Implementation of Learning Communities in Japanese Universities

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We visited five universities in the suburbs of New York in order to investigate learning communities (LCs) to propose methods of implementing LCs in Japanese universities. We emailed an interview questionnaire in advance to the LC coordinators of these universities, before visiting and conducting an informal interview at each university. As a result of the interviews, we identified three important variables for successful LCs: benefits, structure, and management of LCs. We proposed that the following types of LCs are applicable in Japanese universities: (1) LCs for students in liberal arts institutions that plan to follow identical careers, in order to integrate their knowledge and develop human relationships. (2) LCs for seminars in non–liberal arts institutions to discuss materials that they have studied in common courses, at which the faculty member in charge integrates the students’ knowledge. (3) LCs for project–based learning in non–liberal arts institutions, in which students can handle different information and use various skills to complete their project with the cooperation of a team of faculty members.

Key words: learning community, linked courses, liberal arts, seminar, project–based learning

1. INTRODUCTION

The number of learning communities (LC) has increased dramatically in U.S. universities since these programs were first introduced in 1990 (Laufgraben 2005). The Policy Center on the First Year of College reported in the 2002 National Survey of First–Year Academic Practices that LCs have been introduced in approximately 62% of U.S. universities. This system would recognize that for students, learning develops with more strength in groups rather than individually.

As concerned with the definition of a LC, Gabelnick et al. (1990, p.19) has stated that:

A learning community is any one of a variety of curricular structures that link together several existing courses – or actually restructure the curricular material entirely – so that students have opportunities for deeper understanding and integration of the material they are learning, and more interaction with one another and their teachers as fellow participants in the learning enterprise.

LC participants attend more than two courses that are linked. In case of a LC in which English and Psychology are linked, LC participants attend two courses in these disciplines and learn collaboratively. As shown in Section 4.2, the details of the definition of a LC vary according to the structure of the program.

In this study, we had an interview research on LCs and propose an implementation of LCs in Japanese universities. In Section 2, we review characteristics of LCs and in Section 3, we overviewed the interviews on LCs when we visited five U.S. universities. In Section 4, we have reviewed the necessary conditions for the successful management of a LC and in Section 5, proposed models of LCs that would be appropriate for Japanese universities.

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF LEARNING COMMUNITIES

In this section, the formation of management, learning characteristics, and practical examples of a LC are discussed below.

2.1. Structure

Figure 1 shows three different structures for LCs, taken from an example of the Washington Center. The long, horizontal bar represents students that attend one course; the gray sections represent LC participants, and the white sections represent non–participants. Each LC, as shown by the gray areas of Figure 1 is composed of a small group of about 15–25 students and each of these
programs consists of about 2–4 courses that are connected. The aim of all of these programs is to facilitate collaborative learning among students.

On the other hand, LCs have different characteristics depending on their structure. For example in (b), LC participants attend common courses and discuss the topics in each course, whereas in (a), LC participants attend common courses together with non-participants, and discuss topics related to only one course, as indicated by the fourth horizontal bar. Therefore, the interactive connections between the courses are generally stronger in (b) than in (a). Below, we have briefly discussed the characteristics of three types of LC structures.

In (a), LC participants attended the upper three courses alongside students who did not participate in the LC. The upper three courses are usually large classes, and faculty members do not coordinate with one another other in arranging these courses. Classes also often consisted of small seminars, as shown by the fourth, horizontal bar. Because the seminars had only a small number of students, LC participants could easily form groups for learning, even though the faculty members do not coordinate with each other in arranging these courses.

In (b), only LC participants attended the three courses. Each course is taught by a different faculty member from a different discipline. Faculty members often work together in order to integrate and coordinate these courses by discussing the course material in advance. For example, paired courses in sociology and psychology are taught by faculty from these respective departments. The instructor teaching the sociology course might sometimes teach this course taking a viewpoint from the field of psychology. Ideally students could gain a deeper understanding of the course materials taken from both these disciplines through this approach.

