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Research Report

## Educating teachers as designers: the potentials of *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* in Social Science teacher education

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**Keywords:** *Kyouzai Kenkyuu*, curriculum design, social science, teacher education, japan

- Curriculum design has been recognized as preparation for practice, not practice *per se*.
- *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* can be a conceptual tool to indicate curriculum design as teachers' practice.
- *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* is both a teacher's practice and a disposition that a teacher needs to have.
- *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* can strengthen teacher professionalism by understanding teachers as curriculum designers.

**Purpose:** This study introduces the idea of *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* and examines its potentiality as a conceptual tool to point to the curriculum design process with a case of social science education. By doing so, this study can contribute to expanding the target of reflection from the practices *inside* classrooms toward the curriculum design *outside* classrooms and the strengthening of teacher professionalism by understanding teachers as curriculum designers.

**Approach:** The authors utilised literature review to illustrate how *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* can be a conceptual tool to point to the curriculum design process. Subsequently, the authors conducted interpretative practitioner research to showcase how *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* can be taught in pre-service teacher education and how teacher educators can educate pre-service teachers as curriculum designers utilising insider's perspectives. Finally, the authors discussed the potential of *Kyouzai Kenkyu* as a conceptual tool to indicate the content and method of designing the curriculum and as an approach to enhance teachers' development as curriculum designers.

**Findings:** *Kyouzai Kenkyuu*—*Kyouzai* meaning learning material(s) and *Kenkyuu* meaning study or research in the Japanese language—is a practice for curriculum design and one of the dispositions to define teachers as professionals. In Japan, teachers are expected to be practitioners who conduct *Kenkyuu* (research) about discipline, students, and the context surrounding students to design suitable *Kyouzai* (learning material[s]) and a curriculum for individual classrooms. In method courses, pre-service teachers verbalize and reflect on their *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* and how it impacts curriculum design. Through these experiences, social science teachers in Japan can enjoy the opportunities to develop their design and teaching rationales.

**Research limitations:** This study is limited to three method courses that the authors have taught; thus, the findings on how to teach *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* may not be generalizable.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

With the “reflective turn” in teacher education (Schön, 1991, p. 5), a norm of teachers as reflective practitioners has proliferated (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, 2001; Hargreaves, 2000; Randi & Zeichner, 2004). In a paradigm valuing field-based reflection, teachers are professionals who can analyse and reflect on practices and improve instructions with other educators in professional learning communities. Reflection-based teacher professional development has cemented its position in teacher education as evidenced by multiple guidebooks of teacher research such as action research (e.g., Mills, 2000), lesson study (e.g., Lewis & Hurd, 2011), and self-study (e.g., Samaras, 2010).

Educating reflective practitioners is not a new concept in teacher education (Rodgers & LaBoskey, 2016). “Unless a teacher is such a student [of teaching],” Dewey (1904) argued a century ago, “he may continue to improve in the mechanics of school management, but he cannot grow as a teacher, an inspirer and director of soul-life” (p. 15). Freire (1985), who valued a critical understanding of the world, defined a teacher as a professional, “one who must constantly seek to improve and to develop certain qualities or virtues, which are not received but must be created” (p. 15). Based on these two primary reflective traditions, Schön (1983, 1987), especially aligned with Dewey’s reflective inquiry, discussed reflection within the context of professionalism. His work has echoed teacher education communities in reclaiming teacher agency in the era of teachers’ deprofessionalisation (Carlgren, 1999; De Saxe, Bucknovitz, & Mahoney-Mosedale, 2020; Hoyle, 1980; Priestley, Biesta, Philippou, & Robinson, 2015).

Reflection on teaching and learning in the classroom is a way to create teacher knowledge, “the whole of the knowledge and insights that underlie teachers’ actions in practice” (Verloop, Van Driel, & Meijer, 2001, p. 446). This reflecting on lived experiences inside classrooms produces teacher knowledge, and teachers utilised the knowledge to improve instructional activities (Bullough & Smith, 2016). Teachers are knowledge creators who can research their practices and thereby produce context-based knowledge for innovating classroom instruction.

Although there is agreement about the importance of reflecting on practices *inside* classrooms, the authors are concerned about the marginalisation of curriculum design *outside* classrooms. As Carlgren (1999) argued, although planning activities have been valued in teacher education, it was “mainly as a preparation *for* ‘practice’ - not *as* practice” (emphasis in original, p. 54). Designing curricula is how teachers have voices as the agents of classroom innovation (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Kirk & MacDonald, 2001) and how they engage in meaning-making by unpacking the existing curriculum or standards and communicating with the world (Remillard, 2005). Teachers’ curriculum design *outside* classrooms is a practice *per se*—“a source of knowledge for the teacher, who is in the middle of reflecting-in-action while designing” (Wieringa, 2011, p. 172).

