

## Public Lecture

# Understanding and Helping Struggling Adolescents<sup>1)</sup> ; The Roles Required of Teachers in the Generation to Come

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## 1. Introduction

Based on my 23 years of experience in junior high schools, I would like to express my thoughts on the roles that teachers should play in order to understand and help adolescents. It is also a challenge to develop and increase the competency and skill of students who are interested in education so that they themselves can become “helping professionals of growth” who can empathize with the joy and suffering of children, teachers, and parents, both at home and in schools.

## 2. Letters from Students who have Graduated

In March 2001, the students that I have looked after for the past 3 years graduated from junior high. I have built educational practices based on the keyword “re-encounter”, which means teachers should make conscious efforts to create opportunities for the teacher and student, student and student, and one’s self to come face-to-face when practicing

education. Now, let me share with you some letters that I received from my students on the day of their graduation.

### – A letter from A (a female student)

“Until I became a third grader, I was the kind of person who didn’t like talking to or mingling with someone I had not already spoken with or didn’t get along with. After entering 3-1, I changed. At the beginning, the class seemed to be divided into various groups, but I felt that the atmosphere of the class became better and better after the class had experienced a number of events together. Without even noticing it, the boundary between groups had disappeared, even the boundary between boys and girls. I got to know my classmates better, and that made me realize that even the people I had not liked were good people. During the past year, my circle of friends has expanded significantly. Since I had never had such an experience before, I was amazed by this. I felt at ease and comfortable everyday being in this class.”

In this letter, I especially like the part where the student says “[I] realized that even the people I had not liked were good people.” This indicates that the student was able to acknowledge other student’s differences

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and respect them. During the process of adolescence, a child learns to “interact or get along with others understanding that each member of a group is different.” (Shirai, 1999) In other words, this letter is an example of a student who is tackling “relativization of relationship with others” which is one of the developmental tasks that children need to accomplish.

Adults often tell children “to make friends with anybody”, but instead, what we should tell them is that it is more important to acknowledge each other’s differences and respect their friends, like A said in her letter “...even though they are different from me, they are good people.” I have always tried to keep this in mind as an important point when I worked as a teacher. I believe that, “a place where students can feel at ease and comfortable” can only be created when students have a mutual relationship in which they can acknowledge their differences and respect each other.

**– A letter from B (a female student)**

“When I become a high school student, , I should not be too dependent on others.. I have decided to go to an evening high school for the next four years. When I was in the second grade, I had various problems such as smoking, running away from home, riding a motorbike, fighting with others and so on. Although you were not in charge of my class, you cared for me and scolded me for what I had done. Sometimes, you even took my side. When I caused trouble by riding a motorbike, you did not blame me but said, “...I appreciate that you were honest with us. Thank you.” I

cannot change what I have done, but today, I am happy that each one of such moments has become my precious memory and treasure. You and I certainly had a lot of arguments that sometimes pissed me off, but, no matter how angry I was at you, as soon as I saw your face I could not help smiling. I am sorry that I became too emotional and said terrible things to you when I lost my temper. I thank you so much for not giving up on me, scolding me when necessary, and taking my side. I will never forget what you said to me when I was in trouble for riding a motorbike.”

This was a letter from B who changed greatly during the summer vacation of her second year. She was caught riding a motorbike with two other friends. At first, she would not tell us that she was the one who had stolen the motorbike, but after pressure from her parents, she told the truth. On that night, her parents brought her to our school. When she saw me, she was unable to say anything except “teacher” and started crying. I remember saying something like; “I know it took a lot of courage for you to tell the truth. Thank you for telling us what happened” and patted her on the head.

In daily life, it is true that I often had confrontations with her. While emotionally empathizing with her, I had to differ with her over her behavior. The bridge to connect such conflicting feelings in myself was congruence as an individual and the determination as a teacher that I would not give up on her no matter what happened. This dilemma of how to integrate “acceptance and empathic

understanding” and “guidance” has also been discussed by educators. (Katagaki, 1991)

**– A letter from C (a female student)**

“In the past year, I was so happy being in this class where I was able to find my own place. My classmates were all nice and friendly, and you were a youthful teacher. In a sense, I felt as if you were one of us, like a classmate. You understood us very well and were willing to be open about your own feelings to us. Sometimes you even shed tears in front of us, but most of the time, you were always smiling. I’ve never seen or met a teacher like you before. Since you always tried to be honest with us, I too could be honest with you. “A strong will, courage, smile and a positive frame of mind” are the most important things in life. After graduating, even though we will start new lives in different places, what we have learnt in this class over the past year will surely help and support us. Without being impatient and pretending to be strong, I hope that each one of us will find true friends with whom we can be ourselves.”

From this letter, I was happy to know that, through their minds and bodies, my students were able to fully understand what I had said to them. They interpreted it and then returned it to me in their own words. I was also delighted because we could share the feeling that, although we will be separated, we will live in each other’s mind.

It has been pointed out that in order for children to bear their inner struggle, “teachers must serve as important others and

have empathic understanding of students so that they may feel secure and depend on them” and “for that, it is indispensable that a mutual relationship where students can raise objections to their teachers be constructed”. (Kusunoku, 1999) The relationship where teachers serve as “empathic others” is very important, not only for the relationship between teachers and students, but also for relationships with others.

### **3. Cultivation of “Richness in Mind” and Placement of School Counselors**

Now I would like to touch upon the subject of the cultivation of “Richness in Mind” and placement of school counselors by the government. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, as a backdrop to the recent trend of juvenile delinquencies, promoted measures to focus on the cultivation of “Richness in Mind”, and allocated school counselors to public schools nationwide as part of the “Program to Subsidize School Counselor Utilization Projects” from 1995. In the beginning, counselors were allocated to only one elementary school, one junior high and one high school or a special school in each prefecture. However, each year the budget was raised, and 3.5 billion yen was allocated for the project in 2000, which saw the placement of school counselors in a total of 2,250 schools (Murayama, 2001).