In (c), some courses are integrated, and a team of faculty members teaches the students participating in the LC. For example, a team of two faculty members from the sociology and psychology departments might examine themes related to crime with their students. In the classroom, the faculty members can discuss these themes from the viewpoints of their respective disciplines, and in this way students can become involved in interdisciplinary learning. This type of LC is related to the project-based learning described in Section 5.2.2.

2.2. Characteristics of learning

McGregor et al. (2009) described a number of key words related to LCs. We have listed some of these below followed by brief definitions and examples.

Cooperative learning: students need to clearly define their separate roles to accomplish group work. In this way they are expected to naturally develop a sense of responsibility and community.

Peer teaching: students teach and encourage each other. They establish academic and social support networks inside and outside the class.

Experiential learning: students learn through not only academic, but also experiential activities. Through students actively learn through experience that is outside the classroom or off-campus, they are expected to connect the academic skills and knowledge learned in class with these real situations.

Problem centered learning: students learn mainly for the purpose of solving a given problem, not for mastering the course material. To solve a problem, students, on their own, must make use of the library, computer-room, and other campus facilities. This is similar to problem-based learning.

In view of these factors, and as pointed out by Kim (2008), LC can be characterized by two variables. The first characteristic of LC is learning as a group, as opposed to learning as individuals. The second characteristic is that the impetus for the learning comes from the students, as opposed to instructor–centered learned or teacher–based classrooms. According to Kato (2008), LC can strengthen various relationships. In this context, the word “relationship” has a broad meaning that includes relationships between individuals such as students, faculty, and staff members. It also refers

![Fig. 1. The three types of LC in use at the Washington Center](image-url)
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Table 1. Five colleges and universities that were visited

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University/College</th>
<th>Year Founded</th>
<th>State/City</th>
<th>Students no.</th>
<th>LC Participants</th>
<th>LC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nassau Community College</td>
<td>1959</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>23,000</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rutgers</td>
<td>1766</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>1,200&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>22&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Jay College</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>14,000</td>
<td>425</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pace University</td>
<td>1906</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>13,500</td>
<td>3,375&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montclair State University</td>
<td>1908</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>17,500</td>
<td>1,680</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Numbers of students and LC participants are approximate.
<sup>1</sup> Only related to FIGS. Please refer to FIGS in section 4.2.
<sup>2</sup> Participants per college year in which LC is a required course.

to relationships between individuals and social spaces. This could mean relationships between students and spaces for social functions or dormitories, or between faculty members and campus space. Finally it could refer to relationships between disciplines, and between the different academic fields of faculty members.

### 3. OVERVIEW OF INTERVIEWS

We visited five universities (Table 1) in the suburbs of New York during February 2009 for the purpose of investigating LCs. We selected these universities on the basis of the following considerations: (1) Universities had LCs that were actively practiced, (2) They were not too far from New York City, and (3) It was possible to make appointments to visit the LC coordinators.

Prior to our visit, we carefully referred to the websites of these universities. Then, we developed an interview questionnaire and asked an interpreter (a Japanese doctoral candidate who was a researcher at the City University of New York) to send the questionnaire by email to the LC coordinators at the selected universities, so that the LC coordinators could fully understand the points that we wanted to investigate. We had frequent email communications with the interpreter regarding our visit. The questionnaires were received by faculty members, or members of the university staff coordinating LCs. We did not ask the LC coordinators to email their responses to us. The questionnaires were developed only for the purpose of facilitating active and smooth interviews when we visited the universities.

We met with the interpreter on the day before the interview to make final arrangements. We sequentially visited the five universities during four days. The interviews at Nassau Community College, John Jay College, and Pace University lasted a few hours, and they lasted a full day at Rutgers and Montclair State Universities.

