Building a Framework for Educational Practice and Institutional Reform in the EBPM Era: How to Create a Framework for Supporting Change in Public Schools

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Abstract: This article presents a summary of a symposium that aimed to bridge the gap between educational practice and educational policies and systems. The symposium focused on creating a framework for supporting change in public schools, with a particular emphasis on the project titled "Development of an Organizational and Curriculum Model for Public Schools as a Foundation for ESD Practice." The project aimed to connect intrinsic teacher practices with school organizational and curricular reforms, involving collaboration between municipalities, universities, and young researchers. The symposium included reports on school reforms in participating municipalities, discussions on logic models, and reflections on the effectiveness of the project framework. The discussions highlighted the benefits of the framework in promoting sustainable school reform and the challenges associated with implementing logic models. The article concludes by suggesting that educational practitioners and researchers should adopt a perspective and mindset approach and shift from a linear to a complex system framework for teacher learning. It emphasizes the importance of open and integrated knowledge in revitalizing schools and universities, ultimately contributing to the development of effective educational policies.

Keywords: Evidence-based policy making (EBPM); Education for Sustainable Development (ESD); Framework for educational reform

1. Aims of the project

At the 28th conference (Zoom web conference on 10 July 2021), a public symposium was held with the research theme "Building Frameworks for Educational Practice and Institutional Reform." The aim of the symposium was to "bridge the gap between educational practice and educational policies and systems", as indicated by the subtitle "How to Create a Framework for Supporting Change in Public Schools." This requires both (i) a framework for schools and teachers to practice intrinsically and lead to school reform, and (ii) a framework for cooperation and collaboration between boards of education and universities, etc. that support such reform. In this respect, the university in charge of the project has strongly recognized this issue in the course of its research on ESD practice over the last 10 years, and has launched the SDGs project (UNESCO Activity Fund Subsidy) in FY2020. Therefore, the symposium decided to examine the topic of "bridging educational practice and educational policies and systems in the EBPM era" from multiple perspectives, with a primary focus on this project.

The project is titled "Development of an Organizational and Curriculum Model for Public Schools as a Foundation for ESD Practice," which aims to build a framework for promoting educational practices like ESD in public schools. The concept involves building a framework that facilitates the participation of municipalities and universities in connecting the intrinsic and creative practices and activities of teachers with school organizational and curricular reforms. The two participating municipalities are the SDGs Future City Nanto City (Toyama Prefecture) and Kawane Honmachi (Shizuoka Prefecture). The former focuses on school organizational and curricular reforms such as grade division, team-teaching system, multi-classroom joint instruction and specially-accredited schools. The latter emphasizes integrated education reforms and sustainable community revitalization in kindergarten, elementary, junior high and high schools, and are incorporating the transition to compulsory education schools. In addition, the project also aimed to explore the potential and challenges of the "logic model," a method of "social impact management," in building a framework for municipal education reform. This aim is based on the fact that EBPM (Evidence-Based Policy Making), which emphasizes numerical targets and the verification of their achievement, has been identified as a "viewpoint to be particularly noted" in the Third Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education (June 2018). Furthermore, it is expected to become even stronger in the future in the educational policies of local authorities and school management. Although this approach has already been introduced into school evaluation systems and university evaluation systems, there are criticisms that it is burdensome and not functioning effectively. Therefore, the project aims to explore the potential of the "logic model" to address these issues and make it more effective. It is worth noting that the organizers presented a research report titled "Challenges of ESD and Educational Policies" at the 25th conference (2018) and a symposium report titled "Considering Community School Development from the Perspective of ESD: Questioning the Role of Universities" at the 26th conference (2019), published in the annual bulletin No. 27.

2. Structure of the symposium report

The symposium consisted of two parts, the first half of which consisted of three reports on projects. The first was a report by Mr Hitoshi Yamashita (Director of Education) and Mr Tetsuya Watanabe (Chief Officer and Director of the Education Administration Office) from Kawane Honmachi (Shizuoka Prefecture) on "Creating distinctive education in areas with declining population: Building a system for sustainable school development – A logic model linking SDGs and ESD principles with school restructuring." The second was a report by Mr Kenichi Matsumoto (Director of Education) from Nanto City (Toyama Prefecture), on "Creating a Sustainable Educational Foundation: 'Nanto Reiwa Education Reform' Supporting School Autonomy and Diversity." Furthermore, representing the young researchers (eight members: ESD Horupu [1]; nine in 2021), Orie Sasaki (Kaichi International University) and Naoki Sakurai (The Open University of Japan) reflected on their project efforts under the title "Linking intrinsic teacher practice to holistic public school reform."