Broadening the target of reflection toward curriculum design, thus far peripheralised in teacher education, helps maximise the potential of reflective inquiry and further the

discussion of teacher professionalism. To achieve this, it is worth referring to the following suggestion by Carlgren (1999) to develop a language to “point to” curriculum design:

In order to develop professionalism in teachers’ design work there is a need to develop a tradition of using language for a conceptual meaning-making whereby the meanings of practice can be abstracted and dealt with in a way that is separate from the particular forms in which they are captured. . . . By liberating content or meaning from the forms, it will become easier to think about classroom practice outside of the classroom and to escape from the contextual prison in which professional knowledge is embedded. (p. 53)

Developing the conceptual tool (language) is necessary to separate the phenomena “*from the contexts in which they are embedded*” (emphasis in original, Carlgren, 1999, p. 53) and, therefore, make it easier to be reflected. Unfortunately, although Carlgren suggested the necessity of developing the language more than two decades ago, no conceptual tool has been developed to articulate the lesson design process and discuss it in terms of teacher professionalism.

As teacher educators and educational researchers working in Japan, the authors understand that Japanese *Kyouzai Kenkyuu*—*Kyouzai* meaning learning material(s) and *Kenkyuu* meaning study or research in the Japanese language—can suggest an alternative to the previously mentioned problem. *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* is not a preparation *for* practice but is practice *per se* for teachers to develop their expertise while designing curricula. In Japan, teachers are practitioners who conduct *Kenkyuu* (research) about discipline, students, and the context surrounding students to design suitable *Kyouzai* (learning material[s]) and a curriculum for individual classrooms. This is especially true in social science education because the distance between the subject matter and students is lesser than in other school subjects. Therefore, researching the complex and dynamic relationship between discipline, students, and the context is crucial to teach a school subject successfully.

Based on the problem and possible solution mentioned above, this study introduces the idea of *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* and examines its potentiality as a conceptual tool to point to the curriculum design process with a case of social science education. By doing so, this study can contribute to expanding the target of reflection from the practices *inside* classrooms toward the curriculum design *outside* classrooms and the strengthening of teacher professionalism by understanding teachers as curriculum designers. To this end, the authors first review *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* literature in English and Japanese, followed by an illustration of *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* and a subsequent discussion of how it can expand the scope of reflection, including practices both *inside* and *outside* classrooms. Subsequently, the authors conduct interpretative practitioner research (Hawley & Crowe, 2016) to showcase how *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* can be taught in pre-service teacher education and how teacher educators can educate pre-service teachers as curriculum designers utilising insider’s perspectives. Finally, the authors discuss the potential of *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* as a

conceptual tool to indicate the content and method of designing the curriculum and as an approach to enhance teachers' development as curriculum designers.

## 2 *KYOUZAI KENKYUU* IN JAPAN

### 2.1 *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* and lesson study

*Kyouzai Kenkyuu* appears with lesson study, a professional development approach in which “teachers collaboratively plan, observe, and analyse actual classroom lessons” (Lewis, Perry, Hurd, & O’Connell, 2006, p. 3). *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* is understood as the “plan” part of the lesson study. However, *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* has a unique status as it is recognised as *Kenkyuu* (research). In this section, the authors first discuss the worldwide expansion of lesson study and how it intersects with *Kyouzai Kenkyuu*. Subsequently, the authors then clarify the characteristics and context of *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* in Japan.

In *The Teaching Gap*—a classic work that introduced lesson study from Japan to the rest of the world—Stigler and Hiebert (1999) indicated that Japanese students' high achievements in international assessments correlated with the lesson study culture. In this culture, teachers continued to improve their instructional practices and create classroom-based knowledge through collaborative field-based reflection. Since then, educators in many countries have recognised the value of lesson study, premised on teacher ownership, teacher professionalism, student learning-focused dialogue, teacher collaboration, and teacher professional community (Kim, 2021; Cheung & Wong, 2014; Willems & Van den Bossche, 2019).

In the context of “educational borrowing” (Phillips & Ochs, 2004), Kim (2021) explained the transition of the lesson study research trend from “introducing and implementing lesson study” in individual contexts to “suggesting the strategies of improving lesson study” by exploring cases worldwide. Within the latter trend, *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* has received attention for realising robust lesson study from the design perspective (Arani, 2017; Choy & Lee, 2021; DosAlmas & Lewis, 2017; Takahashi & McDougal, 2016; Watanabe, Takahashi, & Yoshida, 2008). As Choy and Lee (2021) argued, *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* is “a critical yet often neglected phase in lesson study adopted in countries beyond Japan” (p. 38). This is especially true in a lesson study culture that is obsessed with educating a reflective practitioner, focused on “describing and interpreting children’s unique learning,” and aligned with belittling “teachers’ instruction and curriculum” (Ishii, 2017, p. 67).

### 2.2 *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* and curriculum design

*Kyouzai Kenkyuu* is “a process in which teachers investigate all aspects of the content and instructional materials in the context of how students think about and understand the concepts they are going to learn” (Takahashi, Watanabe, Yoshida, & Wang-Iverson, 2005, p. 101). It has been recognised as one of the fields in which teachers demonstrate their expertise as professionals in Japan (Kurasawa, 1988). Further, teachers analyse ready-

made teaching materials, including textbooks, unpack national or regional curricula or standards, and explore students' pre-existing understanding of learning content to design their curriculum (from a lesson or a unit to a year-long curriculum) (DosAlmas & Lewis, 2017; Takahashi et al., 2005). Through conducting *Kyouzai Kenkyuu*, teachers "get disciplinary and methodological ideas" to design curricula.

