

Developing a PDCA cycle promoting sheet for special education support systems:
Supporting special needs education coordinators through itinerant school consultants

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The purpose of this research is to develop a “Plan-Do-Check-Adjust (PDCA) cycle promoting sheet for student support systems” (PDCA cycle promoting sheet) to both assess and promote the PDCA cycle of school support systems in elementary and junior high schools. In addition, its premise is that the school mainly aims to improve student support systems by establishing the special needs education coordinator as a key person and utilizing the existing system—the itinerant school consultation services.

In Chapter 1, in the backdrop of a movement toward a global, inclusive education system, we examined the current situation and issues as follows. In Section 1, we stated that each school is required to enhance student support and promote special needs education to build an inclusive system. In Section 2, we discussed how (1) coordinators found it difficult to build such a system because of their lack of time, incompetency, and low cooperation with other teachers, and (2) itinerant school consultants must support coordinators. In Section 3, we argued that itinerant school consultants should indirectly support the system through the coordinator. In Section 4, we mentioned the need to use the Research-Plan-Do-Check-Adjust (R-PDCA) cycle in the student support system, and to develop a check sheet to evaluate and promote it. In Section 5, we summarized these points and described the purpose and composition of this study.

In Chapter 2, we surveyed coordinators regarding the problems and solutions, and examined what itinerant school consultants should consider when assisting them (Research I). We found that coordinators currently lack time and expertise (knowledge and skills), and most coordinators are not planning to improve them. In addition, coordinators lack cooperation with other teachers and wish to implement and enhance the school committee and in-school teacher training to improve cooperation. It was considered that the coordinators’ work could be made more efficient by itinerant school consultants reporting on the successful practices of other schools. Moreover, clarifying the results and issues of cooperation among teachers by using the PDCA cycle promoting sheet would encourage the recognition of the coordinators’ role and increase coordinating behavior.

In Chapter 3, a PDCA cycle promoting sheet was developed (Study II). First, we created a draft and asked the coordinators to fill it out. As the current status of student support system did not appear to be accurately reflected, we conducted an interview survey and changed the scoring criteria based on “not done,” “done at the individual level,” and “done at the organizational level.”

In Chapter 4, a questionnaire survey was conducted among coordinators in elementary and junior high schools (Study III). It was suggested that the PDCA cycle promoting sheet could accurately reflect the status of the student support system based on the relationship between

the results of PDCA cycle promoting sheets and both school attributes and the results of existing sheets. When asked whether they could “understand the current situation” and obtain the “new discoveries and notices” by answering the PDCA cycle promoting sheet, coordinators responded affirmatively about the school support system, especially about cooperation within the school.

In Chapter 5, we illustrated the coordinators’ experiences with filling out the sheet and determined what kind of support must be implemented when using it in schools (Research IV). After classifying the interview survey results, we discovered that by filling out the sheet, coordinators were aware of cooperation among teachers, the PDCA cycle of the student support system, and the trigger for the first step in enhancing it. Some coordinators reported feeling pressure due to their role; therefore, when using PDCA cycle promoting sheets at school, they ought to share the results with the school committee. Finally, it appeared necessary for itinerant school consultants to support coordinators by reporting on successful cases from other schools.

In Chapter 6, a case study was conducted among four elementary and junior high schools to determine whether the PDCA cycle promoting sheets could be effective regardless of the progress of special needs education in each school (Research V). At the beginning of the survey and at the end of the fiscal year, the coordinator filled in the PDCA cycle promoting sheets and, based on the results, the entire school worked to improve the student support system. At that time, as a support to the coordinator, the author reported the successful practice of other schools. We shared the results of the PDCA cycle promoting sheets with the school committee and examined the improvement measures. As a result, although one out of four schools could not improve their student support system within that fiscal year, regardless of the level of their special needs education at the beginning of this survey, all four schools improved in the following year.

In Chapter 7, we changed the name of the sheet from the PDCA promoting sheet to the R-PDCA promoting sheet for greater accuracy. Based on the results of studies I–V, we proposed an “R-PDCA coordinator support model” through the itinerant school consultant, using an R-PDCA promoting sheet. From comparison with the models in previous studies, its uniqueness lies in providing both indirect and direct support to the students by supporting the teachers and the coordinator of the school support system. It was also proposed that the itinerant school consultant collect the R-PDCA promotion sheet answered by the coordinator and analyze and utilize the results at the Board of Education to improve the support system in all schools.

In Chapter 8, we discuss the significance of this research and future challenges. By filling out the R-PDCA cycle-promoting sheets, coordinators enhanced the schools’ awareness and the importance of sharing information, thereby increasing coordinating behavior. These improvements activated the school committees and enhanced teachers’ understanding of special needs education. We also confirmed the schools’ continuous improvement in the next fiscal year, regardless of the progress of special needs education. Further surveys are needed to clarify the process by which completion of the R-PDCA promoting sheet results in the realization of more effective support for students with special needs, by improving student support systems.