The questionnaire was primarily concerned with three topics. The first of these was to determine whether an institution or department had LC programs or similar strategies intended to foster interactive learning and/or group-based learning. We asked respondents to outline the programs in general and to give us details of how they operated. The second issue was how to actually operate such programs in order to maximize the effectiveness of the LC. Finally we asked for any other suggestions regarding the management of a LC or issues that might be a cause for concern in these types of programs. We asked these issues to the LC coordinators in all five universities.

On the other hand, all five universities had unique LC. Therefore, we inquired about particular points that might be related to the creation and management of a LC. For example, the LC in a dormitory was found only at Rutgers and we visited it to interview the staff that lived with the LC students.

### 4. FINDINGS FROM OUR INTERVIEWS

Results of the interviews are classified into three parts. (1) Benefits of LC (Section 4.1.): there are many benefits of LCs, and these have led to an increase in the popularity of such programs in U.S. universities. We have discussed the benefits from the perspectives of the students and the universities. (2) Characteristics and the structure of LCs (Section 4.2.): the structures of LCs were different in each university that we visited. We have briefly discussed six major dimensions that characterize the structure of LCs. It is suggested that when implementing LCs in Japanese universities, these elements should be fully analyzed in order to maximize their effect. (3) Management of LCs (Section 4.3.): there were several important issues facing the universities.
that we visited. A thorough discussion of these issues would be needed in order to identify the best method of managing LCs in Japanese universities.

4.1. Benefits of learning communities

4.1.1. Student perspectives on LCs

(1) Active learning

One of the benefits of LCs is that they allow for a smooth transition from high school to college. This was seen in many universities that we visited. "Transition" in this case means providing a support system so that students can transfer smoothly from basic learning in high schools to specialized and specific learning in universities. Students who have a weak sense of purpose regarding university education would be expected to have difficulty in maintaining the motivation to learn and finding their footing in this new environment. This would especially be true if they attend only large, lecture-based courses. However, such students may be able to engage positively in learning through participating in small classes within collaborative learning systems such as LCs. At John Jay College, the activities in LCs include going to museums, films, and hosting events such as year-end exhibitions that feature art, posters, sculpture, and student performances.

(2) Multi-perspective learning

Another benefit of LCs is that they allow students to experience multiple perspectives in their studies through focusing on common themes found in several different courses, each of which is based in a different discipline. In John Jay College, faculty members discussed the interaction of the themes between courses in detail, which in turn helped the students understand how the learning materials were related to each other. Furthermore, students could apply the knowledge they gained to real-life circumstances. Through cooperative learning, students had a variety chances hold discussions and share information. The students had joint responsibilities for the smooth operation of the LC, and had to manage time scheduling of activities. These are skills that cannot be mastered through individual learning.

(3) Formation of human relationships

One of the benefits of LCs is that they facilitate friendships and relationships during the first year of college. First-year students sometimes have difficulty in making new friends and this can be especially true if they are mainly attending large-scale lecture courses. However, in a LC, collaborative activities necessitate communication between students about topics in the shared courses. This gives students a better opportunity to form friendships. Working in small group that has a common goal for the semester, the students have a chance to better understand their own characters, behavior patterns, and preferences. They also have the opportunity to learn what values are held by the other members of their group. This gives them occasion to form closer bonds and friendships. In Nassau Community College, which has a large number of nontraditional students on campus, LCs were effective in promoting exchanges between nontraditional and traditional students.

4.1.2. University perspectives on LC

(1) Student retention

Three of the benefits mentioned in Section 4.1.1 are directly linked to student retention. At all the universities that we visited, the main purpose in having LCs was promoting retention and decreasing the student dropout rate. In Montclair State University, the LC coordinator insisted that motivation for learning, group identity, and a sense of belonging to a university, all have significant effects on retention. This LC coordinator also felt that participating in LCs helps students to grow and become more mature. Students also may find it easier to continue with their studies, because the social and psychological distance between them and faculty members tends to decrease through interchanges in courses that have small classes. Shapiro and Levine (1999) found by referring to several studies that, among other factors, LC participants have higher retention rates, grade point averages, intellectual development, self-esteem and self-efficacy, when compared to students who do not participate in LCs. In John Jay College, the LC participants had approximately a 10–15% higher retention rate than non-participants. However, it is also possible that students participating in LC had high retention rates, because they were already highly motivated. The effect of participation in LCs on retention should be analyzed longitudinally.