The latter part of the symposium consisted of two designated discussants and an exchange of views. The first designated discussant, from the perspective of educational administration research, was Saiko Sadahiro (Chiba University), a member of the project, who presented a report entitled "Institutional design of EBPM educational policy at the central government level: Its challenges and directions" and offered comments on the project. The second discussant was Terumasa Ishii (Kyoto University), from the field of educational methodology research, who gave a report entitled "From the standpoint of research on educational practice" and commented on the project. Emphasizing the aspect of interdisciplinary exchange in education studies, the designated discussants were given ample time for their presentations. The reports of the presenters and designated discussants, as well as the summary, are included in this issue. Therefore, here we will provide an overview of the discussions, the achievements of the symposium, and the future challenges.

3. Discussion points in the exchange of views

Under the theme "Building a framework for educational practice and institutional reform," the participants exchanged views on "how to create a framework for supporting change in public schools" by reporting on school reforms in the project's participating municipalities and on the project's reform support initiatives. Looking back on the day's discussions, we would like to present two issues as a summary.

The first point relates to the effectiveness of the educational reforms in the two municipalities and the role played by the project in supporting them. In particular, it is noted that the project's concept of "building a framework that connects the intrinsic and creative practices and activities of teachers with school organizational and curricular reforms in collaboration with participating municipalities and universities" is highly beneficial not only for the educational board but also for the school field [2]. "It is crucial that each municipality, like Nanto City and Kawane Honmachi in this case, demonstrates a clear direction for education toward sustainable community development, taking ESD into account. This greatly influences the direction of education and management in each school. Moreover, it is commendable that the project supports the proactive initiatives of each school, emphasizing the importance of intrinsic reforms without imposing uniform restrictions. This approach aligns perfectly with the essence of ESD and is greatly appreciated by the school field. It would be wonderful if municipalities nationwide could adopt a similar approach. I think it serves as an excellent model," stated Mr. Toshio Teshima (former elementary school principal and ESD education promoter).

It is pointed out that the framework of support provided by universities and young researchers (ESDHoRIP) not only allows the educational boards of participating municipalities to "realign" the overall picture of educational policies aimed at sustainable communities but also serves as a foundation for school administrators (principals, vice principals, and curriculum staff) and other educators to confirm and discuss the direction set by the educational boards. This observation highlights the benefits (effectiveness) of the project, as noted by individuals with experience in taking responsibility for the school field.

The second point of discussion pertains to the issues surrounding the creation of a logic model (LM). The project aims to develop a logic model (LM) rooted in the essence of public education, under the overarching framework of "connecting the intrinsic and creative practices and activities of teachers with school organizational and curricular reforms." Specifically, the project aims to: i) create a logic model (LM) based on the concept of social impact management (SIM) in the era of evidence-based policy making (EBPM), and ii) collect and analyze data, evaluate the outcomes, and effectively implement the PDCA cycle to verify the effectiveness and potential of "social impact management" and "logic model" in educational policy, identifying challenges and improvement strategies. However, as of the current stage, the project has not reached the second phase. It is worth mentioning that while the primary entities responsible for creating the logic model are the municipal educational boards (for educational policies) and schools (for school management), the project itself is also considering a logic model.

During the discussions on the day of the event, Mr. Watanabe, an educational board representative who had created a logic model for educational policies, reflected on his experience. He mentioned several points, including: i) recognizing the logic model as a tool to gather evidence and build consensus among stakeholders involved in policy implementation, primarily educators, ii) believing that if the intrinsic awareness of principals, teachers, or schools can be harnessed to drive school reforms, it can bring about changes in education, reflect in the students' development, and lead to schools recognized by the community, iii) acknowledging the implicit knowledge possessed by teachers that needs to be visualized through a revision using a logic model, iv) considering that school educational activities should constantly be adjusted through small steps based on children's outcomes, suggesting that a gear model is more suitable than a linear model, and v) reflecting on the unconscious exclusion of various potential biases when creating a linear logic model. Following these reflections, he posed the question to the designated discussants: "What

kind of revisions are necessary?" The discussants, based on their areas of expertise, provided their insights, and through the discussions, it was collectively understood that the effectiveness of the logic model lies in its use as a tool for acquiring consensus (facilitating agreement formation) rather than solely as a tool for policy evaluation.