From this year, after completing the “Program to Subsidize School Counselor

Utilization Projects”, the “School Counselor Utilization Project”, which seeks to allocate school counselors to all 10,000 public junior high schools nationwide within 5 years, was introduced. In accordance with this project, in general, school counselors will work for 4 hours a day, 2 days a week and 35 weeks per year.

Until now, to work in a school as a school counselor, it was necessary to possess the qualification of a clinical psychotherapist, psychiatrist, or university teacher. However, as of 2000, the total number of clinical psychotherapists in Japan is approximately 7,000, and furthermore, many of them are already occupied in the fields of medical service, welfare, justice, industry, etc. Under such circumstances, difficulties are anticipated in realizing the government’s target. It will be necessary to ask for the cooperation of other people qualified as “school psychotherapists”, “certified counselors” and “certified school counselors” who have been trained and have experience in various academic societies and associations. In 2001, in the “School Counselor Utilization Project”, new provisions for school counselors were introduced by MEXT. It is stated that school counselors shall be certified as clinical psychotherapist or equivalent. These provisions have expanded opportunities to work as school counselors which had been only limited to those who were certified as clinical psychotherapist before the new provisions were enacted. Participation from outside will introduce a new wind of cooperation in school education. If, on the side of school counselors, there is an understanding

that “since we are not experts on school education, let’s make step-by-step efforts to deepen our understanding of school education while working there”, it will help realize a good foundation for joint cooperation with teachers.

At the same time, teachers working in schools need to be trained in counseling skills to be able to enhance their ability to provide student guidance and school counseling. To further promote the government project of school counselors, it is necessary to expand the range of qualified people who can work as school counselors without limiting it to only clinical psychotherapists. At the same time, it is also indispensable that teachers make efforts to explore the best way to cooperate with school counselors by changing their approach on how to relate to students in schools.

School counselors are experts on psychological therapy while teachers are experts on school education. Both groups, on an equal footing, should cooperate to share their own expertise through discussions on how to best support students. Despite the limited amount of time available (only two days a week), there are high expectations for school counselors to play broader roles including providing aids to students and parents, offering consultations (group sessions) to struggling teachers in schools, and Coordination of surrounding environment with local communities, and welfare and judicial bodies. (Nakano, 2000)

In fact, student problems that schools are

unable to deal with on their own are increasing. While being aware of their own limits, teachers should not give up on students. Instead, they must tackle such problems with the cooperation of experts such as those found in medical, welfare and judicial institutions and other consulting bodies. There is a high degree of expectation among school counselors to become important partners for teachers who are struggling to deal with students.

#### **4. Improving the Practice of Education – Theory of children, schools and teachers in the modern age**

##### **(1) Theory of children in the modern age**

Next, I would like to explore the theory of children (Kawai, 1995), schools and teachers in the modern age from the perspective of clinical pedagogy. As a first step in the practice and research of education, we need to understand the theory of children in the modern age, or in other words, it is important to think about how to view children today. We need to understand that, while children are trying hard to live their own lives in the tough adult society, they are also placed in a vulnerable state by being exposed to the negative side of adult society. Here, I would like to discuss children in this vulnerable state from perspectives of social structure and development of children.

First of all, children's linguistic ability has been declining in recent years. Instead of using language that describes their thoughts,

children tend to use physical language such as "being pissed off" or "being annoyed". Much of the time when they are using such phrases, they don't even know what pisses them off or what is annoying them. However, they are saying that they want their actual feelings to be understood.

Secondly, children's personal relationships are somewhat diluted. I am referring more to boys who are regarded as "childish and easy to handle" than girls who tend to form groups and are regarded as "difficult to handle" for teachers. Such girls are actually counseling each other within those groups, whereas, such boys seem to be more vulnerable as they wander alone in "a lonely and competitive society". In fact, I feel that adult males are also struggling with similar situations in society, hence the sharp increase in suicide among middle age men.

In the face of excessive competition and pressure from parents and teachers, children's self-esteem is damaged. When they encounter negative words or actions from parents or teachers, no matter how trivial it may seem to adults, boys may feel that their entire character is being rejected and are thus driven to despair. Today, we see an increasing trend of "toying with human lives" in the form of recent juvenile delinquencies. This phenomenon is seen as an extension of the vulnerability of children, one where their worry about being rejected and their despair are transformed into aggression. (Noda, 2000)

Thirdly, I would like to point out that

children are feeling anxiety about the future and as a result tend to withdraw from competition. Children know that studying hard for exams or entering a major company does not always guarantee them a happy and stable life in the future. On the other hand, the postwar generation that has survived a period of rapid economic growth, does not have confidence in other visions of the future or the ability to lay out a new “lifestyle to ensure a happy life” in the 21<sup>st</sup> century for their children. They tend to be caught in the “supremacy of their own children”, therefore, they continue to drive their children to study harder by telling them that, “you need to study hard as the future is full of uncertainties”.

Under a backdrop of “children who run away from learning” (Sato, 2000) thereby “irreparably rejecting academic ability” (Nishimura, 2001), and problems in the Education Ministry’s guidelines, there are children who struggle to find a new lifestyle in these uncertain times where little reward can be gained from simply studying hard in a stoic manner.