Watanabe et al. (2008) explained that there are two types of *Kyouzai Kenkyuu*: (a) examining and exploring the characteristics and intrinsic logic of pre-developed learning materials (e.g., national curriculum, textbook, and teacher manuals) and (b) "investigat[ing] in-depth the particular subject matter to be taught" (Choy & Lee, 2021, p. 40). Imagine a situation for teaching addition to first graders. During *Kyouzai Kenkyuu*, teachers may first analyse what the textbook contains because, in Japan, it is the primary learning material shared by teachers and students (Shimahara & Sakai, 1995). Japanese textbooks are organised by *mihiraki*, implying double-page spreads, with one *mihiraki* expected to be taught during one lesson. Within *mihiraki*, verbal and pictorial explanations of addition concepts and activities promote students' understanding. In other words, teachers could teach a lesson according to the activities suggested in the textbook (Kim, 2021). While analysing the textbook, teachers may refer to the Japanese national curriculum. It holds legal binding power in Japan; therefore, teachers consider whether their lessons are within the boundary of the national curriculum. Developing their knowledge about the subject content taught is a precondition for designing a suitable curriculum for students. They may read books about addition and related mathematical concepts. Further, they refer to other teachers' and researchers' suggestions about teaching addition, especially focusing on the misunderstandings and mistakes typically made by students. Simultaneously, teachers may think of their students' existing knowledge about addition from their previous teaching experiences and then conduct a pre-survey to evaluate students' understanding of addition. Finally, they synthesise all the results of *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* and develop ideas of the curriculum suitable for their context. Thus, they question the appropriateness of the textbook's content (Shibata, 2011) and create concrete teaching materials (e.g., counting chopsticks in Japan and walnuts in Iran) that are contextually suitable for their students (Arani, 2017).

As *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* is a practice for creating a better curriculum, it is always connected to curriculum design. During *Kyouzai Kenkyuu*, teachers contemplate the questions they need to ask and the activities necessary to achieve the curriculum's goal. However, Japanese teachers are not solely concerned about how their *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* will be utilised for their lessons in the immediate future. Instead, they conduct *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* for a short-term goal (e.g., designing tomorrow's lessons) and a long-term goal (e.g., reading relevant books for developing disciplinary expertise). *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* can even be considered a particular disposition requested of Japanese teachers.

### 2.3 The status of *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* in Japan

The origin of *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* is uncertain. However, it has been reported that teachers and researchers have created the school culture of *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* in a grassroots manner. Within this culture, especially following the “autonomous education movement” in the 1920s (Asai, 2016), teachers have been recognised as both intellectuals in regional societies and educational researchers who create knowledge about teaching and learning. *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* is not merely the designing of a curriculum. Rather, it is a behaviour whereby teachers create an innovative educational theory from the field (Inamori, 1925). Additionally, *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* is a genre of educational research of *Kyokakyouikugaku*, “an independent academic discipline dealing with educational methods of particular school subjects” (Kawaguchi & Watanabe, 2021, p. 56) as evidenced in a Ph.D. thesis based on *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* (e.g., Harada, 2005). In short, *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* and the designing of curricula have obtained the status of *Kenkyuu* (research) in Japan, and teachers who conduct *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* have been recognised as “practical researchers or academic practitioners” (Ojima, 2008, p. 201).

## 3 *KYOUZAI KENKYUU* IN SOCIAL SCIENCE TEACHER EDUCATION IN JAPAN

Here, the authors understand social studies as a form of social science education. Post-war educational reform from 1945 to 1952 abolished moral, geography, and history education, which previously promoted nationalism and militarism during the Second World War and laid the groundwork for social studies education (Katakami, 1993). The introduction of social studies—a form of social science education integrating geography, history, economics and civics to educate democratic citizens—resulted from the reflection on pre-war imperialism. Social studies was the initial spark that moved Japan towards a democratic society (Kawaguchi & Kim, 2020). Over 70 years since its introduction, social studies’ goal of fostering democratic citizenship has not changed. However, the curriculum’s pendulum has moved back and forth between “integrated” and “divided” social studies (Kawaguchi & Kim, 2020).

Currently, social science education in Japan comprises three parts: (a) “living environment studies” (*Seikatsuka*) in first and second grade (ages 6–8), (b) (integrated) social studies from third to ninth grade (ages 8–15), and (c) “geography and history” and “civics” divided into two subjects in high school (ages 15–18). Living environment studies aims “to cultivate the ability to become independent and enrich one’s life by utilising views and ideas related to daily life through concrete activities” (Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2017, p. 8). It focuses on educating about health and safety, interacting with people in the community, and learning public manners, basic skills, and habits. The scope and sequence of social studies in elementary schools are decided based on the expanding communities approach from the local community to regional, national, and global scales, rather than the individual disciplines of social science. Although the subject is still named “social studies” in middle school, the

characteristics of geography, history, and civics are explicit. This division tendency is more intensified in high school, leading to the eventual division of social studies into “geography and history” and “civics” from 1989 to the present day.

