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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to examine trends of the policies in the Connecting Curriculum Between Kindergarten and Elementary School into the two approaches to aim at the school reform and prevent the First Grade Problems, and to examine the content and the characteristics of the recent educational innovation. In the former issue, the government promote the Connecting Curriculum Between Kindergarten and Elementary School as a national strategy of educational reform based substantially on the concept of "the basis of learning" in early childhood education, and tried to spread to the educational scenes and to construct "collaborative learning." In the latter issue, Start Curriculum of elementary schools has the problem of replacing the practice of the living environment studies with the adaptation of children to school.

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## ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this paper is to examine trends of the policies in the Connecting Curriculum Between Kindergarten and Elementary School into the two approaches to aim at the school reform and prevent the First Grade Problems, and to examine the content and the characteristics of the recent educational innovation. In the former issue, the government promote the Connecting Curriculum Between Kindergarten and Elementary School as a national strategy of educational reform based substantially on the concept of "the basis of learning" in early childhood education, and tried to spread to the educational scenes and to construct "collaborative learning." In the latter issue, Start Curriculum of elementary schools has the problem of replacing the practice of the living environment studies with the adaptation of children to school.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In July 2014, the Education Rebuilding Implementation Council submitted the proposal "The Future State of the Educational System" on the revision of the school system from early childhood education to university to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. The Future State of the Educational System required to make early childhood education for children 3 to 5 years free of charge in stages and to put ahead of the starting

age of compulsory education to 5 years. The framework of the free of charge for early childhood education and compulsory education of 5 years would bring about a considerable structural change in the post-war educational system. At the same time, the connection between early childhood education and elementary school education has promoted since the 2000s, and the curriculum policies of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) regarding this.. In the curriculum policies for over a few decades, the new ideas proposed one after another, and early childhood education basically has been organized as a part of compulsory education.

An overview of MEXT policies shows that there are two approaches to the method of reform. One is an approach that aims to reform the school system (from now on referred to as "School System Reform Approach"), and the other is to prevent the First Grade Problems (from now on referred to as "First Grade Problem Preventive Approach"). Although there is a lot of overlap between the two approaches in proposals and arguments, there also is issues and conflicts which are unique to them. Although the idea and the concept of connection are discussed in school the School System Reform Approach, the various problems have emerged in the practical situation of the curriculum. While the specific measures for the First Grade Problem Preventive Approach are taken mainly at the elementary schools, the comprehensive viewpoint on what the school education should be is weak. Therefore, in this paper, I would like to consider the contents and the characteristics of the educational policies for the curriculum for connecting early childhood education and elementary school education (from

now on referred to as the Connecting Curriculum Between Kindergarten and Elementary School) and sort out them into the above two approaches. Looking back on past, nobody treated early childhood education in Japan as the theme of the education policies. Even in the post-war educational system reform, the government positioned early childhood education as a supporting role of the education policies. The situation was clearly shown by the explanation of the bill proposed by Minister of Education Seiichiro Takahashi in the enactment of the School Education Law (1947). Takahashi insisted the four points as the main reasons for the educational system reform, which based on the implementation of the bill of the School Education Law: "the equal opportunity of education", "the spread and improvement of the general education, and the abolishment of sex discrimination", "the simplification of the educational system", and "the development of the academic culture". In all points, Takahashi showed the significance of 6-3-3-4 schooling system (elementary school, junior high school, high school, and university), but did not mention kindergarten.

Therefore, kindergarten education in post-war started in the situation that it was not compulsory education as well as general education. Although Article 1 of the School Education Law defines kindergarten as "school", early childhood education has been recognized as supplemental education. So the matters related to early childhood education have never been discussed extensively as a policy subject of the regulations for public education, the finance, and the administration. It is true that this situation created the independence and the creativity of the practice of early childhood education. But whether early childhood education established in general education has been left as the significant post-war challenge.

The school system reform of the school system took a point for approaching the issue. In July 1971, the report of Central Council for Education: "Basic Measures for Comprehensive Expansion and Adjustment in School Education in the

Future" suggested that childhood school's "the pioneering attempt" seamlessly educated children from aged 4 or 5 to in the lower grades of elementary school, was entitled as "Development of the school system according to the developing process of human". However, the council decided that the aim of the childhood school was "reconsideration of the beginning of schooling" and "consideration of the potential that the development of talents with early education. As a result, the educators gave a lot of negative opinions about the attempt. The Ministry of Education did not embody the concept of the early childhood schooling and drive forward the kindergarten education promotion measures which were described in the report of Central Council, in the Kindergarten Education Promotion Plan (second) in August of the same year. In response to this promotion policy, the government started a research on the relationship between kindergartens and lower grades of the elementary school in the curriculum, the systems, the organizations, and the governance.

