

# Establishing a New System of Training Teaching Assistants in **JAPAN**

## An Attempt in Hiroshima University

### Background

In Japan, university teachers seem to be evaluated usually based on research achievements rather than teaching abilities. When students don't concentrate on learning in a class, teachers believe that a class becomes dull due to the inability of students and thus, tend not to see the need to make an effort in improving their teaching abilities. However, the deterioration of the quality of education in academic institutions came to public attention and was criticized not only by the public but also by the media in the latter half of the 1980's.

Due to such criticisms, the advisory panel of the University Councils of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology requested all universities to execute the following plans: "Better guidance for students" (1991), "Holding small group lessons, employing teaching assistants, and introducing of class evaluation by students" (1998). In effect, the development of teaching ability among teachers was seen to be necessary and of greater value. Furthermore, employment opportunities for university teachers are likely to decrease due to the falling birthrate in Japan.

Consequently, most of the newly conferred Ph.D. graduates will face a huge challenge in finding jobs in research universities. Most of those who pursue a career in research universities might have to start working in either non-research universities, colleges, or community colleges where teaching is more emphasized than research, and demonstrating excellent teaching abilities is more advantageous than research skills. This reality makes it all the more important that universities pay greater attention to the development of graduate students as effective teaching assistants today to be excellent university teachers in the future.

### Features

#### Transforming Consciousness – Preparing for being a "university teacher"

- Lesson plan and teaching materials are prepared, based on classes in Hiroshima University and other universities.
- The teaching plan could be examined and modified, if necessary, based on feedbacks provided by academic advisor, faculty mentor, other researchers, and colleagues who are TAs themselves. In addition by attending and observing other TAs' classes, various styles in teaching and class management methods can be learned from each other, contributing to a mutual growth of their teaching abilities.
- Moreover, because the TA system in Japan is still in its early stage and TAs have a few opportunities to teach classes by themselves, our discussion on a TA's class should be spent thoroughly among graduate students with different background, following "lesson study" the way that Japanese school teachers discuss.

#### Developing global perspectives

- Knowledge of current situations and future directions in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning is acquired through lectures given by specialists on higher education.
- Information on higher education in foreign countries is obtained by attending international symposia.
- Higher education systems in foreign countries are observed and an understanding of how these contribute to the development of teaching abilities of the faculty is gained.
- Personal connection between graduate students and foreign researchers is made through these activities mentioned above.

#### Understanding the teacher training system and its present condition

- Teacher training systems and their transformations are learned in a class titled "Research into Teacher Training".
- Curriculum construction and organization are understood in a comparative analysis of syllabi presently used in various universities.
- The elements of good university teachers are learned in a class titled "Research into Teaching in College".

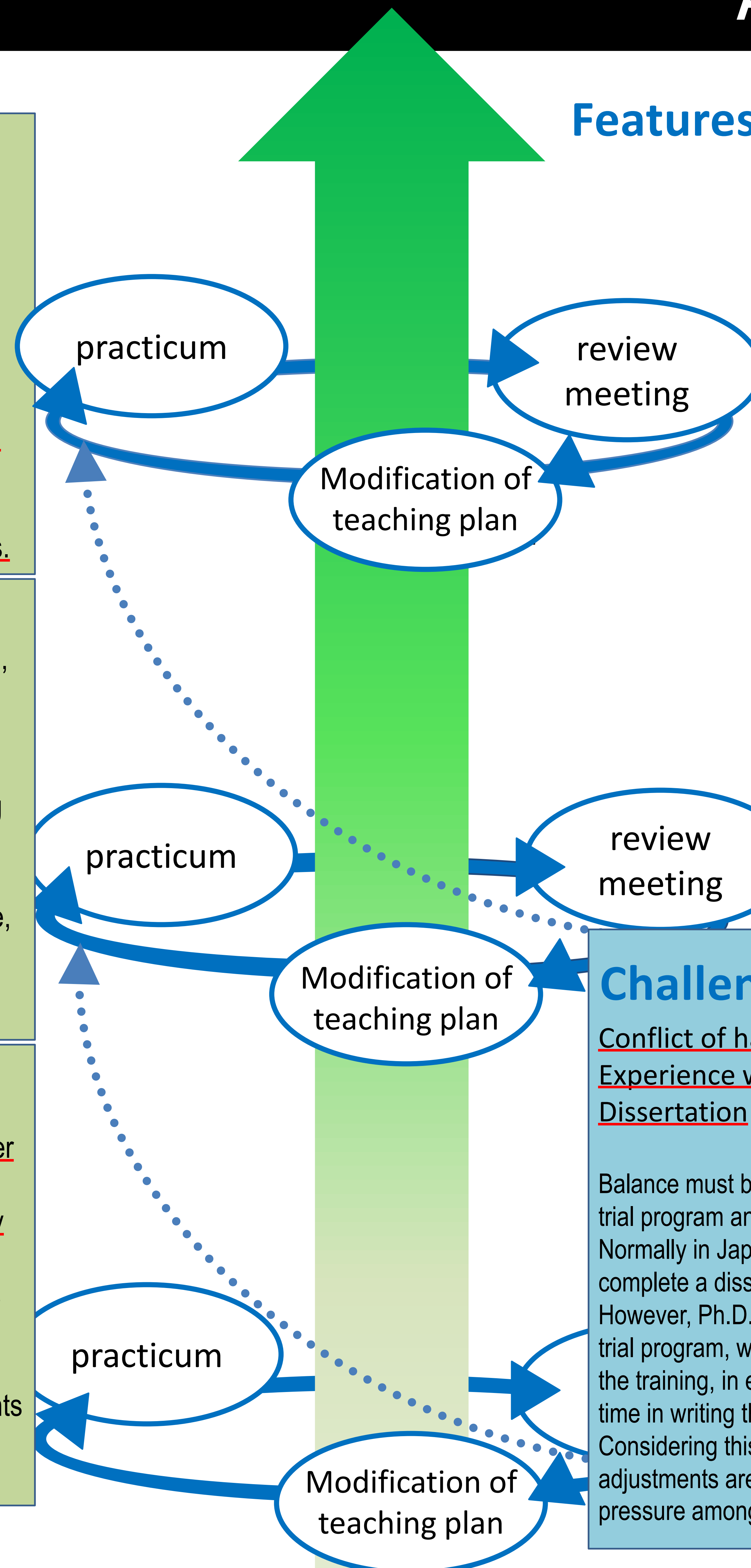
#### Making "Teaching Portfolio": Understanding one's own Learning Outcomes from the Program

- We complete a file called "teaching portfolio" which contains a collection of domestic and international class observation records and teaching practicum records: teaching plans, records of instruction about the plan before the practicum, records of peer review after the practicum, and so on.

### Challenge

#### Conflict of having Teaching Experience with Completing a Dissertation

Balance must be considered between our trial program and Ph.D. program. Normally in Japan, a Ph.D. student must complete a dissertation within three years. However, Ph.D. students attending our trial program, while dedicating their time to the training, in effect, lose some of their time in writing their doctoral thesis. Considering this situation, some adjustments are necessary to help ease pressure among Ph.D. students.



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