The previously mentioned tension between “integration” and “division” of social studies education can be considered the identity issue of the subject, as aptly questioned by Adler (2008): “Are teachers to be prepared as teachers of the academic disciplines or must they also develop the skills and knowledge to create curriculum that will facilitate learners attaining competence as citizens in a democratic society?” (p. 329). In the United States, Crocco and Livingston (2017) discussed the above question with the “federation model” and the “fusionist model.” Should social studies be an integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competency (fusionist model), or should it be the umbrella term for several academic disciplines (federation model)? The debate over the identity and characterisation of social studies exists in Japan, and the discussion is ongoing (Kawaguchi & Kim, 2020).

Identity issues extend to teacher education (Whitson, 2004). If teachers understand social studies as an integrated subject that fosters civic competency (fusionist model), they may prioritise developing informed civic and social decisions and taking informed actions over mastering the individual academic discipline. Conversely, if teachers understand social studies as an assembly of social sciences (federation model), they may emphasise thinking and acting like social scientists, such as historians, geographers, and economists. Therefore, discussing the identity of the school subject is essential in social studies teacher education.

This identity issue is also reflected in *Kyouzai Kenkyuu*. In social studies education, as previously noted, Watanabe et al.’s (2008) categorization of *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* is reorganised into either a disciplinary-driven approach (the federation model) or a goal-driven approach (the fusionist model) based on the tension surrounding the subject’s identity. Here, the authors explain the approaches using Whitson’s (2004) example of “production, distribution, and consumption.” Social studies teachers who prefer the disciplinary-driven approach—focusing on exploring the academic meaning and significance—might regard “production, distribution, and consumption” as “downgraded” economics. Thus, they would examine how topics are treated in economics and consider how to encourage students to think economically. Teachers who pursue the goal-driven approach might emphasise the importance of civic competencies more than the academic aspect. Accordingly, they would seek examples of social problems concerning “production, distribution, and consumption” and consider using the essence of social science discipline to address the topic. In the goal-driven approach, economics is an element (or tool) to design a curriculum; conversely, economics is the foundation for designing a curriculum in the disciplinary-driven approach.

Choy and Lee (2021) described *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* as the process by which teachers examine instructional materials, while considering the ways students think, understand, and learn. By iterating this process, “teachers not only understand the instructional

materials from their [own] perspectives but also see the content from their students' perspectives" (p. 40). In social studies, however, the meaning of *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* can transcend Choy and Lee's statement because the subject's identity is uncertain.

Considering social studies education, by rearranging the previously mentioned types of *Kyouzai Kenkyuu*, the authors introduce three types of *Kyouzai Kenkyuu*: (a) short-term *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* as an in-depth and critical examination of previously developed teaching materials, (b) short-term *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* as the creation of new materials and content suitable for fostering democratic citizenship, and (c) long-term *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* as daily professional development. In the next section, the authors illustrate the process of these approaches by referring to the secondary social studies teachers' guide.

### **3.1 Short-term *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* through in-depth and critical examination of textbooks and the national curriculum**

The first type examines existing teaching materials such as textbooks and the national curriculum from various perspectives, including those of children, society, and disciplines. Imagine the case of teaching about Australia. Japanese textbooks primarily comprise guiding questions, text, and visual aids, such as pictures and graphs. For example, a published social studies textbook characterises the country with the guiding question, "How does Australia relate to Asia in terms of immigration and tourism?" The main text comprises the following three parts: "Transformation from White Australia Policy," "Towards a Multicultural Society," and "Increasing Tourists from Asia." Photographs of Sydney's Chinatown and graphs showing the changes in immigration trends are printed.

Utilising this textbook, Kusahara (2015) suggested ways of undertaking an in-depth and critical examination of textbooks. The first strategy was to supplement the media for students' understanding. Students without vivid images of a multicultural society typically struggle to envision Australia's reality. Therefore, teachers expose learners to multilingual television programmes and Google Street View photographs as supplemental resources to promote the students' images of a multicultural society. The second strategy was to highlight competing discourses covered in textbooks. In Japanese textbooks, Australia is described as a country that favours a multicultural society. However, there were—and still are, to some extent—significant debates on multiculturalism in the country before the settlement of national policy. As "textbooks tend to focus on consequences" (Kusahara, 2015, p. 11), conflicts and controversies are ignored when deciding what to describe in the textbook. Presenting a dynamic reality rather than static consequences can enable learners to enjoy opportunities for judgement and debate on actual consequences.

However, the strategies of *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* do not discuss the reasons behind the teachings of Australia, which can be understood as a case that allows learners to create an image of a multicultural society or study conflicts and controversies surrounding its multicultural policies. Teachers need to develop a rationale to decide what and how to

teach beyond “their usual practice of dependence on [national] curriculum framework” and textbooks (Choy & Lee, 2021, p. 42).