As a final point regarding the vulnerability of children, there is an ever increasing number of children who do not have the opportunity to learn at home through candid, face-to-face encounters with their parents. Instead, there are a number of children in troubled homes who are forced to worry about their parents, due to such things as being abused by their parents, being neglected by parents who are overwhelmed by their own troubled lives, being overprotected by their parents, or those from relatively wealthy homes who must

push themselves excessively to fulfill the high expectations of their parents, excessively pushing themselves to fulfill the parents’ high expectations.

As a result, their homes are not a place where they can feel at ease or comfortable, and they do not have opportunities to candidly confront their parents or raise objections. Consequently, schools have become a valuable place that can offer children the opportunity to express their pent-up anxieties and frustrations to teachers and friends with their limited expressiveness.

However, because their skills and ability to build human relationships with others are still immature and somewhat limited, their anxiety or frustration may sometimes be expressed in the form of “bullying or violence against the weak”, “the destruction of property” or “offensive language and violent behavior” towards the very teachers that the children wish to be supported by.

The above situation can lead to the function of the class being lost or breaking down. The problem is then how to find positive aspects of children whose behaviors seem mainly negative. (Kawai, 1996)

## **(2) Issues and challenges that today’s teachers have**

The second issue I would like to address regarding educational practice and research is challenges that teachers have today. The first point is how to understand the capacity of teachers and the goal of educational

practice. Should teachers attempt to lay the right tracks for students and properly set them on their way? Is that the main goal of educational practice, and should that be positioned as a core of teachers' capacity?

Education is an intentional activity and it is necessary for a teacher to have some specific targets in their educational practices. However, when there is a discrepancy between what a teacher wants to do and what the students expect to do, it is important that a relationship of mutual understanding is in place so that children can exercise their right to express their opinions and say, "That is not what I want. I want to do something else." How to listen and respond to students' opinions and find common ground after examining their opinions is one of the most important challenges we face. (Sakamoto, 1995) It is this that will form the core requirement of educational practice for teachers in the modern age.

The second point is to clarify and understand the process of the transformation of experienced teachers. Teachers as a group are dominated by those in their forties and fifties, especially in elementary schools. In particular, teachers in their forties now form the middle-level of teachers with a rich and varied array of experiences. Often, they have been required to act as leaders, but without the benefit of sufficient support from those following in their footsteps.

However, a large number of such teachers will near retirement in 5 to 10 years. Therefore, it is urgently necessary to identify

the process of their transformation. What kind of needs have they been faced with and how have they fulfilled them? How have they grown as teachers during their careers, and how have the ways they deal with children, parents and colleagues changed? Clarifying these processes and passing this know-how onto the next generation of educators will be critical to improving educational practices.

### **(3) Theory of schools in the modern age – create a link between student guidance and school counseling**

The third part of educational practice and research is the theory of schools in the modern age. It is important to introduce the ideas of "a school that is open to the regional community" and "a school that is a space of coexistence". (Fujita, 1996) In discussions on educational reform, ideas such as a school council or a regional human resource center have been proposed to promote the involvement of the regional community and parents in school education.

What is lacking, however, is a system where children themselves can participate in school development in order to create a better school system. For instance, the efforts of Tachibana Jr. High School in Odawara Municipality to involve its students in revising its school regulations is one of the specific examples that we can learn from. (Urano, 1999)

The second point is to have an attitude where you are always "ready to listen to the voices of children", and form a common awareness of how to reflect the voices of

children in actual practices. This also includes the practical issues that arise when integrating “acceptance and empathic understanding” and “guidance” in modern schools.

Other than teaching courses in classrooms, teachers have specific involvement with students when offering student guidance and school counseling. If we draw coordinate axes, we can plot “acceptance and empathic understanding” at the top end of the vertical axis, “request and instruction” at the bottom end, “individual” at the left end of the horizontal axis and “group” at the right end. Student guidance is one of the main pillars of school education, and is positioned on the “group” side. Student guidance has centered on ensuring that students follow school regulations and have a normal awareness, and providing “guidance” to students who commit acts of delinquency or have behavioral problems. So far, MEXT has used a narrow interpretation of the term “guidance” by employing the term “student guidance”. On the other hand, research organizations in the private sector have been using the term “lifestyle guidance” which is closer to the original intention of the term “guidance”. We make a clear distinction from MEXT about this point, because we believe that the focus of “guidance” should not be limited to students’ problematic behaviors or acts of delinquency. We think that teachers should deal with students using a wide overview of their daily lives, and believe that this is the only way for teachers to provide all of the necessary “guidance”.

In the revised educational guidelines, the emphasis is placed on the “enhancement and reinforcement of the guidance function” (MEXT, 1999). The new direction should not be limited to just reviewing the current “student guidance”, but should influence the entire school educational system. (Takahashi, 2000)

So far, school counseling has been positioned at the other end of spectrum to “student guidance”. In the abovementioned coordinate axes, school counseling is positioned on the “individual” side, for example, dealing with students who refuse to attend school or are maladapted to groups based on “acceptance and empathic understanding”. However, recently the conventional positioning of “student guidance” and “school counseling” has changed and there are more and more commonalities seen between them. In school counseling a move from the conventional “problem-solving approach” for an individual, to a “preventive and developmental” counseling approach for a group is now being highlighted (Kokubun, 2000). For instance, frequent school counseling can be provided to unstable and at-risk children who exhibit a lot of behavior problems. Or as a part of the efforts aimed at the entire class or grade, “career guidance” can be provided as a link to “searching for your own lifestyle”. Today, based on “acceptance and empathy”, school guidance is shifting towards a “preventive and developmental” approach that targets “groups”.

