

An Alternative Approach on Career Education for University Students: Comparative Action Research on "Ba" Workshop in India and in Japan

Atsushi Takei^{a*}

Department of Advanced Practice in School Education
836, Ohya, Suruga, Shizuoka 422-8529, Japan
*mail: eatakei@ipc.shizuoka.ac.jp

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this report is to demonstrate needs and possibilities of new approach on career education for university students. Career education curriculum of university, in general, organized by goal oriented approach: typically consists of (1) setting a foresight, (2) analyze environment, (3) finding career goals, (4) setting action plans.

These goal oriented approaches, however, are not very persuasive simply because we know by our experience that our life is unpredictable and sometimes enriched by uncertainties, as are sometimes called ‘serendipity.’

The reporter has been developed an alternative approach for career education both in theory and in practice in which uncertainties are used as constructive factors. A key concept of this approach is ‘Ba.’ ‘Ba,’ (in Japanese and Chinese) literally means ‘spot’ in daily usage, but it is philosophical term as well. ‘Ba’ is highlighted also in theory of knowledge management recently.

The report consists of three parts. First, the reporter propounds arguments of career education. Second, the reporter shows his approach and analyzes outcomes of the workshops conducted in Delhi University, India and in Shizuoka University, Japan. Third the reporter poses implications on university career education.

Keyword: ‘Ba,’ Career Education, India, Japan

1. Questions to Career Education

1.1 Career Education in India and in Japan

(1) Career Education in Japan

Much emphasis is given to the needs of career education in Japan these days. This is partly because the needs to face ‘knowledge based society’ and partly because the increasing number of so called ‘NEET’ (not in education, employment or training) or young people in insecure working arrangements.

Current policies of MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology) for the promotion of career education vary from elementary levels to

higher education levels. In elementary school, local community based attempts for career education is promoted and supported by board of education in each municipality. In secondary school, an attempt called ‘Career Start Week’ in which students have working experiences in that attempt has introduced (Takei 2009).

Whereas in contrast with the emphasis to the idea, curricula and materials used in schools are very limited in number. There are no professionals in Japan such as career consultant in US schools. Apart from some of the advanced attempts (for ex. Yamazaki 2013), not much skills and programs are accumulated in practical field and have been left in the hand of teachers. Therefore, it might be fair to say that the situation is still being in a state of “embarking on the road less traveled” (Fujita 2011).

(2) Career Education in India

Indian situation is even more behind in career education. The word ‘career education’ is not very common till lately in school education. However, there are some movements to bring this concept into education in recently.

For example, Indian Career Education & Development Council (ICEDC) was just established in 2014 with support of the Australia India Council to create awareness and demand for career education and development in schools. The vision of ICEDC was described as ‘to create a conducive platform for government, industry, academia and community to engage with schools in a practical and meaningful way, to enhance the capability, professionalism of career practitioners in India, in order to help every young person leaving school have knowledge, skills, confidence to self-manage their career journey and have a successful, happy and balanced life¹.’

The career education in India is just state of ‘crack of dawn.’ We have to assume university students have never experienced career education in most cases.

1.2 Questions to Career Education

For the reason of poor accumulations on practical knowledges, the models of career education in universities are tend to be imported from western scheme or practices in business training (see for ex. Ministry of Health Labor and Welfare, 2014) in Japan.

As a result, career education curriculum, in general, organized by goal oriented approach: typically consists of following four elements.

- (1) Setting a foresight: the students need to know about what are they searching for in their jobs by checking up tests or meeting with a career counselor.
- (2) Analyze environment: they have to learn about the variety of industries and the chances to approach these career path, which sometimes include job experiences and internships.
- (3) Finding career goals: they have set career goals so that they are able to find focal point of their effort and set action plans to achieve that.

(4) Setting action plan: they have to organize sets of actions to approach the goals, which usually include opportunities to improve their competencies. These goal oriented approaches, however, are not very persuasive simply because we know by our experience that our life is unpredictable and sometimes enriched by uncertainties as Krumbolts et al (2002) pointed out.

2 Contents of the Workshops

2.1 Outline of the Workshops

The workshops are conducted in two collages in Delhi University, India (2014, 2015) and Shizuoka University, Japan (2014). Participants in Indian workshops are undergraduate students (approx. age. 19-21). Collage A, a workshop conducted in 2014, is for middle academic level women college. Participants are education major and most of them are wish to be a teacher in future. Collage B, a workshop conducted in 2015, is for high academic level women college. Participants are sociology major and many of them go to business sector or higher study in future. Shizuoka University is a national university which has been undertaking a central role in the promotion of school education in the prefecture. The participants joined in this program are in the first year in mister's program (approx. age. 22-23), conducted in 2014. The workshops are same in basic structure.