### **3.2 Short-term *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* as the creation of new materials and content suitable for fostering democratic citizenship**

While the first strategy starts with existing teaching materials, the second emphasises a deductive approach that starts with teachers’ educational views or the context surrounding classrooms (e.g., classroom, school, and neighbouring society). For instance, Ojima (2015), a junior high school teacher, deliberated over what secondary history meant to his school’s ethos, “Education for Sustainable Development” and “Global Citizenship Education.” He understood that secondary history education should develop the ability to explore social matters in a multidimensional and comprehensive manner. It was a means for educating students who could suggest alternative solutions to social problems through critical thinking and a way for them to develop values, such as respecting human rights and diversity (Ojima, 2015, p. 109).

Based on this thought process, Ojima created the unit “Who is a Global Citizen?” In the current Japanese national curriculum, topics related to nationality are spread throughout the history curriculum, allowing few opportunities to contemplate the comprehensive and critical nature of Japanese people. Furthermore, he studied his students’ experiences of school trips and daily life and integrated them into the unit.

This type of *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* overlaps with curriculum design more than the first one. Similar to Ojima, social studies teachers who pursue the second type start *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* with their individual educational views and classroom contexts. For them, textbooks and the national curriculum are not predetermined materials for teaching. Rather, teachers choose what and how to teach based on their understanding of the subject matter and the context of children, school, and surrounding society. Although the results of the first and second types of *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* (which means curriculum) might be similar, the respective starting points of *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* are different.

### **3.3 Long-term *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* as daily professional development**

It is difficult to understand the dynamic relationship between students, discipline, and society and utilise this understanding to design a curriculum. Therefore, long-term *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* with daily implementation is necessary. In Japan, *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* indicates the autonomous routines and habits that teachers perform daily to acquire sources and expertise in designing a curriculum. When teachers say, “I haven’t been able to *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* lately,” it does not imply their inability to teach their regular classes. Rather, it means that they could not read academic books or current news for their professional development and future curriculum design.

The practice of *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* as a daily routine and habit is extensive. One example is gathering information about social science, such as collecting pamphlets on tourist

attractions, reading newspapers and academic books, and conducting fieldwork trips (Arita, 1984). Teachers also conduct scholarly research as social scientists for their *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* (Ida, 1989, pp. 15-22). In some cases, teachers share their disciplinary findings from *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* in the academic community through presentations at conferences and published articles in academic journals. Iwata (1994) described *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* as “intellectual life” (p. 25). According to him, “A mature teacher would succeed in developing an intellectual environment. By accumulating experiences, they know how to manage information and book collections” (p. 26). *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* is a key element—even a disposition—that Japanese social studies teachers need in order to succeed in their classrooms. Furthermore, long-term and daily *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* is the premise for research on short-term *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* (Yasui, 1994, p. 35).

#### **4 CASE STUDY: TEACHING KYOUZAI KENKYUU IN SOCIAL SCIENCE METHOD COURSES IN JAPAN**

In this section, utilising the interpretative practitioner approach (Hawley & Crowe, 2016) on their individual social science method courses, the authors showcase snapshots of why and how *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* is taught in teacher education and therefore present evidence of how it contributes to developing a language to point to curriculum design and educating teachers as curriculum designers. Although *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* is frequently discussed in the context of in-service teacher education, the authors intentionally focus on method courses because the courses tend to explain the definition, philosophy and procedures of *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* systemically for pre-service teachers who encounter the concept for the first time.

As teacher educators in Japan—where *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* has been deeply rooted for more than 100 years—authors needed to reflect on their practices carefully. For perceiving the “familiar as unfamiliar” and thus providing unexplored snapshots of teaching *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* in Japan, the authors discussed the following questions: (a) How do you define social studies and *Kyouzai Kenkyuu*? (b) Why do you think teaching *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* is important in social studies method courses? and (c) How do you teach *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* in your method courses?

##### **4.1 Case 1: curriculum design for middle school social studies and high school geography and history**

Kim understands *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* as a practice to discover or create *Kyouzai*—implying instructional content or conceptual and physical tools for teaching the content to students—and investigates how these tools can be utilised in the classroom. He believes that performing *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* and gaining broad knowledge and perspectives on society are prerequisites for high-quality teaching. He also comprehends that doing *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* is a disposition that teachers need to embody for being teachers as

researchers and curriculum designers who continue renewing their practices based on research.

For Kim, it is impossible to distinguish between *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* and curriculum design. While reading relevant books, academic papers, and news articles, investigating neighbourhood issues, and capturing students' current understanding of the subject matter content, teachers ideate for pedagogically transforming their research results into a curriculum. They revisit and review the research sources, exploring other sources when encountering obstacles in designing the curriculum. Therefore, he taught *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* while instructing on curriculum design.

For example, Kim taught the course Curriculum Design for Middle School Social Studies and High School Geography and History based on project-based learning. Students were asked to design their own unit-level social studies curriculum based on the Inquiry Arc of College, Career, and Civic Life Framework suggested by the National Council for the Social Studies. Additionally, they had to deliver a presentation about their curriculum at the Mock Unit Exhibition on Week 15, the final day of the course. Table 1 outlines the syllabus courses.

