

OECD Initial Teacher Preparation study

Promising practices

Exploring the alignment of initial teacher education to the new national curriculum in Japan: teaching for active learning

*Country category: **Japan***

*Teacher education pathway category(ies): **Attracting; Selecting***

*Stakeholder category(ies): **researcher; policymaker***

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This case study describes a “Promising practice” drawn from an OECD review of Initial Teacher Preparation in Japan from 5-9 September 2016.

The OECD Review Team – Hannah von Ahlefeld (OECD), Francesca Caena (University of Venice), Kjetil Helgeland (OECD) and Danielle Toon (Learning First) – identified a number of “Promising practices” in each country. These practices may not be widespread or representative, but seen in the context of other challenges, they represent a strength or opportunity to improve the country’s initial teacher preparation system – and for other countries to learn from them.

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Promising practice 2.
Exploring the alignment of initial teacher education to the
new national curriculum in Japan: Teaching for active
learning

Context

In 2012, in response to new issues and challenges in Japan brought about by globalisation, modernisation, demographic decline and the rapidly changing socio-economic landscape, the Japanese government created the Council for the Implementation of Education Rebuilding. Headed by the Prime Minister, the Council brought together experts from different fields to formulate ten global recommendations, including policy recommendations for developing the Second Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education (2013-17).

Japan is now finalising its Third Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education (2018-22), which includes a National Curriculum Reform organised around three pillars:

- Cultivating human nature and the ability to pursue learning so that one strives to apply learning to life and society, particularly the competencies for living required for the new era;
- Acquiring knowledge and technical skills; and
- Developing the skills to think, make judgements and express oneself to be able to respond to unprecedented situations.

According to OECD (2018), the national curriculum in Japan, which is revised around every 10 years, “not only specifies what children should learn, but also how they should learn and what they should be able to accomplish. In that regard, the curriculum seeks to improve the learning process from the perspective of proactive, interactive and authentic learning (**active learning**).”

Active learning strategies are those that promote the engagement of students in their own learning. Active learning practices typically include class discussion, mock lessons, group work, games and debate. Technology can be a useful tool to support active learning. While some studies reveal a high correlation between the use of these strategies and student performance (Orlich et al., 2013), high levels of teacher self-efficacy are most commonly associated with regular use of active learning strategies and participation in professional development. In other words, the more teachers participate in training activities, the more confident they should feel about their ability to teach, and the more they should use such strategies. (Le Donné, Fraser and Bousquet, 2016; OECD, 2014)

How is the new national curriculum aligned to initial teacher education?

Ensuring the candidate teachers and new and experienced teachers can use active learning strategies is therefore critical to the successful implementation of the new national curriculum. However, transforming teaching from a knowledge transmission model to an active learning one is a great challenge.

In 2017, the OECD was invited to carry out an Education Policy Review to examine the current curriculum reform agenda in Japan (OECD, 2018). In one of its recommendations, the report (p. 161) highlighted the importance of making additional investment in initial teacher education, induction and continuous professional development to ensure that teachers are able to adapt to the new curriculum, focus on effective teaching and learning and that they have flexible resources that reflect active learning and encourage cross curriculum learning”.

In Japan, steps are being made to start to develop a new pedagogy to foster students’ active engagement in learning, in line with the demands of the revised national curriculum.

- In 2015, the National Institute for School Teachers and Staff Development (NITS) launched the Center for Innovation and Research in Education (formerly Education Centre for Future Learners) to search and acquire better teaching practices fostering of pupils' active engagement in learning.
- Revisions to the Special Act for Education Personnel on 31 March 2017 require every BOE to set a “Capability Index for the Enhancement of the Quality of School Principals and Teachers (Teachers' Capability Index)”. This revision seeks to launch an explicit framework for teachers' professional development that cuts across ITE and CPD providers. It is the responsibility of BOEs to set the Teachers’ Capability Index, and the Act requires BOEs to align teachers’ professional development to the Teachers’ Capability Index.
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) is preparing guidelines for an “integrative teacher curriculum reform” to help prepare and develop teachers to meet the demands of active learning and other aspects of the national curriculum. There is no legal provision explicitly defining what constitutes a teacher’s talent or skills. The issue has been discussed in the Central Council for Education, and the Council’s Report has elaborated on the competencies and skills required for teachers. Recently, however, there is a political pressure for making explicit standards for teachers in different carrier stages, and the BOEs and ITP providers work in collaboration to draft these standards.

Why is it an opportunity?

The OECD Review Team in its visit to Japan from 5-8 September 2016 concluded that aligning the national curriculum with ITE is an opportunity in that:

- MEXT and some Boards of Education, teacher education institutions and schools are *exploring how they can align themselves with the revised national curriculum* in the sense that they are developing guidelines and programmes to support teachers to adopt active learning strategies, including digital ones – and ultimately improve the relevance and quality of ITE programmes.

- Existing practice of *Lesson Study* can be used as a springboard to implement other active learning strategies. Trainee teachers use the same process of lesson study that they will use for professional development throughout their careers. This process helps them continuously reflect upon and improve teaching practice.

How could it be improved?

The OECD Review Team also noted that:

- While some universities are reforming their ITE programmes, *there is a need to develop systems and mechanisms to embed these type approaches throughout the system* in a continuous improvement cycle, for example, by clearly defining core competencies of teachers and integrating these competencies in ITE programme accreditation, which takes place every 7 years, by aligning entry methods into ITE and into teaching, etc.
- Revising ITE programmes and content in light of the new national curriculum may result in additional workload for teachers. The structure and needs of ITE must be carefully considered to avoid further burden for teachers.

For more information

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