At the same time, student guidance is also shifting from its traditional group based



approach that sought to ensure compliance with school regulations and to deal with delinquent children, toward a more “individual” approach. Emphasis is now being placed on helping and understanding “individuals” through guidance based on “acceptance and empathy”. While guidance continues to emphasize the development of a group, equal importance is now being placed on “helping and understanding individuals”, thus making “guidance” similar to conventional school counseling. In the practice of school counseling, the awareness of “groups” is being increased while in student guidance, the awareness of “individuals” is being enhanced. School counseling and student guidance are now closely linked with each other.

Thus, the counseling division and student guidance division in a school should work together closely to watch over and care for children. Equal importance needs to be placed on using an “individual” approach and a “group” approach. In the future, “acceptance and empathy” and “guidance” will be completely integrated in the practice of education, and this structure can be realized only when the student guidance division and school counseling division are able to expand their shared commonalities and link with each other toward proper integration.

## **5. Demonstrate the Convention of the Rights of the Child in schools and classrooms – how to listen to and accept the voice of children**

### **(1) Demonstrating the Convention of the Rights of the Child in schools and classrooms**

In 1989, the United Nations enacted the Convention of the Rights of the Child. It is significant in that it provides that children shall be protected while at the same time stipulating that children themselves are the right holders. In 1994 Japan became the 158<sup>th</sup> country to ratify this Convention after deliberation in the diet

I try to employ the principles of the Convention of the Rights of the Child when developing my classes. This is one of the main pillars of my practice of education, and there are 3 specific points that I try to keep in mind when trying to adhere to the Convention.

The first one is the right for children to express their own opinions. I try to create a class atmosphere where students can freely exchange their own views and opinions. The second point is that of equal rights. Although the roles within a class may be shared, it is important that the relationships in a class be based on equality. The final point is the right of participation. No student in a class should ever be left out from any school event, learning activity or class activity. If there is a student who is not good at gymnastics or music, I try to ensure that he or she is never left out from an athletic meeting or music

contest. Furthermore, I try to ensure that no student is ever denied an opportunity at school because of his or her hairstyle or clothing.

From the viewpoint of school development, the key is to find a way to realize a system where children can participate together with the cooperation of teachers, school staff, the local community and parents. When promoting school and class development where the Convention of the Rights of the Child can be demonstrated, the important thing is “how to listen to and accept the voices of children”. Once, when I was in charge of a class in the second grade, I asked the students what they wanted from teachers and parents. Roughly categorized, they expressed the following 5 points: “do not scold or preach me without letting me have a chance to explain”, “do not make blind assumptions, suddenly loose your temper or slap me”, “listen to what I have to say and/or how I feel first”, “understand and acknowledge my good qualities”, and “trust me that I can get things right when I really have to”.

Of the 5 points, the last one is most noticeable in today’s children. This is their “message of independence”. It shows that although children want us to watch over them, they also want us to trust them more, and acknowledge that they are making efforts in their own way, instead of evaluating them on whether or not they are on the “right” track, as laid down by teachers.

## **(2) Relationship building between children and teachers and social skills**

I admit that even from a young age (twenties and thirties), I had a strong tendency to “undertake problem solving”. When a student came to talk to me about his/her problem, I usually gave a specific instruction saying, “I understand your problem. Let’s fix it in this way”. I was obsessed with the idea that since I was a teacher I must give them the “right” answer when they consulted me. I was caught up in a so-called “merit system” type of thinking. However, it did not work well at all. My advice often resulted in a backlash, as I sounded somewhat bossy. Sometimes I expected too much of the student, and this ended up driving him or her into a corner. Once, in a music contest, after I had failed to draw the best out of the students, I made an insensitive remark saying, “That was the worst performance I have ever heard.” which resulted in a significant backlash from the students. (Kasugai, 1995) After all the failures, I finally learnt the following: it is important to say “Would you tell me…” when there is something that you don’t know or understand, to say “I’m sorry” and apologize when you are wrong, and to use polite wording like “could you please…” when asking a student to do something.

Only after implementing the above, was I able to be my natural self when dealing with students. It is hard for adults to unreservedly apologize to children. To be able to do so, we may need assertion training (Hiraki, 2000) where we can learn how to build a relationship

by asserting ourselves without hurting other's feelings. Assertion training equips us with the social skill of being able to communicate your own thoughts while not hurting other's feelings. However, even if you learn this skill, you will not be able to practice it unless you have properly developed humane relationships.

How should we approach children in the modern age? I think there are two ways to approach children: one is to approach them from the "inside" (their mind) and the other is to approach them through "action". Both approaches are equally important and need to be integrated according to each child's stage of development.

I once said to a young teenage student whose self-identity had not been established that he was always playing around and that he should reflect on his own life to find himself. It was an impossible demand for a child. The student's reply was the following words of wisdom, "I am too busy for that!"

The support we offer needs to be in accordance with each child's stage of development. For young children it is necessary for adults to teach social skills step by step. We need to show them how to deal with people and what kind of actions we can take in specific circumstances. For example, "In this situation, it is appropriate to do this." "When you are wrong, say sorry." Mutual interaction with other people helps form positive relationships that will undoubtedly develop and enrich the minds of children.

### **(3) Schools and teachers that children are looking for**

When I was in charge of first graders, I asked them what kind of school or home they would like. According to the answers I received from them, they wanted teachers to "understand students' feelings", "make classes easy to understand", "be easy to talk to", "be impartial", and "praise them for doing well". Their requests for parents included, "eating meals together as a family", "laughing together as a family", "having more time to play", and "being non-violent". Usually, children would seldom be able to express such requests to their parents. I realized that children hold back such feelings when they come to school.