Next, the moderator asked consisting of young researchers (ESD Hooripu) about the issues and challenges the research team had encountered during their efforts to create a logic model. Member Sasaki answered generally as follows. i) It is meaningful for stakeholders to share a common understanding and a concrete image of the development of children. ii) It may be better to align the logic model of the school board on the policy side with that of the school side, or to create them separately to not restrict the actions of schools. iii) Can we involve educators in the policy process to express their intrinsic awareness, iv) While the logic model has significance as a tool for budget allocation and accountability, should we perceive it separately or consider a reciprocal relationship. v) Our role is to support the creation of the logic model as a tool to empower teachers' intrinsic practices and jointly consider an approach that does not constrain school practices. This understanding was shared with the educational board. Furthermore, during the first half of the event, member Sakurai reported on the progress of the examination of the framework for "Supporting the Development of Intrinsic Teaching Capabilities." During the discussion, the situation of Okuma Town, which became a participating municipality in the project as a difficult-to-return area following the Great East Japan Earthquake and is currently in school evacuation in Aizuwakamatsu City, Fukushima Prefecture, was discussed. According to the report, they plan to transition to compulsory education schools in Aizuwakamatsu City as their evacuation destination in the fiscal year 2022 and then construct a new school building in Okuma Town and relocate there in the following fiscal year.

Finally, drawing on their 20 years of teaching experience and subsequent career as a practitioner educator in a graduate school of education, the Director of Education in Nanto City, who has been actively and creatively promoting school organizational and curriculum reforms since assuming the position in 2019, was questioned about the meaning and positioning of the logic model. The following five points were discussed regarding the Director's efforts. i) The key to sustainable school reform is to realize that school boards, teachers and children are all imperfect and the only way to do this is to create an environment where they can genuinely engage in the work. ii) The key for school boards is to refrain from making decisions about everything, instead focusing on making minimal decisions and supporting the schools in their dedicated efforts. iii) Determining who will take responsibility. The school board should support schools in exercising their autonomy by taking shared responsibility. iv) To show teachers who are bound by the conventional norms that they can do more and encouraging them to come up with innovative ideas. (v) Keeping in mind the school's educational goals, the differences among teachers, and the school's environment, involving everyone's opinions and implementing reforms with the headmaster at the center.

Regarding the logic model, the Superintendent expressed the following thoughts. i) To be honest, he wasn't sure. While he believes there are no specific targets for each individual reform, he wondered what would happen to the logic model in such circumstances. ii) He would also like the Hooripu team to create a logic model and use it in a way that can be easily understood by the council, citizens, etc. iii) Creating the model is not the end goal, and the key to sustainable education reform is how staff and teachers in schools can become an organization that continuously strive for improvement. That is what matters. iv) In the case of life and integrated learning, children can enthusiastically engage in activities in a holistic manner, enhancing their self-esteem through trial and error. v) In situations where goals are not clearly defined, such as in life and integrated learning, what would happen to the logic model for the educational board that supports each school.

In the discussions, the focus was on the effectiveness and challenges of the project framework and the approach to logic models in local educational reforms. Particularly valuable was the exchange of insights

regarding the reflection on the experiences of creating logic models for educational policies and programs at the municipal level. Although developing logic models required significant time and effort in the project, it deepened the discussions by exploring the various aspects of the design, potential, and challenges of introducing logic models in municipal educational reforms. This topic is closely related to the essential theme of education administration and policy, as stated in the previous Article 10 of the old Fundamental Law of Education, which emphasizes the distinction and interconnection between educational administration/policy and educational practice (educational activities). Addressing the question of how to handle this distinction and connection within the specific context of creating logic models for municipal educational reforms poses both a new research challenge and a practical issue. Future educational policy research is expected to construct research frameworks that incorporate action research-oriented practical initiatives and reflections.

4. Future challenges

The Central Council for Education (referred to as "Chukyo-shin") released a recommendation in January 2021 aiming to build a "Japanese-style school education in the Reiwa era." As indicated by the subtitle "Realizing Individualized and Collaborative Learning to Unleash the Potential of Every Child," the goal is to establish schools that enable "independent, interactive and deep learning." At the same time, a consultation (March 2021) was held on reforming teacher education (training, recruitment, personal development, etc.), and Chukyo-shin established a special subcommittee to address this matter. In November of the same year, they released a "summary of deliberations" on the progressive resolution of the teacher's license renewal system. Subsequently, a "Basic Issues Sub-Committee" was established within the Special Sub-Committee to examine the full scope of teacher education reform and is scheduled to reach a certain conclusion by summer 2022 (from the December 22, 2021 conference documents). On the other hand, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology has set up a task force to promote the "reform of teachers' work style" and is leading the reform [3]. However, issues such as excessive workload, long working hours, and appropriate compensation for teachers still remain unresolved.