**Table 1: Syllabus of surriculum design for middle school social studies and high school geography and history**

Week	Themes
1	Teachers as curricular-instructional gatekeeper
2–6	Inquiry Arc: (Dimension 1) Developing Questions and Planning Inquiries (Dimension 2) Applying Disciplinary Tools and Concepts (Dimension 3) Evaluating Sources and Using Evidence (Dimension 4) Communicating Conclusions and Taking Informed Action
7	Consulting with advisers
8–14	Elements of the teacher's curricular-instructional gatekeeper: (a) Textbook, (b) National Curriculum, (c) Discipline, (d) Students, (e) Family, (f) School, and (g) Society
15	Mock unit exhibition

Initially, students were guided to realise their role as curricular-instructional gatekeepers—those who “make the day-to-day decisions concerning both the subject matter and the experiences to which students have access and the nature of that subject matter and those experiences” (Thornton, 1991, p. 237). This realisation is important because pre-service teachers in Japan tend to think that teachers teach textbooks rather than teach students with textbooks. Students' understanding of their role as agents of curriculum design is the foundation of *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* and gives them the rationale for unpacking the textbook and national curriculum.

From Weeks 2–6, Kim taught about the Inquiry Arc, which “focuses on the nature of inquiry in general and the pursuit of knowledge through questions in particular” (National Council for the Social Studies, 2013, p. 12). The Inquiry Arc has four dimensions: (a) questioning, (b) disciplinary investigation, (c) making arguments, and (d) communicating and taking action. Although Kim taught students that *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* is essential for every dimension, he emphasised it more for the questioning and disciplinary investigation phases than other dimensions. This particular focus came from his thought that without understanding the knowledge and perspectives students possess from social sciences, it is impossible to create a question that students feel compelled to answer and, therefore, to design a robust inquiry.

On Week 7, students could consult with teaching assistants and Kim about their ongoing projects. Since Week 1, students designed their own curriculum. The advisers’ main task was to ask students how much *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* they had implemented thus far. Based on students’ answers, the advisers captured how students’ curriculum designs were progressing and suggested a direction for *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* to refine their curriculum designs (e.g., reading specific books, anticipating students’ reactions).

From Weeks 8–14, students learned about the elements that affected their curriculum design. Among the many elements in Table 1, Kim mentioned *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* most when teaching the elements of textbooks and discipline. In terms of the textbook, he realised that his desire for students to unpack the textbook and design their creative lessons rather than reproduce the textbook content affected his teaching. Considering the discipline element, he taught students how to perform *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* through an article that narrated the kinds of *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* used by the author for designing a unit-level curriculum, focusing on disciplinary inquiry. Kim valued discipline-based *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* so that students could choose appropriate content and materials to foster democratic citizenship instead of reproducing textbooks.

On the final day, the students presented their unit plans with rationales for their designs. This performance task was evaluated by Kim based on a rubric that was already shared with the students. One of the main evaluation criteria was *Kyouzai Kenkyuu*. Students had to present *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* performed by them and how it was connected to their curriculum design. With the rubric, students were guided to be conscious of doing *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* in their curriculum design.

Kim provided students with an opportunity to do *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* because experiencing the entire cycle alongside curriculum design is valuable to understanding the nature of *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* and a teacher’s roles as a researcher and curriculum designer. He chose the “learning by doing” strategy because he understood *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* as a simultaneous practice and disposition. According to him, by experiencing *Kyouzai Kenkyuu*, students could utilise their competency and disposition in other situations.

## 4.2 Case 2: learning to teach in high school civics

Kawaguchi taught a method course for teaching civics in high schools. Although high school civics, such as elementary and middle school social studies, aims to foster democratic citizenship, it focuses more on social science disciplines, such as political science, economics, psychology, and sociology. She believes that a disciplinary approach is vital for children to acquire academic knowledge and perspectives for refining the naive theories that they might develop in their daily lives. However, she believes students should acquire these disciplinary perspectives while considering current social issues rather than learning discrete academic perspectives without any context. Therefore, civic learning needs to achieve a balance among children, academics, and society, which can be considered “the social studies curriculum triangle.” The interrelationship between these three aspects can foster informed and responsible citizenship through children’s independent learning. She thinks *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* directly relates to the content and methods and creates a rigid basis for lesson planning.

Kawaguchi believes that it is difficult to separate *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* from curriculum design. She primarily utilises project-based learning of curriculum design, and *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* is embedded in one part of the project. In *Kyouzai Kenkyuu*, students, by accepting the premise that there is no “perfect” lesson, would achieve the disposition that seeks and explores “better civics lessons.” This disposition forms the basis of teachers as researchers who continuously improve their practice through reflection.

In the method course practiced by Kawaguchi, all students had to develop a one-hour lesson plan and present it on the course’s final day. Most students lacked any teaching experiences until they took the course. This course provided students with the first exposure to designing a high-school civics curriculum.

In Weeks 1–2, Kawaguchi intended students to explore civics characteristics as a school subject. Civics is one of the subjects responsible for democratic citizenship education that uses a social science perspective by comparing geography, history, and elementary and junior high schools. The students understood that a good civics curriculum should meet three conditions: academics, children, and society (i.e., the social studies curriculum triangle).