In the long run, the policy of the Connecting Curriculum Between Kindergarten and Elementary School in recent years was a continuation of the school system reform plan in 1971. However, it is also a fact that the Connecting Curriculum Between Kindergarten and Elementary School became the subject of educational reform since the 2000s, while the globalization had progressed and the transition to the post-industrial society had accelerated the international competition in education. In this chapter, I focus on and examine this new situation.

In the following discussion, firstly I will describe the main policy issues of the Connecting Curriculum Between Kindergarten and Elementary School from the late 1980s to 1990s, and secondly, identify the content and the characteristics of the policy in the two approaches since the 2000s. Lastly, I will discuss the concept of a curriculum "The smooth way of connection between early childhood education and elementary school education (report)" (November

2010) that made comprehensive proposals based on the reforms with the two approaches.

1. The establishment of the subject of living environment studies and the concept of "base of learning."

The collaboration of kindergarten and elementary school have been done experimentally before the WW2, but when the course of study revised in 1989. It requested that the relationship between schools should have been further strengthened through the curricula. For the first time, the Curriculum Council discussed on the kindergarten curricula together with elementary school, junior high school, and high school curricula, and aimed to realize "the content of the education with harmony and unity." At that time, the rate of 5-year-old children who enter kindergartens was 94% including those who received education by the kindergarten education at the nursery schools, and of high school was also 94%. Therefore, it was necessary to establish the "consistency of educational content" from kindergarten to high school.

The establishment of the living environment studies at that time, although partially, had the meaning to ensure the connection between kindergarten and elementary school in the curricula. According to Shigeto Nakano who was involved in the establishment of the living environment studies as the subject survey officer of Elementary and Secondary Education Bureau in Ministry of Education, instead of thinking about kindergartens and elementary schools separately as before, Central Council for Education considered restructuring of subjects with focusing on "connection and development" of "kindergartens to elementary schools".

The living environment studies was born as a subject that focused on the direct experience and the comprehensive instruction in consideration of the kindergarten education, on the premise the developmental status of the children at the lower grades of elementary school who had undiffe-

-rentiated thoughts and feelings.

On the other hand, the Revision of the Kindergarten Instruction Procedure (same year) focused on reinstating the uniqueness of early childhood education with new expressions, rather than connecting with elementary school. In the Revision of the Kindergarten Instruction Procedure, "play" was clearly described as "important learning to cultivate the basic of development," the foundation was laid to link "play" to "learning" as the experience of young children. But the points that the early childhood educators involved in the revisions argued was the ideas of the new "education through the environment" and "general guidance through play." It was emphasized to perfectly pursue the concepts as a fundamental and to break away from the education that taught the areas as just a subject, and that preempted the contents of elementary schools.

Bringing early childhood education closer to the connection between kindergarten and elementary school is the education policy that seeks to foster Zest for living in the mid-1990s. The report from Central Council for Education "The way of education of our country, with the view of the 21st century (the first)" (July 1996) pointed out "the decline of the educational abilities" in the; homes and the community, the pressure on children, the lack of sociality, the decline of physical strength, and advocated the; development of the proactive problem-solving abilities, the enriched humanness, and Zest for living that represents a sound body. In addition, the report from Central Council for Education defined "healthy mind and body, desirable habits and attitudes in social life, spontaneity, motivation, rich emotions, interest and concerns in things, powers of expression" that are raised in kindergartens as "basis of learning" after elementary school, and hoped that early childhood education would improve the education of Zest for living. Zest for a living meant the abilities to be directly linked to independence and personality rather than knowledge and skills and

united with the education that children learn and think independently rather than that teaches them unilaterally. In that respect, it can be considered that the study of Zest for a living had an assured affinity with early childhood education. It was natural to positively find the significance of early childhood education in the formation of “the basis of learning,” and the consciousness of the connection of kindergarten and elementary school was rising.

Even so, the concept of “the basis of learning” was carefully discussed so as not to spoil the characteristics of early childhood education. In the Ministry of Education's report “The future way of kindergarten education corresponding to the change of the times” (November 1997), “the part that forms the basis of kindergarten education” was linked to “the foundation of learning” after elementary school, and constituted “the foundation of connection” between kindergarten and elementary school. Six issues were mentioned in the content of “the basis of learning”: will and confidence to work on actively and positively, notice from experiences, various expressions of thoughts and emotions, dealing with fellowship, involvement in symbols, and understanding and using the language in conversation. These contents of six issues were not in derogation from the Kindergarten Instruction Procedure and the interpretation on that. This report emphasized that the consistent education in elementary schools was also based on the kindergarten's “comprehensive teaching centered on the independent play.”