I once had discussions in a class of third graders on "what kind of school we are looking for in the 21<sup>st</sup> century", after studying the Convention of the Rights of the Child in a social studies class. Let me share with you some of the comments from the students.

"Minimize school regulations. Abolish almost all of them, except for the ones that are really necessary",

"Abolish the school uniform and allow us to wear our own clothes",

"Help us so that all students who wish to go to high school can",

"Improve the school facilities and equipment",

"Introduce a five-day week as soon as possible",

"Implement effective measures so that both bullies and bullied students can have decent

lives at school”,

“Create more opportunities for us to have psychological care and mental counseling”,

“Hold classes only in the mornings so that we can use the afternoons for ourselves”,

“Make school life more enjoyable”,

“Change bossy teachers into kind ones”,  
and

“Increase the number of teachers who understand our feelings.” (Kasugai, 1997)

Their voices represent the core problems facing the modern educational system, and show us the path to developing a school that demonstrates the Convention of the Rights of the Child. It is our task to seriously consider how to realize the children’s wishes in our education system.

I have also been asked to address the issue of how to help teachers who are struggling with various problems. Instead of trying to exclude such teachers, I have focused on using constructive criticism and mutual support to get the best out of teachers and help them grow. Once, when a teacher was struggling with disorder in his class, I suggested holding open classes in the same grade for one week so that anyone could observe any of the classes. Thus it was possible to attend other teachers’ classes. The idea was designed to clearly demonstrate the approaches of different teachers while considering the positions of other teachers. Teachers’ meetings were then used for subsequent discussion and feedback. In this way, each teacher was able to address various issues in a calm and positive manner, and received ideas from others who were facing

similar problems.

We also conducted a survey of all classes in the same grade. As a result, we received requests from the classes of all 9 subjects. The results of the survey were reviewed in the teachers’ meeting to discuss the current status and effective measures to improve the situation.

One critical point of the survey was the way it asked students to assess themselves. The questionnaire included “class evaluation” and “self assessment” sections. In my social studies class, I asked students to evaluate my classes and assess themselves at the end of each term for me to review and improve my classes. In the questionnaires, students never wrote a completely negative statement. They would usually say something like, “there are parts that I like, but I would like you to improve this part...” I was actually able to learn how to conduct better evaluations from my students.

## **6. Parent-Child Relationship That Encourages Children**

As I mentioned earlier, if there is anything that I do not know or do not understand I ask the children. Accordingly, I conducted a questionnaire entitled “Student Growth after 3years at Jr. High School” in my class of third graders. Here, I would like to show you some of their answers to the question, “What kinds of things do your parents do for you that makes you happy?” Their answers were; “they

encourage me and support my club activities”, “they do not scold me when I get a low score on an exam and say, ‘we know that you try hard. Keep working so that you can get a better score next time’”, “they always listen to me when I have problems. They try to understand me and think about my problems together. They give me encouragement and praise”, “They let me have the chance to assert myself. We have been able to construct a relationship in which I can talk to them about anything”, “They let me do what I want to do. They let me make my own decisions on which course I will follow in the future, and therefore, I can try something willingly”, “When I talk to them about my happy experiences, they say they are also happy for me”, and “They always stand up for me.”

Sometimes children may ask questions to their parents directly, for example, “When you gave birth to me, did you really want me?” or “Will you really protect me no matter what happens?” Children even question adults with negative behaviors. When I take charge of a class, at the beginning of the first semester, I make it a rule to intentionally say to my students, “I will be your teacher of this class for this year. As your teacher, I will make you this promise. I will protect you whatever happens. To do so, I may make requests of you, scold you or even apologize with you if necessary. However, I will protect each and every one of you.” I have come to understand that this promise helps some children feel secure. Parents also encounter some occasions where

they have to apologize to others for what their children have done. If your child has done something bad to a friend, you go to the friend’s house and say, “We are very sorry” and apologize together. Always going with your child when he/she has to apologize to others for what he/she has done shows your desire to protect your children.

Other answers were; “My parents have done a lot of things for me. My mother prepares a packed lunch for me. My parents always take care of me when I am sick. My mother put a note in my chopstick case when I took my high school entrance exam, and when I phoned my mother after my high school entrance exam, she gently said to me that she believed that I had done my best in the exam.”.

What kinds of things can adults say to please children? The answer to this question can often be found in the conversations between grandparents and their grandchildren. Grandparents are always ready to listen to what their grandchildren have to say. If their grandchildren say something, they listen and acknowledge it, saying, “Yeah, yeah. It must have been tough.” If grandchildren do something to help their grandparents, the grandparents will say, “Thank you. That was a big help” and praise them. When children know that they are being counted on, they can be proud of themselves. And when they are appreciated for what they have done, children feel rewarded. This is exactly what I felt when I grew up planting and harvesting rice.

Unfortunately, teachers and parents do not often convey words of appreciation to children. Only when adults acknowledge their children's efforts and show them respect, will they be able to say to them, "good job", "you must be tired", "you worked hard", "thank you for your hard work", or "why don't you take a break".

However, most of the time, adults tend to say, "Do your best" instead of "Well done!" Children quite like to be told to do their best. It often encourages them. However, saying only, "Do your best" can imply, "You are not doing your best", "I can't approve of such work", or "you can do better than that".

Children, on the other hand, have to live in a world where they wonder when they can have a break or when they can receive the approval of adults. Therefore it is natural for children to feel frustrated and become unable to control their anger. In particular, so-called "good children" who are excessively sensitive to their parents' feelings tend to push themselves harder to respond to their parents' expectations. To show your sympathy to children in such words as "you've done well", "you must be tired", and "why don't you have a break?" shows that you appreciate children's hard work no matter what outcome is produced. Showing such appreciation nurtures children's self-affirmation and their sense of self-control and thus they are better able to control their tempers.