(2) Faculty development

Faculty members are granted a fair degree of autonomy in choices they make regarding course materials and teaching methods. For this reason faculty members may be reluctant to engage in groups that could require them to tailor their
instruction or materials to team or group-teaching situations.

Recently, it has been pointed out that a better organizational system for education is needed in Japanese universities. This system would not be one in which each member of faculty only teaches in his/her specialized fields and works independently of the other departments. Almost all Japanese universities have comprehensive faculty development (FD) programs. Faculty members often share materials used in their courses. However, it is not common for faculty members to develop partnerships to team-teach, or to develop joint courses. Through managing a LC, faculty members can become engaged in combining their courses for a common goal. It is hoped that this would result in improving FD. That is, LCs may be a useful method for FD.

4.2. Characteristics and structure of learning communities

(1) Nonresidential and residential

In nonresidential LCs, students usually attend courses offered on campus. In contrast, the students participating in residential LCs live and study together in places such as dormitories. Therefore, learning takes place through a fusion of on- and off-campus activities. This learning then is much more a part of these student’s daily lives.

In Rutgers, senior honors students and staff members lived together with freshmen, sophomores and juniors. These senior students and staff members acted as teachers and counselors for the other students. There were two types of LC. The first was only for freshmen, and the second LC was comprised of freshmen and the other year students. LCs were also recommended for students who were not highly motivated to study. It is hoped that the LCs will increase the motivation of these students and improve their curiosity for learning through helping each other and by experiencing this type of student community.

(2) Student mentors

Should senior and graduate students support the management of the LC as student assistants (SA) or as tutors? In John Jay College, mentors’ role is limited to helping students in the classroom. They also served as role models for the participating students. Through these activities, the mentors came to understand the social and academic lives of students. At the same time faculty members also communicated with the mentors regarding the progress of the students involved in the LC. In Rutgers, senior honors students were in charge of the First-year Interest Group Seminars (FIGS), a small class seminar for first-year students. The purpose of FIGS was not to give students expertise in a specialized field, but to introduce them to important topics, and to show them how to apply their knowledge of these topics to situations in real life. Senior students served as a bridge between faculty members and freshmen. Seniors could get three credits.

(3) Number of courses

One unit of a LC usually consists of 2–4 courses. For example, at John Jay College, a typical unit of LC consisted of two courses (i.e., composition combined with general psychology). LC courses varied widely from psychology to math, art, ethnic studies, chemistry, anthropology, speech and government. These courses were usually paired with English composition, but there were also mathematics and chemistry for forensic science majors and two sections of mathematics and counseling. In Nassau Community College, a unit in the LC also consisted of two courses, reading and one other course. In Montclair State University, the LC usually contained four courses: a first-year seminar, writing, and two other courses such as mathematics and physics. The arrangement of courses in these universities was similar in that a package of the LC always contained a seminar, or a course on academic skills that was shared with the other courses in a specialized field. This arrangement is effective because students can apply academic skills mastered in seminars, or other courses, to learning a different specialization.

(4) Strength of link between courses

The strength of the links between courses was different at the different universities. At John Jay College for example, faculty members planned themes or skills to share at the beginning of the semester. These might include paired assignments that would receive a grade in both classes. In preparation for these courses, participating faculty members usually discussed students and their progress rather than just focusing on homework assignments or teaching materials. In Montclair State University, in contrast, faculty members did not usually discuss course material with each other. Students were expected to understand the relationship between the courses in the LC through talking with each other. Perhaps, as discussed in Section 4.3, this is because it is
sometimes difficult for faculty members to understand the value of team-teaching, or to put it into practice.