A curriculum that made consideration of the connection to elementary schools became the assumption of early childhood education, and an important policy issue, combined with the resurfacing plan of school system reform. In 1998, the Curriculum Council Report (same year), which was prepared for the revision of the Revision of the Kindergarten Instruction Procedure required that the kindergarten education should be responsible for “fostering the foundation of life and learning after elementary school”, and referred to the cooperation with the

elementary schools which paid attention for the relation with living environment studies. In December 1999, the Central Council for Education Report states that: “Improvement of the connection between primary and secondary education and higher education” argued that it was necessary to strengthen the cooperation between each school level, because of the acceleration of the children's development of bodies and minds, the independent life, the delay in self-directed career choice, and the change of the industrial structure as the society matured. This report required that, based on the recommendations of the school system's development in the 1971 statement, the practical researches of the way of the constancy of the early childhood education and the lower grade of the elementary school curriculum, further establishment of systematics, and cooperation and connection.

As mentioned above, the School System Reform Approach appeared earlier than the First Grade Problem Preventive Approach. In terms of what is “the basis of learning” (education content) and what kind of instruction (education method), the School System Reform Approach connote the tension that it should have maintained the characteristics of kindergarten and elementary school, and also find their harmony.

## 2. First Grade Problem Preventive Approach

(1) The argument of the First Grade Problem and the practice of the connecting between kindergarten and elementary school

Through the disputes that drove distrust in school education, the First Grade Problems caused the new contexts in which the curriculum policy of Connecting Curriculum Between Preschool and Elementary School worked, apart from the backgrounds of the school system reform. First, let's look back at the main arguments regarding the First Grade Problem.

At first, the First Grade Problem was regarded as a phenomenon in which the class disruption that occurred in the upper grades reached the lower

age. But the problem became to be emphasized in connection with early childhood development and education. Naoki Ogi considered that the class disruption was the breakdown of the Class Kingdom of the elementary schools, referred to Non-interference Nursery as a factor that caused the class disruptions of the first-grade children to "all over the country." Similarly, the arguments of claiming that reproduction of the First Grade Problem thereafter causes the early childhood education which focuses on the free activities and the personalities of infants. Shinbo Makiko argued that the First Grade Problem was "a problem caused by children who were tied to their early childhood," and "a state of an unformed class that did not form a group, not a class 'disruption.'" She listed the four points as the background of the problem: 1. Changes in society surrounding children, 2. Changes, and isolation of parents in parenting, 3. Expansion of the gap between the preschool education which in process of change and the school education which unchanged, and 4. Self-abortion preschool education and school education without collaboration.

Confronted with the doubts and the criticisms for the early childhood education, the early childhood educators pointed out that the "gap" expanded between kindergarten and primary school education systems, and the lack of collaboration between teachers was matter. In kindergartens, the children's play as self-motivated activities regarded important, and the teachers prepare the necessary environment based on their interests and concerns. But, in elementary schools, the children's learning and life are organized uniformly by timetables, textbooks, and teacher-led teaching. In the methods and contents of education, the changes that accompany the transition from early childhood education to elementary school education, the learning environment, and the codes of behavior were considered to be "gap." There were many people, including Takashi Muto who treated that the large "gap" made children's confused was a factor of the First Grade Problem. Fukada Shozo showed that it

took from several months to a year for new pupils to adapt to the life of the elementary schools, and they got severe stress during that time.

Regarding the lack of collaboration between the kindergarten and elementary school teachers, Hiroko Sasaki and fellows saw as problems that kindergarten teachers who were indifferent to the elementary school education after the children enter the school, and the elementary school teachers who "ignored" children's educational history, development, and individuality, and forced them in "single frame". The First Grade Problem was concluded that "the confusion and the puzzle of children who fell in the gap" of the broken relationship between kindergarten and elementary school. The final report "The current situation of class management problems and their response" (March 2000) of the class management study group, which was delegated by the Ministry of Education, also dealt with "the cases of lack of cooperation and cooperation with preschool education" as one of "a situation where the class does not work well". The Research Council for study on for Future Kindergarten Education in Response to Changing Times (1997) also referred children's anxiety accompanying the transition from kindergarten to elementary school.

The opinion was that it was necessary to remove anxiety and gave a sense of security, as both children and parents felt uneasy about "studying" and "friends" in elementary school. But at that time, the anxiety in transition was just considered to be a general trend. The report of Research Council for study on for Future Kindergarten Education in Response to Changing Times in 1997 showed the view that "the last half of kindergarten older class to the first semester of first-grade elementary school" was considered as a period of transition. But the proposal for connection only referred to the promotion of mutual understanding between kindergarten and elementary school.