## **7. Redefining Teachers' Ability to Practice Education – Through Specific Educational Practices**

### **(1) Children rising above the principle of competition ? In sport, losing has equal significance to winning**

Educational practices are similar to raising a child, in which things do not go as parents expect. We often say that we "make dramas" in school education, but in reality we are facing a series of unexpected happenings and accidents. The best part of educational practice is how to make those happenings become impressive dramas. For example in a school athletic meeting, it is common for a student to fall over in a sprint, even though he or she is running as fast as they can, or for a student to trip over in a centipede race, even though they were fine in practice. Such accidents happen because the students are nervous.

When teachers assess children's performance in school events, it is difficult for them to determine what to be evaluated and how. Since teachers themselves are often also caught up in the principles of competition, we tend to adhere to the results of school events, such as athletic meetings or music contests. Therefore, many teachers often pressure children not to make mistakes. The same was true for me. However, in my mid-forties I was finally able to break free from the results of competition and evaluate students based on the efforts they made. This was made possible by seeing the numerous times children were willing to support their friends by saying,

“don’t worry, you did your best!”

Once in a relay race, one student failed to pass the baton and dropped it. He repeated the same mistake he had made during practice. Seeing his mistake, I could not help saying, “What does he think he is doing? What was all the practice for?” Even though I kept telling others that the process should be evaluated not the result, I still had a winning-is-everything attitude inside. But, another student who was watching the race with me said right away, “You can’t get angry at him.”. When I asked him what I should say to the runner instead, the student said I should say nothing to him. When the runner came back to us, the student was trying to cheer up his down-hearted friend and telling him that he’d done his best. Then, I understood how much a child’s feelings can be saved by such kind words and actions. My students were trying not to reject their friend’s efforts and to show as much consideration for them as possible. It was evident that they had already gone beyond the principle of competition.

If teachers only adhere to the results of competition, the same attitude will also be encouraged in the minds of students, and this could lead to the situation where some students, such as those who cannot run fast, are not good at sports, have a handicap, or are bad at singing, may be excluded from activities. Consequently, some of those students will refuse to go to school at the time of such school events. From this point of view, I would like to emphasize that process

evaluation is extremely important.

Last year when I was in charge of the third graders, our class was victorious in the school athletic meet. When I was in charge of the second graders the previous year, my class finished in last place. The class next to ours, which a younger teacher was in charge of, gained more than 10 prizes while our class did not receive any. It was the first time for me to be ranked at the very bottom, and to be honest, I had a tough time accepting the fact. However, I found my students were so happy that the entire class could share a sense of unity. My students taught me a very important lesson.

A comment from a female student in the third grade: “I can’t run fast or do anything remarkable, however, I will remember, until the day I become senile, that I participated in the last athletic meet in my junior high school days as a member of this class, and that my class was victorious. . When I shared the joy of winning with everybody else in this class, I shouted within my mind that, ” This class is terrific!” and I felt so grateful that I had been a member of this class. I found myself jumping up and down and clapping hands, not because our class won, but because an acute feeling that I was a member of this wonderful class made me so happy. Until the end of the athletic meeting, I had not noticed the feelings that I have expressed in this comment. However, after recognizing how I felt as a result of this experience, I think that I have become more mature than before. I am happy to know that I still have such a pure heart.”

Comments from my students in the second grade: "Although my class finished in last place, there is no regret because I know that I have done my best. Now I know that to lose a competition when I try as hard as I can and to lose it when I cut corners are not the same at all." (from a male student), "Right before the athletic meeting started, all the girls in the class put everybody's hands together, made a circle and cheered us on by saying, "We will do it!" . Although our class finished at the very bottom, I believe I have grown through this experience." (from a female student), "The bitter feeling that although we did our best we failed to get a good result can only be shared with my classmates. But I am sure that this experience will turn into a good memory." (from a female student), "During the race, we encouraged each other saying, "Don't rush!" and "Take long strides!" The result was not a good one, but I feel good because the entire class worked together as one." (from a male student)

After I read these comments, I realized that the students were a notch above their teacher.

## **(2) There is no accompanist! – The last music contest in Jr. High School**

We encountered an unexpected happening in the music contest when I was in charge of the third graders. There was no piano accompanist in our class. This was a mistake made by the teachers during the fine-tuning of class allocation after teachers were allocated to each class. At the beginning of April when each new semester begins, a class

representative and some of the girls came to me saying that there was no accompanist in our class for the music contest in October. When I suggested borrowing an accompanist from another class, they resented my suggestion and said that they did not want to ask another class's help and that they wanted to handle this problem by themselves. Eventually, they decided to sing a cappella, however, the song that had been chosen was a problem. The song I had recommended happened to be an anthem as many of the songs that are sung a cappella are anthems. It so happens that there was a female student in the class who was unable to sing that song for religious reasons. Knowing the student's problem, a female class representative said to me, "We can't choose that song, because we need everyone's participation in the last music contest in junior high school."

At last, a song called "Mori no Karibito Allen(When Allen-A-Dale Went A-Hunting)", that had been recommended by the music department, was chosen by the students. I was concerned as to whether or not this would go successfully, but in the end I agreed with their decision. Since it was their music contest and I wanted to respect their decision. While none of my suggestions were adopted, the process of making their own decision seemed to imply important points of educational practices, such as the pride of the students, consideration of others, a commitment to the participation of all classmates, expressing their objection to the teacher's suggestions, their right to self-determination, and how to come to an agreement with the teacher.



There were many times when I thought about these points during the process of deciding the song for the music contest.