(5) Year of attending LC

A unit of a LC can be developed only for first-year students, or only for students in the same year, or for those in different years. Courses for first-year students tend to be general education or courses in required subjects. On the other hand, courses for seniors tend to be specialized. In Montclair State University, a unit of LC was implemented only for students in the same year, because it was difficult to manage a course for a mixture of freshmen, sophomore, junior, and seniors. There were two types of LC, one for general courses and the other for specific fields. The former was recommended for students that haven’t determined a major. In Rutgers, there were a few LCs that allow students in their junior year to explore specific projects. These courses were managed by faculty members and supported by graduate students working as TAs.

(6) Courses that are between or within departments

Whether courses in a unit of a LC are offered between, or within, a particular department is another important issue. In cases in which LC courses are held entirely within a particular department, students may already be familiar with each other and may have similar interests. Moreover, cooperation between faculty members and the management of the LC are simplified, because the participating faculty usually interact in committees or meetings and generally work in related fields. On the other hand, in the case of inter-departmental LCs, students may not be familiar with each other and may not have similar interests. Moreover, the participating faculty members may also be unfamiliar with each other and may work in different fields. As a result, a longer time may be needed to smoothly coordinate the management of the LC. Therefore, it is suggested that initially, it may be better to implement LC units that are within departments. When these are fully developed it may be appropriate to consider developing inter-departmental LCs at the university.

4.3. Managing a Learning community

(1) Requirements of faculty members

The theories underlying the creation of LCs and the significant effects that LCs can have on students’ lives should be fully explained to faculty members. This ideally would increase the desire of faculty members to participate in the LCs. Kim (2008) proposed that faculty and staff should thoroughly understand the following points when implementing LCs in universities. Firstly, the efficiency of learning in a community is higher than that of learning as an individual. Secondly, it is just as important for the students to know how to learn as it is for the faculty to know how to teach. At Pace University, a coordinator who mediated disputes between faculty members when they could not cooperate in managing the LC said that it is difficult to properly select paired faculty.

The faculty training described above is designed to provide intrinsic motivation for faculty members to participate in LCs. It is also suggested that the extrinsic motivation of faculty members should be addressed. In both Rutgers and Montclair State Universities, few faculty members had positive feelings about the LCs, probably because they felt their efforts were not highly valued. At John Jay College, previously, when the LC was first implemented, $500 a year was being paid to each faculty member that participated in the LC. However, currently, the number of courses assigned to these faculty members has decreased when they have a chair on the LC. Accordingly, faculty members are able to participate in the LC without having a drastic increase in their workload. Incentives such as promotions, rewards, and fewer assigned courses are essential for faculty members who have a chair on the LC.

(2) Organizational system

Kato (2007) states that unique forms of FD should be considered for faculty involved in managing LCs, and suggests that the following issues are important. The first is a support system in which faculty and staff can maintain cooperative relationships over a long period. One way to achieve this aim is to agree on a liaison officer and to hold frequent meetings. The second approach is systematic and comprehensive FD. One way to achieve this aim is to have intensive faculty and staff training before offering LC courses to students.

In order to manage a LC effectively, faculty and staff members have to accept that the scope of their jobs will have to be expanded to include such concerns as the quality of students’ lives, career support, and other types of instruction or counseling. For this, at the minimum, a coordinator familiar with LCs, as well as several
staff members to provide support are needed. The coordinators in Nassau Community College, John Jay College, and Pace University were faculty members and in Rutgers and Montclair State Universities, they were staff members. Furthermore, the LC section should be developed in such a way that relationships between students, faculty members, and staff can be easily formed. The LC at John Jay College was managed through formal department for First Year Experience Support for first year students as one of some works. Also, special learning communities for non-native English speaking students were coordinated by the Director of the Center for English Language Support.

It is also important that leading members of the universities support LCs. The President of Montclair State University and the Vice President of Pace University recognized the significance of LCs and gave vigorous support to promoting them in the university. The coordinators in both universities said that the LCs were able to make more progress owing to this support.