Since the appearance of the First Grade Problem, the interest in connection had been directed not only to the consistency of the contents of

education but also to the pragmatic exchange and collaboration between kindergartens and elementary schools in daily educational activities. In February 2001, the Survey and Research Co-workers Meeting on Promotion of Early Childhood Education's report: "Toward the enhancement of early childhood education -Toward the formulation of early childhood education promotion program" pointed out that there was a lack of opportunities and mutual understanding for the cooperation and exchange between kindergartens and elementary schools, and it advocated "promoting exchanges between teachers, children and parents" as the measure to prevent the problems. The concrete matters were: among teachers, "daily information interchange and continuous exchange" through regular meetings and joint in-school training, rather than a one-day training, among children, "joint events including athletic meet, school play, and excursion", "joint activities including open space of each garden and joint lunch", "mutual participation in childcare and classes including involvement of early childhood in the class of living environment studies and integrated studies period, among the parents", "joint parents' association, lectures and symposia", "joint events", and "PTA activities". The report also showed the reciprocity of collaboration, in which these exchanges do not benefit just one, but provide opportunities for both to learn and grow. In the First Grade Problem Preventive Approach, the obviousness and the urgency to practice collaboration for the education sites became the driving forces of the Connecting Curriculum Between Preschool and Elementary School.

## (2) Formation of start curriculum

Within the First Grade Problems, the curriculum reform focusing on elementary school education rather than kindergarten education. The report of Central Council for Education "Improvement of the course of study for kindergartens, elementary schools, junior high schools, high schools and special needs schools" in January 2008 pointed out that the problem of children, including "weakening of self-control and sense of norms and

inadequate establishment of lifestyles", as a factor of the First Grade Problem. And the report argued "adaptation" to elementary school life as an issue. The main improvement matters of the educational contents based on this report are as follows for kindergarten and elementary school.

First of all, in early childhood education, it was a matter of improvement to establish collaboration between kindergarten and elementary school, focusing on the exchange opportunities between them. The new Kindergarten Instruction Procedure showed the setting of opportunities for "exchange of children between kindergarten and elementary school" and "exchanging of views, and joint research" with elementary school teachers. And the new Kindergarten Education Guidelines also referred to continuity and planning for meaningful exchanges. But the term of "the First Grade Problem" didn't appear in the new Kindergarten Instruction Procedure, and the guideline just referred that as there was a substantial change in their lives, "children may not be able to adapt well to the changes in their lives". It was the elementary schools that recognized the problem of the first grade to adapt to elementary school problem to the primary schools as a severe problem of arranging a curriculum. The report especially referred to living environment studies and certain activities about the First Grade Problem and difficulties in adjusting to school. This report pointed out that "adaptation to school life" was a matter in living environment studies and "adaptation to a group" in special activities. In addition, the report listed the following as specific matters for curriculum improvement for living environment studies: the composition of the unit centered on the living environment studies at the beginning of entering, the further enhancement of the teaching which was jointed and related to other subjects and living environment studies, and kindergarten and school children's joint learning activities, and the exchange of teachers. The specific matters for curriculum improvement for special exercises were an effective adoption of activities to learn social skills that build relationships. The term of



the First Grade Problem which was not used in the guidelines of the new Kindergarten Education procedure, repeatedly appeared in the new Courses of Study of living environment studies and special activities (4 times for life course, nine times for special excersises). That represented a sense of urgency on the elementary school side.

The point to be noted in this revision is that the improvement measures are proposed that regard the curriculum at the beginning of the first-grade year as a Start curriculum, to promote adaptation to schools and prevent the First Grade Problem. According to the part of living environment studies of the Elementary School Course of Study Guidelines, in the first unit of April, Start Curriculum forms a large unit that is comprehensively teaching the contents of the Japanese language, music, and drawing work, centering on the learning activities of living environment studies to explore the school sites. And the comprehensively teaching is organized to be gradually divided into each subject. By creating a large unit, it was considered that "it would be possible for children to carry out activities for realizing their thoughts and wishes in a relaxed time."

Start Curriculum actively incorporated the method of learning that was comprehensive on the extension of the early childhood education, and flexible allocation of activity time not tied to timetables, into the curriculum of the elementary school education. In other words, it was an attempt which partially reduce the "gap" between kindergarten and elementary school education systems. The Start Curriculum presented the model of Connecting Curriculum Between Preschool and Elementary School, but it brought about the change in the meaning of the practice of living environment studies at the same time. According to Tadahiko Inagaki, history of remodeling class established living environment studies and it was designed for practicing replacing the traditional subject-centered classes, through the selection of distinctive tasks by teachers, the re-question of class goals, and the development and understanding of children and

progressing of independent activities. However, Start Curriculum expected living environment studies to have a function of linking the jointed class to the specialized classes, rather than of reviewing. Also, Start Curriculum aimed at the methods with a limited goal of adaptation to school life rather than creative methods by teachers and children. In later, the Start Curriculum was criticized that "it has not yet free from the long instruction of adaptation," and did not change the way of learning in the lower grade of elementary school. These criticisms would represent that the practice of living environment studies had been temporarily replaced with adaptation instruction with the introduction of the Start Curriculum.

