussions will take place, but the lessons from those meetings and discussions will not reverberate throughout the department. Great ideas will most likely be lost and forgotten. Ultimately frustrations could form and negatively impact the classroom.

While teachers are clearly an integral part to any change effort. Within the field of education, the students are the other element in this dynamic. In all honesty, the student is at the center of the system. All forces are acting on the student with the objective of producing a person who will be valuable to their society. Inayatullah (2022)⁽¹⁵⁾ states, “Teachers are not meant to be masters of content. Rather, we convey how one might align oneself to desire, to curiosity, to a search for knowledge and healing” (p. 7). Teachers are facilitators, maybe guides, along a path, but it is the student who must do the work. The student must have the vision. They must engage in the encounter (Inayatullah, 2022)⁽¹⁵⁾. Japan’s students have to be awakened and presented with encounters for them to engage with. Shibata (2011)⁽¹⁶⁾ alluded to Japanese young people as lacking any curiosity about the world outside the island of Japan.

The Japanese government has been actively encouraging the education system to create programs that provide opportunities for the youth of the nation to encounter other cultures and build they capacities for cross-cultural exchanges. As a language teacher I have been at the forefront of this effort. I believe university leaders need to be direct with the student body. Show them what encounters await them. Do not obscure the reality. This can be done from the opening matriculation speeches and supported by teachers. Central throughout this framing is that students will be responsible for their education – your education and life are what you make of them.

In the classroom, specifically, more lessons involving a project-based learning (PBL) and task-based learning (TBL) approach need to be implemented. Develop lesson plans that require autonomous learning. The objective is to provide opportunities for students to embrace the moment by drawing on the skills they have acquired through six years of learning English. Ohmae (2005)⁽⁷⁾ emphasized the necessity of learning English, not because he acquiesced and coward in the face of English imperialism, instead he recognized that as a tool English has connected the world through business, finance, technology, art, politics, diplomacy, etc. In the 21st Century with the rise of artificial intelligence, programming as a discipline, and the omniscient power of the Internet, English language literacy is an invaluable skill that literally and figuratively puts the world in one’s hand. I imagine Ohmae would say that any university curriculum needs to incorporate active interdisciplinary courses that provide students with real world learning opportunities to use their English, regardless of their levels.

DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008)⁽¹³⁾ warned that an impediment to developing a professional learning community was always thinking one needs more training or needs more qualifications before engaging in making such a collective. The same can be said of reform as I have described. Teachers will raise every barrier saying things like the students are not ready for such activities, they do not have the English, they are not motivated, this will not help our students in their lives, they do not need so much English to live in Japan, etc. These are excuses for teachers not wanting to work. If we do not encounter the students and

encourage them, who are we as teachers? Why do we have the jobs we have? The dynamic is that teachers are the authority and our students look to us for guidance and leadership. We do not have to create an entire curriculum guide, but within the one we already have we can challenge them to be better; challenge them to be ready for what awaits them. This was the underlying philosophy of the UNSDGs based discussion class instituted by the case university. The teachers did not have to wait for a full curriculum review. They met, brainstormed ideas, looked at new textbooks, decided, and worked with the department director on a schedule to place willing teachers in the proper classrooms.

Over the many previous decades, the government has invested a lot of yen into programs to bolster the English communication abilities of the general population. From the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme (see <https://jetprogramme.org/en/>) to the Top Global University Project (MEXT, n.d.)⁽¹⁷⁾, and now J-MIRAI (Japan Future) (MEXT, 2023)⁽¹⁸⁾, all of these initiatives have either directly or indirectly supported programs to increase the English language abilities (and broader global and intercultural competencies) of the Japanese population, particularly the secondary and tertiary education demographics. There is a vast network of professionals at local schools, boards of education, and institutions of higher learning with the singular duty to teach English. I feel like the challenge before us is to first recognize this reality then organize ourselves to fully embrace and take systematic action toward developing curriculum solutions. Freire (2005)⁽¹⁹⁾ would characterize this activism as critical citizenship and aligns with his advocacy for a praxis education framework focused on active, intellectual and reflective rigor, or a development-reform process of ideation, implementation, and reflection.

6. Conclusion

Kezar (2001)⁽³⁾ advised that when dealing with any type of organizational change there needs to be a concerted effort to unfreeze systems to see where and what change can be made. This allows stakeholders to see the system in a natural state and investigate the parts. Unfreezing something does not happen immediately. The changemakers must be patient, motivated, and systematic. Sound leadership with a clear vision articulated through an active mission statement will be necessary to set the stage for all stakeholders.

Curriculum as part of a grander pedagogy requires active encounters that leave marks for those involved to investigate, not only the state of that curriculum but also the pedagogical principles from which it was derived (Inayatullah, 2022)⁽¹⁵⁾. Teachers need to encounter students. Students need to encounter each other. Administrators need to encounter students and teachers. Communities need to encounter all the institutional stakeholders, and themselves.

Universities in Japan are being called upon to develop and produce globally competent human resources (*gurobaru jinzai*) that Japanese companies can use to help them compete in the global marketplace. This university prides itself on a high job placement rate for its graduating students. Ideally, these graduates will contribute to the forward development of Japanese society, and more broadly, the global community. This university is ideally placed for discussing what curriculum reform means and looks like in an age of change. My hope is that other universities and institutions of higher education reflect on their purposes in society and what reforms they need to adapt and progress with society.

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