(3) Nurturing student mentors

When mentors and tutors take part in managing LCs, they should receive comprehensive training before they take on this responsibility. In Rutgers, a systematic program for nurturing student mentors has been developed and 20 hours of classroom management training was offered to mentors, so that they could prepare to teach first-year students in FIGS. In case of the residential LC, a different program for nurturing mentors has been developed. This was done in order to give mentors advice on residential living with students and to help them to act as counselors when needed. In practice a program for nurturing mentors indirectly acts as an education class. Nurturing mentors can confer significant educational benefits, not only for first year students, but also for the mentors themselves.

(4) Support for off-campus activities

In Nassau Community College, students often participated in off-campus activities such as observing court proceedings and attending meetings and discussions held in coffee shops. It is possible to develop synthetic learning through off campus activities. However, the cost of such activities and obtaining the funds to pay for them presents some problems. In managing the residential LC at Rutgers, an annual report was given to funding organizations on the management development for the LC. Such reports are expected to lift the profile of LCs. Writing these reports is regarded as a collaborative work experience for students, as well as a valuable experience that helps people understand the role of these programs in universities and society at large.

(5) Assessment

Assessments of LCs were conducted at all the universities we visited. At John Jay College, both faculty and students were surveyed in order to learn about their experiences in the program, and to find out what worked, what didn’t, and how to improve the LC. Moreover, some first year students analyzed questionnaire data in order to suggest improvements to the course in the following year. In Rutgers, LC faculty members examined improvements to the course based on quantitative surveys. Staff members in contrast, used qualitative methods to survey LC participants. It is recommended that faculty members share assessment data with each other, because LCs are developed with the participation of several faculty members and involve a number of courses.

(6) Cost

LCs usually consist of small classes of 15–25 students. Therefore, the cost for implementing a LC can become very high when the number of classes grows large. In Pace University, students must get credits in at least one LC for each registration period. Therefore, the annual cost of a LC such as this would be very expensive. In the other universities that we visited, the courses in the LCs were elective courses. It would be difficult to set up LCs that involved required courses in large universities, and in universities that face financial difficulties and need to reduce operating costs.

(7) Networks outside the campus

In Pace University, a coordinator exchanged information on LCs and held regular meetings with several universities in the U.S. to promote LCs. In Montclair State University, staff members attended the society of First Year Experience, and looked at issues and practices in LCs at both foreign and domestic universities. It is natural that faculty and staff members belonging to the same university should analyze the LC at their institutions. It is also necessary that they learn about methods of conducting LCs from sources not directly connected to their university. In this way they can choose the best options from among
various types of LC systems and management styles.

5. LEARNING COMMUNITIES IN JAPAN

From Sections 1 to 4, we have mainly reviewed LCs in U.S. universities in regard to the data collected in our survey. However, there are many differences regarding the potential role of LCs in Japanese and U.S. universities. For example, students in Japan have already chosen a major course of study at the time of their entrance into a university. Additionally, a class system in which a small group of students belongs to a particular class in the same department with a designated advisor is common in Japan, but this is not the case in U.S. universities. Japanese students in the same department are already familiar with their classmates, and usually attend common courses. Considering that the role of a LC is partly to link both courses and students for the purpose of pursuing similar goals, a system similar to the LCs categorized in Fig. 1(a) is already in place at most Japanese universities. It is essentially in the field of liberal arts that LCs would have the most impact on students in Japan.

In this section, we propose how to implement LCs in Japanese universities that are categorized as liberal arts institutions as well as universities that are not. We consider the issues discussed in Section 4 in regard to the implementation of LCs in the Japanese university system.