### 3. School System Reform Approach

#### (1) The characteristic as the national strategy

About the whole curriculum policy, the government reviewed Yutori education (more relaxed education policy) in the 2000s, and the development of "certain academic ability" was emphasized. With the background of the argument of the decline in academic ability, MEXT launched the enhancement of "mind education" and the improvement of "certain academic ability" in the Recommendation of Learning in 2002. According to the report of Central Council for Education "Measures to enrich and improve the present curriculum and instruction in primary and secondary education" in October 2003, "certain academic ability" included from "knowledge and skills" to "ability of thinking, judging, and expressing", and emphasized "willingness to learn". There was also a view that "certain academic ability" was an aspect of knowledge of Zest for living in the report.

Therefore, the early childhood education, which had emphasized significance in the formation of the "basis of learning" that fosters Zest for living, could no longer ignore "academic ability" and its policies. Also, early childhood education was forced to adapt to the trends of the international

models of academic ability. The revision of the course of study in 2008 particularly emphasized the importance of the education of Zest for living in 'knowledge-based society' in the 21st century. At the same time, Zest for a living was interpreted directly to the "key competency" framework of academic concept in the PISA survey of OECD.

Manabu Sato referred that educational reforms, including academic policy in recent years, had become internationally competitive due to nationalism from globalization, and been promoted as a national strategy. The report of Central Council for Education "Creating compulsory education in a new age" in October 2005 advocated that it was "the age of change," "the age of confusion," and "the age of international competition." So the nation needed to "strive to realize the world's highest level of compulsory education as a national strategy." A system to improve the coordination and the connection between schools at each stage focusing on compulsory education, including the flexible curriculum, is an essential issue to consider.

Following these movements, the School System Reform Approach to Connecting Curriculum Between Preschool and Elementary School began to show its character as a national strategy. In 2003, Central Council for Education set up Early Childhood Education Committee under the Primary and Secondary Education Division, to identify "the way of early childhood education as what is connected to a compulsory education system" in the process of discussion. Because of this process, as Mioka Torii pointed out, the problem of early childhood education was positioned as a reform of the entire compulsory education system, as a part of "realization the world's highest level of compulsory education as a national strategy." Furthermore, as the intention of the MEXT secretariat, they chose not to immediately start the development of a consistent school system between kindergartens and elementary schools, but to adopt a policy to promote the development of early childhood education centered on the Connecting Curriculum Between Kindergarten and Elementary School.

Next, I would like to identify how the curriculum reform of the connection between kindergarten and elementary school had progressed based on the report of Central Council for Education. The report stated that "The way of early childhood education based on the change in the environment surrounding children-Thinking about early childhood education for the best benefit of children-" (January 2005, hereinafter referred to as the Way of Early Childhood Education report), which summarized the discussion at that time.

(2) "The beginning of school education" and reinforcement of promoting curricula

The Way of Early Childhood Education report mentioned the direction of the reform of Connecting Curriculum Between Preschool and Elementary School. Firstly, relocating the early childhood education as "the beginning of school education" and ensure the connection with compulsory education with revising the law. Secondly, making the promotion of early childhood connection curriculum pervade to the education scenes. Thirdly, introducing the concept of "collaborative learning" that links early childhood and childhood education.

These three policies are all based on the idea of "the continuity of development and learning." In the report, "the continuity of development and learning" was the idea of linking the educational functions of homes, communities, and kindergarten facilities, and connecting the education systems by passing on the results to elementary schools. At the same time, as a principle to promote the system development of early childhood education for that purpose, it was also mentioned as a principle that emphasizes the connection of education of infants, early children, and children. "The continuity of development and learning" appeared in the report as the concept to restructure the early childhood education and promote the connection between kindergarten and elementary school.

I will describe the specific contents of the three policies below. The first policy of positioning early

childhood education as the beginning of schooling” aimed at further clarifying the relationship the educational content of between early childhood education and compulsory education. Early childhood education is expected as the function of fostering the foundation of Zest for living, that consists of “certain academic abilities” including “knowledge, skill, thinking, judgment, and expression,” “rich humanity,” and “health and physical strength ”for living healthily. This report also proposed the review of Article 1 of the School Education Law, which placed kindergartens at the end of school types, to legally clarify the connections in educational contents. The fact that early childhood education is the “beginning of school education”, meaning that is linked to compulsory education in series. In line with the proposal, Article 1 of the new School Education Law (revised in 2007) was changed to "In this law, schools means kindergartens, elementary schools, junior high schools ..." In Article 22, the new provision “Kindergartens foster the basics of compulsory education and subsequent education” was added to the purpose of kindergartens. About the revision of the School Education Act, some people worried that the goals and content of compulsory education linked to national norms and strategies. The worry became not to overlook it in the curriculum for early childhood education.