Despite my concerns, the students did a great job in the music contest. Although they finished second, what they actually gained was something much more precious. I was impressed with the students' faces that looked so happy and proud of themselves. The following is an extract from their thoughts on graduating.

"I love 3-1! I feel like shouting it 100 times towards the setting sun. On the first day of practice, I thought, "Where is everyone's motivation?", but we all gradually got serious. And when I saw the students who had been looking at the floor while singing were starting to raise their heads, I felt sure that we were going to make it. On the day of the contest, I'm not sure why, but I felt extremely anxious about singing our song. I felt that I wanted everyone to hear our song. While waiting in front of the rehearsal room, some boys and I were practicing by ourselves, some other boys and girls started to join us, and before I knew it, the entire class was singing together. In the rehearsal room we sang at the top of our voices, and I felt so confident that we were going to win first place. When we handed a collection of letters to our teacher to surprise him before going on stage, I was moved to see him crying. Then, we went directly onto the stage, and I felt that I just loved this feeling of rising tension and I sang my heart out during the performance." (from a male student)

After the class finished rehearsing, a class representative handed me a collection of letters from the class saying, "We will do our best today. Please watch us on the stage". They prepared the collection of letters to surprise me. I could not help crying right before their performance. It was my very first time to have such an experience in my life as a teacher.

There were comments in the letters that said, "I will do my very best to sing today", "Mr. Kasugai, watch us and trust us that we will make it", "We will show you our best performance, so good it will give you goose bumps" and "Thank you for encouraging us. We will show you our best performance today."

There was one other happening behind the scenes that I was unaware of. Although most of the class was doing everything they could to make the music contest a success, there were some girls who were not enthusiastic about participating in the music contest. The male class representative thought about what he could do to ensure everyone did everything they could and decided to call the girls. He talked with those girls as well as some of the girls with leading parts in our piece. The following day, we saw a visible change in the attitudes of those girls, who now started to sing in a positive manner. This further encouraged the other members of the class, including the girls with leading parts and the female class representative. I have noticed that sometimes among girls, it can be difficult to say delicate things to each other, and sometimes it can be easier for boys to say

such things to girls who are more prepared to accept what's said by the boys. Mutual support between genders serves as a good experience during adolescence and in our later lives.

### **(3) Sitting with children with worries and troubles – an unexpected love letter from a student**

When I was in charge of the second graders, one day after school when there was no club activity because an end of term exam was scheduled for the following week, F (a female student) looked worried and would not leave the classroom. Actually, I had been informed earlier by another female student that F had been bullied in the girls' room earlier that day. I also knew who the bully was. However, not mentioning that someone had told me what had happened, I said to her that she did not look well and asked her what had happened. We talked for 30 minutes in the classroom where I repeatedly asked, "What's wrong?" and she kept telling me that she could not say what had happened. In the end she thanked me and finally left the classroom. I did not find out exactly what had troubled her, but I let her go believing that I should not demand that she tell me about her problems when she was obviously trying so hard to keep it inside and handle it by herself. A few days later, I received a letter from her; "Dear Kimi (you), Thank you for asking what my problems were. Before, I could talk to my friends about my problems, but I just can't do that this time. I feel that it would not work out even if I could talk about it to my parents, so I thought that I could not talk about it with

anyone. It was nice of you to ask me about my problems. Thank you. When things get better, I may come back and talk to you about it. From Boku (me, first-person pronoun used by men)."

She referred to herself as "Boku (me)". This seems to be an indication of her desire to look androgynous, which is often seen in female junior high school students. Anyway, it was good for F that I was just sitting with her when she had some problems. It is important that when a child has some worries, someone is sitting beside them or trying to understand their problems. When I deal with children, I have said that I try not to "undertake problem-solving". However, sometimes, girls come to me to talk about troubles in their relationships with their friends. After listening to what they have to say, I always ask them what they want me to do for them. In many cases, children say that they don't want me to do anything at all. I usually ask them if they are sure about it, but they just thank me and go home. Then I let them go, telling them to come back if things get worse or when they feel like talking to me again. There are some students who actually come back to me when their problems seem to be too much for them to handle. If they have someone who can listen to their problems, they are able to face their own issues and challenges. They know that they have to deal with their own problems. And if they know that they have someone who understands and cares for them, they are able to find the energy to confront their problems. Such an approach is important

when teachers are dealing with parents. Instead of giving them specific advice or instructions, by listening to what parents have to say, teachers can help parents understand their own problems and confront those problems. We help parents to face up to themselves as well as their children and families. Needless to say, if there is any problem in the school approaches or responses, we must listen to the parents carefully and take responsibility for finding a solution.

**(4) “Essay on our Future Career”, one of the activities of “Future Career Planning Program”, provided students with a good opportunity to re-encounter with classmates–**

Starting from 2002, the “Integrated learning period” will be fully implemented. Without being limited to the 4 examples of “global understanding, environment, information, and welfare and health” illustrated by MEXT in 1999, I believe that it is important to further develop the practice of the integrated studies that has so far been nurtured in each school.

From this point of view, let me talk about “Essay on our Future Career” which is one of the activities carried out as a part of “Future Career Planning Program”.

We, teachers, have systematically promoted programs for students to determine their future course during the 3 years of junior high school, instead of merely just providing students with guidance for high school entrance exams. Specifically, the programs

include “Work study of welfare”, “Essay on Parent-Child interaction” (1<sup>st</sup> grade), “On-site workplace learning”, “Seminar for determining one’s future course” (2<sup>nd</sup> grade) and “Essay on one’s future course” (3<sup>rd</sup> grade), etc. (Kasugai, 1999a).

