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# An International Study on the Changing Nature of School Curriculum: From Transmitting Content Knowledge to Developing Students' Core Competencies

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## Major Purpose of the Study

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Investigating how competence-based curriculum are implemented in three schools in Korea, Australia and New Zealand.

Location of Research: one high school in Korea, one elementary school in AU and NZ, respectively.

Data Collection: Teacher interviews, classroom observation, analysis curricular documents

# Background of the research

Korean students are working so hard, but for what?

There are the hardest-working students in the world, since, e.g., high schools students go to school 7 in the morning and come back home 10:30 at night. In average, they sleep 5.4 hours a day.

Products: High achievement in academic performances, e.g., in the PISA 2006, first in reading and second in math.



## But the problem is that...

- Low interests and confidence in learning (29% of Korean students felt confident in learning whereas the international average was 43%. They belong to the lowest group in terms of level of enjoy their learning.
- There is a social concern that Korean students are only good at doing simple tasks lacking higher-order thinking skills such as creativity and problem-solving.

# Growing attention to key competencies

- Since the early 2000s, a growing attention to reform school curriculum to be more competence-based.
- The primary purpose of school curriculum should be redirected from transmitting content knowledge in textbooks to developing key competencies required in globalizing and post-industrializing Korea.
- But, how? What is lacking is more tangible and concrete examples of competence-based curriculum in practices.

# Exemplary cases of curriculum reform

This study focused on three schools in Korea, Australia and New Zealand. These countries have underscored the development of learners' key competencies through school curriculum.

And the schools are known for their efforts to reform curriculum to be more competencies in each country.



# Major Findings1: Changes in instructional methods

Teachers tend to interpret that what competence-based curriculum pursues are more engaging instructional methods and enriched learning environments.

Teachers in Wisdom elementary in NZ emphasized that they used to be concerned with “covering” all the knowledge in textbooks; but now they pay more attention to what students came to able to do through their instruction.

Teachers in the other two schools also agreed that they use more student-centered and diversified instructional strategies such as teamwork, project-based learning, discussion, presentation, and so on.



## **Major Findings2: Co-construction of Local Definitions**

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Teachers in all the tree countries emphasized they worked together with other teachers to build local definitions of key competencies.

Since key competencies such as creative thinking and working with others could have so many meanings in different contexts, building a shared understanding of them and ideas of how to connect them with the existing curriculum is crucial.



## Major Findings3: Creating of new courses

According to a shared vision, schools created new courses to develop targeted competencies.

Southern High in Korea opened a new course called “self-study” to enhance students basic learning competencies after the teachers agreed that these are especially important to their students.

Likewise, Central Elementary in AU opened “Game Designing” which could not be found in other schools.

Therefore, competence-based curriculum is not just a matter of changing instructional methods but also reorganizing the construction of the existing curriculum.

## Major Findings4: Principal's Leadership

In all the schools, principals were playing a critical role in reforming school curriculum to be more competence-based.

They proposed a new vision, enhanced professional relationship among teachers and reformed the school culture to be more respectful democratic.

Especially, what was notable was “transformational and instructional leadership” rather than one-way, authoritative leadership.



## Conclusion: Towards a transformative approach to school curriculum

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Teachers transformed their curriculum to develop students' key competencies instead of treating the latter as a new teaching component that they need add onto the current curriculum.

Teachers transformed their instruction, the structure of curriculum, the relationship among the teachers and between the teachers and the students.

Key competencies are not something to be taught *in addition to* the existing curriculum but *through* it by transforming it to be more competence-oriented.



**Thank you very much!**

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