Next, the background of the second policy to spread Connecting Curriculum Between Preschool and Elementary School to the academic scenes required the enhancement of collaboration in the country, local public organizations, and educational sites, with formulating the Action Program for Promoting Early Childhood Education. This program showed the following matters to the country and the local public organizations as an effective and efficient measure that the report of “The way of early childhood education” sought. The country needs to consider revising the Kindergarten Instruction Procedure that more enhances the teaching to cultivate the basis of living and learning after elementary

school, in kindergarten. The local public organizations need to support the development of the model curricula so that the kindergartens can create and implement the curricula and the teaching plans that take into consideration the transition to elementary school education. It has been pointed out that the reason why the collaboration of kindergarten and elementary school did not spread and establish is that there are differences in ideas among the areas and the school boards, between kindergartens and nursery schools, between public and private schools, and that it is difficult for the whole elementary school to work with. The Action Program for Promoting Early Childhood Education attempted to improve these situations and pushed forward with the creation of the connecting curriculum in the education site under the direction of the Board of Education.

As part of that, the issue of “collaboration with elementary schools regarding the formation of the curriculum” was added to the survey on early childhood education by MEXT since 2008. Among the kindergartens who answered that there was the exchange between the kindergartens and the elementary schools (77.6% of the total), the kindergartens that had organized curriculum in cooperation with the elementary schools were 21.8% in 2008, 34.0% in 2010, 49.3% in 2012. Although not clearly stated in this program, it can be said that organizing a curriculum in cooperation between kindergartens and elementary schools are considered to be one of the goals to be achieved in the educational scenes. The Board of Education has also expanded the movement toward formulating a model curriculum for the connection between kindergartens and elementary schools, and the instruction of the exchange and the collaboration between kindergartens and primary schools for the educational scenes. Although curricula are made based on the autonomy of teachers in kindergartens and schools, on the other hand, there was a tendency that the administration imposed the curricula on the educational scenes as an action goal.

### (3) Introduction of Collaborative Learning

The reason that the third policy asking for the introduction of Collaborative Learning is, it was advocated in need of particularly showing the teaching to cultivate “the basis of learning” in early childhood education. Mainly targeted at 5-year-old children before entering elementary school, the Way of Early Childhood Education report defined that “the activity that each child sets a goal such as common destinations and challenging issues, with teacher's help, and solves them with cooperating and devising” was collaborative learning. Furthermore, the report called for consideration of “the flow of education” from “activities in line with interests” to “learning using interests” and “learning focusing on subjects.” As reference material for organizing and implementing Connecting Curriculum Between Preschool and Elementary School, “Education from early childhood to childhood” (February 2005) was published by the Curriculum Research Center of the National Institute for Educational Policy Research. In this book, Collaborative Learning had the following three features.

First, Collaborative Learning rationally explained the relationship and continuity of the kindergarten and elementary school educations, as a basic concept to connect the two curricula. The Collaborative Learning in early childhood was considered to constitute “the basis of learning” of the elementary school in the sense of “being taken over by the elementary school and developing into the class activities centered on classes.” Furthermore, beyond the difference between kindergarten and elementary school education, the basis for the continuity of education was clarified from the viewpoint that the experience of sharing and collaborating goals should have emphasized on both sides. There have been a variety of early childhood experiences that become “the basis of learning” in elementary schools. Collaborative Learning integrates these experiences and clearly shows the direction in which early childhood education aims. Also in the curriculum for early childhood education, not

only the exchange activities of kindergartens and elementary schools which placed in one-time and local space were given but also the intention to consider the connection in the whole education plan occurred.

Collaborative Learning went out of the realm of living environment studies which mentioned the commonality with early childhood education, and suggested a change in the way of learning in elementary school education. As in early childhood, the emphasis on experiences and the comprehensive activities had been limitedly introduced mainly in the living environment studies in primary schools. The book pointed out that the introduction of living environment studies and integrated studies would increase the experiential learning, which children find and search for their issues, and develop “the independent learning method such as checking by themselves or going about with consulting with their friends”, that is not a one-way lesson of the teacher even in the subject learning. In future kindergartens and elementary schools, “finding and working on their issues” and “developing learning in cooperation with friends” will be the ways of the learning that should be important as well. The apparent difference between play and subject learning was clear, but Collaborative Learning gave a perspective on the continuity of study, which was not bound by the framework of subjects.

Second, Collaborative Learning restructured, with the principle of cooperation and learning, the curriculum of early childhood education organized on the principle of spontaneity and play, and resented the reorganization of early childhood experiences. The book divided the flow of development from early childhood to childhood into three dominant periods and represented the features of each period with nineteen practices. The three periods of progress are described: the case of three and four years old children in “the period to meet various environments in the first corrective life”, the case of four and five years in “the period when their plays enriched and they demonstrate themselves”, and the case of a

five-year-old in "the period when their human relationships deepen and they can learn together." Through the variety of circumstances, the book expressed the developmental aspects that the ego emerges and starts to be aware of the others, becomes able to adjust the behavior through the exchange of conflict thought of friendship, the process of giving interest and attention to an object, and realizing the new aspects and relationships, and broadening and deepening understanding, and the process of earning that creates new ways of involvement.