In Week 3, students learned the entire process of curriculum planning in civics, including *Kyouzai Kenkyuu*. Kawaguchi divided *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* into two main steps. First, students need to explore the meaning of the subject matter content. She believes that teachers can guide learners through in-depth inquiry into society with a deep disciplinary understanding of civics. Second, students need to imagine how learners would learn based on their tentative lesson plan and then refine it. As a modelling, Kawaguchi also invited civics teachers who could provide their stories of *Kyouzai Kenkyuu*, asking them what and how they did during *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* and how it aided their curriculum design.

As a mid-term assignment, students were required to conduct *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* and develop a lesson plan based on the curriculum planning process from Weeks 3–7. Kawaguchi set two scaffoldings for the students. At the beginning of each class, one group

member was obligated to deliver a short presentation about the results of their investigations of current news related to their curriculum design. Further, Kawaguchi prepared a book list that students could refer to for their *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* and encouraged them to go through it. Students were requested to share their reading and provide another suggestion for conducting effective *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* (e.g., recommending books and news to read).

From Weeks 4–7, students learned useful teaching methods and the curriculum elements. Unlike Week 3, the main topic of the period was not *Kyouzai Kenkyuu*. Nevertheless, Kawaguchi mentioned the importance of *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* and encouraged students to analyse the kinds of teaching materials used in the examples she mentioned.

To learn about *Kyouzai Kenkyuu*, Kawaguchi used the strategy of “learning by doing.” Students learned how to conduct *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* while following the curriculum planning. She also emphasised *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* as a daily habit of civics teachers, such as gathering information from the news and literature, because it provided a solid foundation for good civics practice.

### **4.3 Case 3: teaching method of living environment studies for the elementary school**

Watanabe teaches a method course for teaching “living environment studies.” Living environment studies is a school subject for the first and second graders (ages 6–8) in Japanese elementary schools. The subject deals with the contents of social studies and natural science education in an integrated form, considering students’ developmental stages. Unlike social studies that aims to acquire knowledge and methods of social sciences disciplines and utilise them as citizens, living environment studies aims to develop children’s self-awareness by studying their surrounding environments such as society, people, and nature. Instead of educating “an objective view of society and nature” (Nakano, 1992, p. 50), living environment studies helps provide opportunities for students be involved in their neighbouring environment through hands-on experiences such as exploring communities, cultivating plants, and playing with natural and social sources.

Considering these characteristics of living environment studies, Watanabe states that *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* involves teachers either working either alone or together with children to design curricula while discovering and creating *Kyouzai* (fun and interesting learning materials for children) and utilising them. He highlights the importance of teachers considering children’s lives and everyday environments (i.e., the people, objects, and events around them) when developing *Kyouzai*. As living environment studies is based on the philosophy of child-centered education (Kuno, 2018, p. 39) and is essential for teachers to design curricula tailored to the interests and curiosity of children, Watanabe believes that high-quality lessons cannot be learned from textbooks alone. Adopting *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* perspectives and methods is a prerequisite for conducting high-quality lessons.

He also believes that the advancement of *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* would lead to a deeper understanding of subject goals and educational content among teachers.

Watanabe believes that *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* and curriculum design involve several practices. Teachers go out of the classroom (e.g., towns and parks) and interact with nature, society, and other people to explore children's immediate environment. Occasionally, the teachers try to experience the activities and play performed by children during lessons to reflect on the value and significance of *Kyouzai*. Furthermore, teachers should listen to the children's stories, read their diaries, and observe their behaviour. Thus, teachers can better grasp various learning activities and design a curriculum while considering children's interests and curiosity in the environment. Watanabe emphasises designing curricula over a longer time than other subjects (i.e., those with 10 to 20-hour units) because living environment studies is based on the philosophy of "learning by doing" and values the process by which children independently make discoveries and solve problems. Therefore, he teaches the methods and perspectives of *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* while allowing students to experience the process of designing units.

For example, Watanabe taught a method course named "Teaching Method of Living Environment Studies for the Elementary School" (15 weekly sessions in total). Approximately 200 students attended the course. The objective of this lecture included the following: (a) enable students to understand the subject objectives, educational content, and teaching methods in living environment studies and (b) give them the necessary competence to design lessons and execute proper instructional strategies. To evaluate these objectives, he set and implemented a performance task wherein students conducted *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* and designed unit plans during Week 14.

Weeks 1–4 revolved around the significance of living environment studies and its subject objectives, educational content, and government curriculum guidelines. Watanabe believes that students need this information to implement *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* and design the curriculum. During his lectures, he typically asked the students, "Why do we teach living environment studies at elementary school?" and "What is the importance of each part of the educational content?" He believed that the quality of *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* and curriculum design is dependent on the teacher's understanding of the essence of living environment studies and their perception of the subject.

During Weeks 5–12, he tackled various theories relating to annual plans, unit plans, one-hour lesson plans, and learning guidance. In line with his discussion, he had the students conduct learning activities aimed at the performance task. First, the students had to examine their lives and familiar places and seek materials related to the unit themes. Next, they were asked to delve into the children's existing and possible activities and experiences about a certain theme. Watanabe explained that understanding the value and meaning of *Kyouzai* and examining its activity and experience were also a form of *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* which could be useful for teachers when designing a curriculum. He frequently used the term *Gakusyuuuzai Kenkyuu* (study of learning materials) in his lectures. This term

has been used in the context of living environment studies to emphasise studying *Kyouzai* with a focus on learners.