From the latter half of the second semester of the third grade, all classes in the third grade were introduced to the “Essay on one’s future course”. In the latter half of the second grade, classmates tend to pursue their separate ways to prepare for high school entrance exams. At that time, it is significant for all students to write and think about “their worries and hopes for their future course” or “their own future” in essays. In this half-year program, all students share their essays with the other students. Each student reads his or her own essay aloud in front of everyone, and classmates write encouraging comments and provide feedback on the essay. Messages from classmates are collected and given to the student. During this program, students can gain a new understanding of themselves and each other. They rediscover their friends through the internal interactions common to the issue of determining their future course and consequently the human relationships within each class are strengthened. This could not possibly be done by the teacher’s efforts alone.

Last year, during a period of class activity, I invited my former third grade students from 3 years ago. At the beginning of the class, I asked those former students to talk about how they had felt in the program of “Essay

on one's future course" when they were in the third grade. While listening to them, the students in my class were all ears and sparkling eyes. After that, 2 students from my class read aloud their own essays. One of them, G (a female student), expressed for the first time what was really bothering her inside. She loves animals and wants to become a veterinarian, but she was not sure whether that was the right direction for her to pursue. The following is part of her essay:

"Since I have grown up and begun thinking about my future, I really do not know if this is the right direction for me to go. Someone inside me keeps whispering to me that, 'you seem to have chosen this course because your parents wanted you to. Are you sure that you really want to go to this high school and this university that you have chosen? Have you conducted enough research on those schools and sufficiently considered if they are the right schools that you really want to go to? If not, you are just running on the track that was laid by your parents'. After thinking this, I became nervous and uneasy before the program for determining my future course and the career guidance session. I was unstable inside and often had quarrels with my family. I am still asking myself if I made the right decision in choosing the high school, and wondering if there are other alternatives. Recently, I asked my parents to fill out the second questionnaire about my future course. I said to them that I want to train dogs, but my parents told me that I would not be able to earn enough to make a living by training dogs and wrote something else in the questionnaire sheet. I know that they care

about me a lot, but I feel disappointed and do not know how I can stick to my own wishes."

After the essay was read, all the students wrote comments and gave them to G. The three former students encouraged her by saying: "We kept the comments from my classmates and read them from time to time especially when we had difficult times in the high school. They are truly encouraging. We hope that you also create friendship with your classmates."

As the case above illustrates, being a coordinator is one of the most important roles of a teacher. In order to benefit from the local community, their parents, and former students and use their help in the best possible way, I have placed importance on continuing relationships with students even after graduating from school.

## **8. What can be done in schools to encourage fresh encounters with children?**

Finally, I would like to touch upon 9 points concerning what we can do in schools when we are faced with children who are part of the modern age. (Kasugai, 2001)

The first point is to introduce fun and enjoyable approaches to restore lost childhoods. To deepen the interaction with children, we can introduce games with a lot of physical contact, or create enjoyable approaches.

The second point is to emphasize the process

rather than the result when evaluating the efforts of children. If evaluation only focuses on the results, children's efforts are not encouraged. Only when the entire class works closely together as one in an athletic meeting or a musical contest, can feelings of excitement and enjoyment be created. This illustrates how "differences do not exist in efforts."

The third point is to acknowledge the diversity of students in a class. Teachers do not have to follow the conventional group forming method where a class is divided into 6 small co-gender groups. For instance, we can let students freely form groups of the same gender on field trips and other occasions. There can be around 10 groups in a class.

The forth point is to promote school activities where internal interactions can take place. As the same can be said of the "Essay on parent-child interaction", it is actually not easy to find opportunities for parents and children to interact unless the opportunity is intentionally set up. (Kasugai, 1999b) It is also rare to have interactions among students in terms of their future direction.

The fifth point is not to "undertake problems solving", but to sit with a child who has worries and troubles. As I mentioned earlier when I talked about F the female student that gave me the letter that said, "Thank you for listening to my problem. From Boku (first-person pronoun used by men)"

The sixth point is to "integrate acceptance and guidance". What do we request from children? "Lives and human rights", "labor and cooperation", and "learning and time management" are my themes as a teacher. It is important for a teacher to have something that he/she can cling to while being flexible enough to change him/herself. Without it, teachers will simply compromise themselves to appeal to the students, instead of integrating acceptance, empathy and guidance.

The seventh point is that even after teachers manage to restore functions of a class that were once broken down, they need to ensure not to further tighten control over children. When children start to become disciplined, teachers are often tempted to tighten control over them. For instance, teachers tend to mold students into cookie-cutter patterns in terms of their hairstyle and clothing. However, if teachers strengthen control over students, at the same time, teachers themselves will be micromanaged in terms of how to provide students with guidance etc.

We should keep it in our minds that there is a positive chance in such periods for us to implement creative educational practices rather than to tighten control over children.

The eighth point is to "respect the process of children's self-determination". Teachers should respect what students decide by themselves, while making sure to provide them with information and advice. It also means to listen to and accept "objections" raised by children and to respect their right to express their own opinions. If we prioritize

what we want to do first, we may be caught in the “operationism of education” (Takagaki, 1998). Thus, periodic self-inspection is required to check that what we do for children really fits the children’s wishes and/or needs. Conducting self-inspections will prevent us from becoming caught up in control-oriented education.

The last point is that teachers do not have to act as shining examples of adults in front of children. Sometimes an adult may simply be someone who thinks about a child’s problems with them, gives them enough time to worry about their own troubles, listens to and understands them, and even sometimes someone who disagrees with them.

These are the approaches that teachers and parents must adopt when dealing with children, instead of forcing ourselves to act as shining examples of adults.

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