As mentioned above, Collaborative Learning transferred the principles of the formation of early childhood education curriculum, from spontaneity and play to cooperation and learning. However, the two principals were not in opposition but mutual and co-existing relationships. The self-motivation of early childhood developed into cooperativity as "higher quality." It was considered that "spontaneity rises where cooperativity grew," learning arises in play and life, and study would further enhance play and life. The principles of cooperativity and learning in Collaborative Learning had the potential to hand over the results to primary education while maintaining the characteristics of early childhood education.

Third, Collaborative Learning emphasized "listening and communicating." The book showed the process of which communication changes from "body expression" to "verbal expression" through trusting in others, acquiring words, rebuilding and interacting with verbal experiences, and listening to the other person's opinions with focusing.

Speaking of early childhood education that emphasizes verbal dialogue, there is Communicating Childcare and the Reggio approach. "Communicating" of Communicating Childcare, argued around the Childcare Problem Research Group in the 1960s, was a method of proactively finding objective facts and aiming at foster awareness. The dialogue of the Reggio approach aims at a structure in which the children

find the meaning of the object in the way of exploration integrated with the activities of creative art. Collaborative Learning was proposed on the assumption of the activities of the project represented by the Reggio approach. However, "listening and communicating" in "education from early childhood to childhood" emphasizes the skills in the formation of listening attitude and communication, rather than the dialogue open to the construction in the various meanings. It differs from the Reggio approach in that respect.

Collaborative Learning was initially attracted attention as the idea of connecting kindergartens and elementary schools, but it became instability as an idea of early childhood education soon. At the Kindergarten Education Specialty Group of Curriculum Group of Central Council for Education, held in preparation for the revision of the Kindergarten Instruction Procedure in 2008, there were a series of opinions that the term Collaborative Learning should have been avoided. They pointed out the following problems: the educational methods in which formal group formation was carried out in attempting to practice for Collaborative Learning, the education content associating with area was difficult, and the misunderstanding of treating "studying-like" learning as "sharing and learning." As a result, the new Kindergarten Instruction Procedure did not hold the term of "Collaborative Learning", but instead had the expression of "playing cooperatively." And the matter about "playing cooperatively" was described in "content handling" in the area of "human relationships," and as a social experience rather than a cognitive experience of learning. In the tense relationship between the connection between kindergartens and elementary schools, and the uniqueness of early childhood education, Collaborative Learning faces a conflict between child-centered and teacher-centered, area and subject, play and learning, and is receding at least as a curriculum term.

4. The current situation of Connecting Curriculum Between Preschool and Elementary School policy

The policy of Connecting Curriculum Between Preschool and Elementary School has been promoted with backlogs, with the School System Reform Approach in the mainstream, and the First Grade Problem Preventive Approach. The report "A smooth connection between early childhood and elementary school education" of MEXT in November 2010 designed a future curriculum based on the examination and practice in both approaches.

The report referred to the First Grade Problem and also showed the notes of Start Curriculum. But the core of the report was theorizing of a curriculum to organize and explain kindergarten and elementary school education continuity and consistently. The report aimed to build a system of Connecting Curriculum Between Preschool and Elementary School, based on certain principles and concepts. Then, what was presented is the "three-tiered structure," which is developed by "the purpose and goal of education" → "curriculum" → "educational activities." In "the purpose and goals of education", the contents on purpose and the goals of kindergartens and elementary schools in the Fundamental Law of Education and the School Education Law were cross-checked, and the concept of "fostering basic skills for learning," which represents the common goals to both parties was presented. As follows, I would like to describe two points that I noticed. The Curriculum clearly states the importance of cultivating "the three independence" in early childhood and childhood, and "the three elements of academic abilities" after childhood for "fostering Basis of Learning." "The three independences" in early childhood were the just same words in living environment studies ("independence in learning," "independence in life," "mental independence") to express the commonality between early childhood and lower grades in elementary school. "The three elements of academic abilities" are the "life-long learning basis" defined in Article 30 of the School Education Law: "basic knowledge and skills," "thinking, judgment, and expressive ability to solve problems," and "independent attitude to engage in learning." "The three independences" in

early childhood is thought that it would gradually lead to "the three independence" and the "the three elements of academic abilities" in childhood.