5.1. Liberal arts colleges and universities

For example, referring to the website in Kyoto Koka Women’s University (KKWU), Junior College, there is a Department of Contemporary Life Design. The course of study is divided into three areas: Field, Unit, and Course. The curriculum consists of 12 fields such as hospitality, wedding planning, and tourism. Each field consists of a certain number of units. The total number of units in the whole university is 50. Each unit consists of a certain number of courses. The total number of courses in the whole university is 100. Through a combination of fields and units, each student can build her own study plan for the career she wants to pursue. Faculty members act as advisors and offer support in selecting courses for the students in each advisor’s class. In this way, it is possible to say that each field consists of one LC. LC participants who plan to follow the same career could attend courses together to integrate their knowledge and to develop human relationships. Each field could become a LC just as shown in Figure 1(b).

Also in KKWU, there is a Faculty of Career Development that is set to be established in 2010. The basis for this department is a study of the fundamentals that are needed to be a member of society. These consist of knowledge in three fields such as humanities, sociology, and international relations, and two skills such as communication and problem solving. To participate in this program, students will study in one or more of six specialized fields such as ICT business, tourism, welfare, education, wedding planning, interior design from around junior grade. Each field would consist of 20 students on average, which is a suitable class size for LC. Similar to Junior College in KKWU, each field could become a LC as shown in Figure 1(b). Because LC participants share common ideas such as knowledge in three fields and two skills, they might more successfully form links with topics in some courses. Furthermore, it might be possible that LC participants who major in different fields would interact with each other. An interchange between different LCs that was not seen in the universities that we visited could produce more interdisciplinary learning.

5.2. Non-liberal arts colleges and universities

When the students who enter a department have already been selected, and the materials and courses have been decided, there are two steps that can be put into practice to implement LC. The first is to offer enrichment seminars and the second is to introduce project-based learning, as shown in Fig. 1(a) and 1(c) respectively.

5.2.1. Seminars

Seminars are offered to students in most universities. The goals of these seminars are different in various universities, but they mainly cover the following two areas. The first is to master academic skills such as presentations, writing, and discussion skills. The second is to enhance learning motivation through conversations with advisors and classmates.

The above two goals would be promoted more effectively through the implementation of LCs. In both cases, seminars could take part in integrating the materials in some courses, as shown in Fig. 1(a). A Faculty member who has seminar should integrate LC students’ learning entirely.

In the first case, it would be desirable for students to use the academic skills taught in these
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5.2.2. Project-based learning

PBL is widely used in specific fields such as medicine, electronics, and fieldwork. This is a method in which students need to use teamwork to complete a project. Students have to handle different information and use various skills to complete their project. As mentioned in Section 4.1.1., PBL is a method of education that satisfies three elements, i.e., active learning, learning from multiple perspectives, and the formation of human relationships. Students tend to take the initiative in managing projects, and faculty members couch rather than teach. PBL is regarded as an exciting form of learning that takes place through experience. Students must be highly motivated to participate in these projects. Therefore, PBL needs strict oversight and is suited for students in their junior or senior year who have higher motivation, rather than for first-year students with unclear goals.

PBL could be seen as identical to the system used in a LC, if faculty members commit to overseeing a PBL project. A team of faculty members can cooperate for the advancement of a project. This type of learning could be a LC as discussed in Figure 1(c). For this, it is better that students compose a report detailing their development in PBL with each other. Students can show interest in other projects and reflect on the positive points of their own project. Additionally, it is a good idea that students evaluate the projects through considering the comments of faculty members. Ideally students would distribute their own report in the local community, or would propose it to a company that might be associated with their project. These actions can help students connect their findings with society and the world beyond their university.

6. SUMMARY

Based on data obtained during our visit to five universities in the U.S., we reviewed the characteristics of LCs and issues involved in developing and managing these programs. We suggest that implementing educational LCs is crucial for FD and that LCs also have a positive effect on student learning. It should also be noted that LCs entail devotion and work by faculty and staff members. Because there are differences in the educational systems of Japanese and U.S. universities, the goals of LCs in Japan should be redefined. In case of universities that already have small-class seminars or PBL, a curriculum including the ideas used in LCs can be prepared by slightly reconstructing already existing programs.

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K. Sakai

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