During Week 13, students were asked to prepare a unit plan, and by Week 14, they had to report on their unit plans. The students were required to design their unit plans following the government curriculum guidelines. Watanabe emphasised the teachers' autonomous use of national standards. During the 14th lecture, students who proposed particularly good unit plans were asked to present them during the lecture. The other students had to obtain recommendations for improving their unit plans and were asked to reflect on each presentation's merits. In other words, they conducted a mini-lesson study. During Week 15, the students explored the unit plan design process. Watanabe tried to help the students verbalise their own actions by rechecking not only the results of *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* and lesson design but also the processes of developing them. In most of his lectures, he answered students' comments. By demonstrating how he conducted lectures to the students while deliberating with them—besides modifying the lecture content according to the students' level of comprehension, interests, and curiosity—Watanabe could convey the idea of *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* and curriculum design for living environment studies.

According to Watanabe, allowing students to experience *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* that emphasises children's lives and their immediate environment is essential in understanding the essence of living environment studies and acquiring the necessary disposition and methods of a curriculum designer. Furthermore, he provided students with opportunities to conduct *Kyouzai Kenkyuu*. He also chose to have students think and learn together while engaging in dialogue with them, emphasising experiencing *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* and verbalising its processes. This is in line with Watanabe's desire for students to create curricula and *Kyouzai* in living environment studies as future practical researchers.

## 5 CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

During *Kyouzai Kenkyuu*, social science teachers deconstruct ready-made curricula and reconstruct their own by conducting in-depth inquiries of social science disciplines, students, and society. This constructivist idea of *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* has the possibility to expand teacher professionalism. Teachers are not only implementors of the curriculum given by experts but also designers who create a unique curriculum for their classrooms and agents who bring their voices to the world through their curriculum and instruction. As a conceptual tool to indicate the content and method of designing the curriculum, *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* helps to recognise designing curriculum as a practice, instead of preparation for implementation. Therefore, it can be embraced as the object of teachers' reflection and self-research.

As commonly emphasised in the three cases above, *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* and its reflection provide the opportunities for building a rationale, which “is the statement and explication of the basic principles upon which [teachers'] school behavior is based” (Shaver & Strong,

1982, pp. 9-10). While unpacking textbooks and national curricula, exploring alternatives that arise from reading books, and investigating students and social issues, teachers encounter the question, “What are you teaching social studies *for*?” (emphasis in original, Dinkelman, 2009, p. 91). To decide the teaching content and process, teachers need to think about the purpose of their teaching; however, it is extremely difficult to answer the question, especially for pre-service teachers. Understanding the difficulty, the authors continued asking students during the method courses regarding why they designed a curriculum in a specific manner and how their *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* was reflected in the design process. Providing students with opportunities to reflect on what and how to research for curriculum design based on a learning-by-doing policy encourages them to develop rationales and, therefore, be a professional of curriculum and instruction (for more details of the potential benefits of rational building in social studies, see Hawley, Pifel, & Jordan, 2012).

The uncertainty of social studies adds another layer to the discussion of teaching *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* and rationale-building. The competition between the fusionist and federalist models in social studies affects what and how to teach in teacher preparation (Whitson, 2004), including in teaching *Kyouzai Kenkyuu*. Those who understand social studies as the federalist model consider how individual social science disciplines can foster democratic citizenship. The federalist model is in line with the discussion of subject didactics in many European countries, such as how history and geography can educate democratic citizens (Ecker, 2018; Lambert, 2018). Conversely, those who understand social studies as the fusionist model prioritise educating democratic citizens before teaching individual social science disciplines. For fusionists, academic disciplines are tools to understand the society in-depth and make wise decisions as democratic citizens. The designed curricula of the federalists and fusionists might look similar; however, *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* may be considerably different because one design starts from discipline and the other from educating democratic citizens. All authors of this paper believe that social studies should be based on a fusionist model. Readers could sense this from the case of method courses. Social studies teacher educators who pursue the federalist model might teach *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* differently.

*Kyouzai Kenkyuu* is a practice in which teachers’ educational views, content, and teaching methods are intertwined. In the era of the division of “curriculum” and “instruction” with “content” and “methods” (Whitson, 2004), *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* creates a space in teacher education to overcome the previously mentioned divide and remind of the importance to educate teachers as designers and thus strengthen teacher professionalism. Owing to social pressures for educating students with 21st-century skills (e.g., key competencies suggested by the OECD), teachers, including social studies teachers, are requested to redesign the traditional curriculum (Lambert, 2018). Within this curricular transformation, every teacher is re-invited to become a curriculum designer who can reimagine the school subject’s aim. *Kyouzai Kenkyuu* opens the possibility of authentic change in curriculum and instruction rather than out of mere necessity. To

realise this change, it is necessary to teach *Kyouzai Kenkyuu*-wise practices in teacher preparation, as in the cases discussed in this article.

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