> "...there is a need to improve and enhance school education in order to develop the qualities and abilities necessary for children to independently navigate an unpredictable future society and actively participate in the shaping of society. In addition, the challenges faced by schools are becoming more complex and difficult, not only in terms of learning and teaching. ...The aggregated results of the Teachers' Working Conditions Survey (2016) also revealed that the working conditions of teachers cannot be overlooked. ...The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology is reviewing teachers' past work practices, aiming to refine their teaching skills, enhance their personal qualities and creativity, and enable them to conduct effective educational activities for children. ... We are actively promoting workstyle reform in schools [4]."

The current challenge that educational research and the academic community should collectively address is the establishment of a framework in which local educational boards and school communities can actively engage in tackling the aforementioned policy challenges.

The perspective of "linking the results of intrinsic teacher practice to school and system reforms" is a perspective that reexamines the normal school routine and responds to "rapid changes in society" in the midst of diverse and complex relationships between (1) teaching and learning methods, (2) curriculum management, (3) classroom management, and (4) regional cooperation and collaboration. School reform (school development) that enables students to learn to "live independently in an unpredictable future society and participate in the shaping of society", based on the context of each region and school, can only be carried out intrinsically by the teachers and staff there, the local community, parents and others. When seen in this way, the main focus must be on "implementing reform practices with holistic and systemic thinking",

taking a comprehensive view of the entire school organization. At the same time, in order for school boards and universities to work together and collaborate to provide high-quality reform support, they must also reform themselves with a "holistic and systems thinking" approach, which UNESCO's ESD for 2030 (SDGs) positions as the "institution-wide approach" (referred to as the "whole-school approach").

5. Conclusion (suggestions)

The authors would like to suggest two things to educational practitioners and educational researchers. First, is to apply a "perspective and mindset" to basic concepts and research themes. While incorporating the "perspective and mindset of subjects" has been included in the curriculum guidelines, it is also important to reconsider (reframe) the "perspective and mindset" towards "schools," "school/classroom management," "teacher guidance," "curriculum," "timetables," "teaching methods," and so on. In general, there is the design of "perspective and mindset" and its concretization through "activities (practices)." When the former becomes richer, the latter also becomes more appealing.

The second is to shift the framework of teachers' learning from a "linear (single-line) system" to a "complex (non-single-line or double-line) system" [5]. It involves engaging in a cycle of "thinking in a complex system → creating a framework (systems thinking) → act (activities)/practice under the framework → improve through evaluation and verification." This approach incorporates context, agents, and other elements such as means and tools into the design. This perspective is influenced by social constructionism, including the ideas of Engeström, and allows for substantial engagement, collaboration, and coordination with multiple stakeholders (local residents, local businesses, NGOs, etc.). Evidence-based policy making (EBPM) becomes an effective tool when designed as a multi-linear system [6]. In contrast, a linear approach is not only ineffective but can have negative impacts in the VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity) era [7].

The key to revitalizing schools and universities lies in transforming the specialized knowledge of educational research and the educational field into an open and integrated form (open system), and "reorienting" schools and universities with system thinking. This approach, based on reorientation, is crucial for educational policies that are currently needed [8].

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Endnote

(1) ESDHoRIP stands for "ESD Holistic Reform in Public Schools through Intrinsic Teacher Practice," which is the abbreviation for a framework study group that links public schools to holistic reform through the intrinsic teacher practice of ESD.

(2) The following statements are based on symposium records and later confirmed by the speakers.

(3) Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) website: "Regarding Workstyle Reform in Schools."

(4) Same as above.

(5) Complex systems research has become an important theme in the field of science. It is a concept that, like biological phenomena, involves self-organization while considering the whole and the parts, and creatively activates both the individual and the whole simultaneously. It means "seeing the forest for the trees," and this approach also applies to the "model development" (mold creation) in projects.

(6) The framework of Evidence-Based Policy Making (EBPM) in education policy involves stakeholders

creatively designing institutional systems, considering diverse contexts and content. For example, (i) the complexity of educational activities and interactions with children and parents, (ii) response to educational policies, (iii) changes in schools and society, (iv) creating schools that facilitate intrinsic educational practices, and (v) involvement of the community and universities (collaboration and cooperation).

(7) The term "VUCA" was coined to express the difficulty of future prediction, representing Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity.

(8) Please refer to the Shizuoka University Affiliated Education Practice Center Bulletin No. 31, 2022, titled "Connecting Educational Practice to School and Teacher Reform: From the Whole-School Approach of ESD/SDGs."