However, as far as I know there is no argument that explains the connection from "the three independence" to "the three elements of academic abilities" in elementary school education. For example, looking at the whole course of study and its guideline on the relation to life course, the contents of "independence of learning" has the descriptions related to the methods of learning and acquiring knowledge and skills of the subjects in the Japanese language, society, and science. On the other hand, the contents of "individual independence in life" and "mind-independence" are described as moral in living environment studies. "The three independences" through integrated learning in the living environment studies are broken up in the transition to learning in the subject. In particular, the relationship with "independence in life" and "mind-independence" is excluded from subject learning. An explanation of how "the three independences" in early childhood to lower grades is developed in the subsequent education remains as a future issue.

In "educational activities," direct and specific relationships with subjects are considered in the two areas, "relation with people" and "relation with things." "Relation with people" is a relation with oneself, another person, or a group, and "relation with things" is with nature and things around them. The educational activities from "the beginning of learning" (early childhood) to "awareness learning" (childhood) develop into learning during play and for each subject, taking into consideration the relationship with the two areas.

The main contents of the activities that systematically address teaching in each area are as follows. "Relation with people" deals with social experiences that create cooperative relationships with others. The exercises are that exchange and adjust ideas and feel a sense of accomplishment together at the end of early childhood, and aim to "form group codes" in the elementary school lower grades. "Relation with things" deals with

cognitive experiences mediated through nature, things, and tools. At the end of early childhood, “relation with things” is an activity that children solve problems with combining laws, words, letters, and quantitative relations acquired in life and experience, and use them according to the situations. In the lower grades of elementary school, “relation with things” is an activity to foster essential skills and practical understanding of Japanese language, quantity, and natural events through the teaching of each subject, “expressing and appreciating ability” through sound, “creative and conceptual ability” through natural objects and artifacts.

Although the term of Collaborative Learning was not in usage, learning from early childhood to childhood was again planned based on the principle of collaboration. What differs from one used to be is that, it focuses on the role of “words” and “expressions” that support the direct and specific relationship with objects. In other words, the report focused on “words” and “expressions” passing through relations with people and things rather than the acquired knowledge and skills of “words” and “expressions.” And the exploratory experience of “deep awareness and thinking” through “words” and “expressions” was positioned as a learning experience. Referring to “relation with people” and “relation with things” activities, for example, although the content of group norms, abilities, and knowledge itself are also essential, we should consider putting the way to set up an experience of learning how to understand others and objects in the process of exploring matters, into the curriculum plan.

## II. CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have sorted out the characteristics and the issues of the curriculum policies in recent years, focusing on the two approaches, the School System Reform Approach and the First Grade Problem Preventive Approach that designs Connecting Curriculum Between Preschool and Elementary School. These have explored the possibility of rethinking early childhood education

as regular education, but the process has had some problems. In the School System Reform Approach, the early childhood education which had the conflict between asking connection and securing of originality was pushed back by the compulsory education reform as a national strategy, and promoted the development of Connecting Curriculum Between Preschool and Elementary School based on the concept of “the basis of learning.” As a result, we saw the problem of the influence of the governmental control that directly linked to the compulsory education, the high demand for the educational scenes to introduce the connecting curriculum and the reorganization of the early childhood education by “collaborative learning” and its commotion. In the First Grade Problem Preventive Approach, the practicing of the collaboration of kindergarten and elementary school progressed, and Start Curriculum was proposed for children’s adaptation to elementary schools. But the practice of living environment studies is trivializing. And now, Japan aims at the construction of the system of Connecting Curriculum Between Preschool and Elementary School. While including the misunderstanding and cooperative learning started over, there are various proposes of the concepts of the connection. Looking back on the history of the early childhood education, since the no kindergarten argument in Meiji period, the Japanese kindergarten has the trauma that they were criticized for the teaching knowledge unilaterally like the elementary schools. And the country found uniqueness in the spontaneity, play, and life of early childhood education. Then it leads the country here. The reform of Connecting Curriculum Between Preschool and Elementary School demands a review of the ideas, principles, theories, and practices of early childhood education. However, in the process of the policies of the two approaches, the issue of how to consider future school education through the connection between kindergarten and elementary school may not have been sufficiently discussed. In early childhood education, it would need to find and reflect the possibilities and opportunities

for the early childhood education to the position in the general education on the connection between kindergarten and elementary school, rather than asking whether it is played or learning, child-centered or teacher-led, emotional or knowledge. This paper is one of the essays which has such a view, for the curriculum reform. "The continuity of development and learning" in the connection between kindergarten and elementary school will continue to be emphasized as the idea to integrate the unique and diverse practices of early childhood education. However, it is also necessary to pay attention so that the advocacy of "the continuity of development and learning" does not bring about the unnecessary control of homes and persons who bring up children.

Although not mentioned because of space limitations, the issue of the connection between kindergarten and elementary school is also deeply related to the integration of kindergarten and nursery school, the international interest in investing in infants and early childhood with the economic growth strategies, and the assurance and the evaluation of the quality of education. The policies and the discussions of the connection between the kindergarten and the elementary school also need to be organized and considered from these <sup>P</sup>oints of view.

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