The aims of the workshops are defined as follows:

- ① Consider the limitations of Educational Science
- ② Discuss how we can help students to face "Accidental Nature" of Life.

There are three sections in the program.

- ① Session 1 Concept of 'Ba' and its Significance (approx. 90 min.)
- ② Session 2 Application of "Ba": Art of Cultivation (approx. 90 min.)
- ③ Session 3 Small Reports and Free Discussions (approx. 30 min.)

Worksheets and questionnaires are distributed to all the participants and whole class room has organized with considerations of open atmosphere and frequent communication between participants.

Outline of the workshops are as explained bellow.

2.2 Session 1: Concept of 'Ba' and its Significance

(1) Introduction

After brief introduction of the instructor, the workshop starts with tricky question: "Now I am studying in this university because of --- 1) my own will, capacity or effort, 2) the environment, happenstance or fate, 3) I can't answer." The participants are requested to answer to this question and the results are shared in the classroom instantly.

This question is meant to detach participants' thought from daily studies and to get a 'bird's eye view' to their career life. It is meant that this question functions as an icebreaking as well.

(2) Conceptual Comparison

In the next stage, participants are asked very challenging task. Watching two videos available on the net, participants are requested to compare two well-known speakers especially focusing on their cognitive framework. One is Bill Gates presentation in TED talk in 2009², and the other is Steve Jobs' commencement speech at Stanford University in 2005³.

They both are giants in IT industry, and collage dropouts as well. Nevertheless they are holding quite contrast philosophies as are known widely. The participants are requested to find 'axis' to set each other off well. They are expressing their views to education and career in these videos based on their own philosophy.

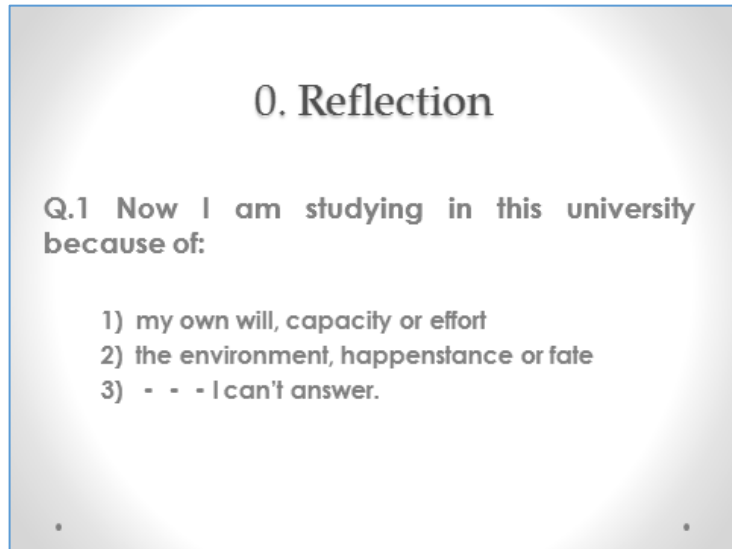


Figure 1. Introduction

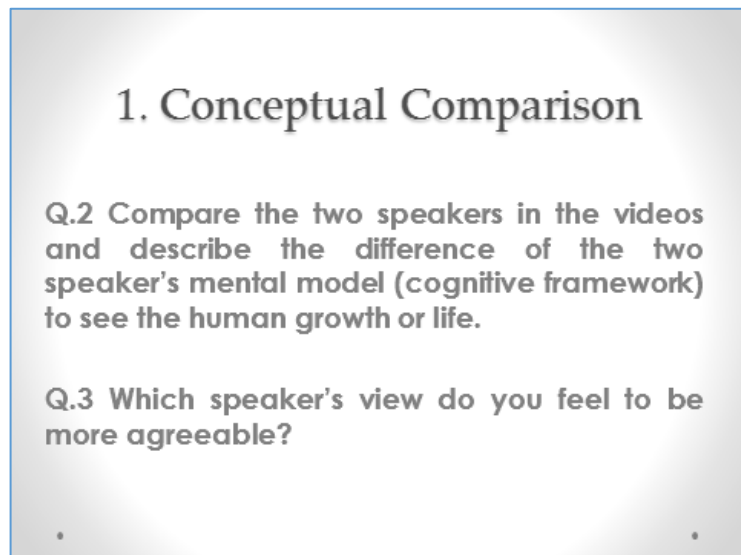


Figure 2. Conceptual Comparison

After brief sharing of the results among the participants, the instructor shows his analysis. Bill Gates view represents evidence based, systematic vies to the education, and therefore, perfectly fitted into the goal oriented theory generally used in management (Figure 3) theories.

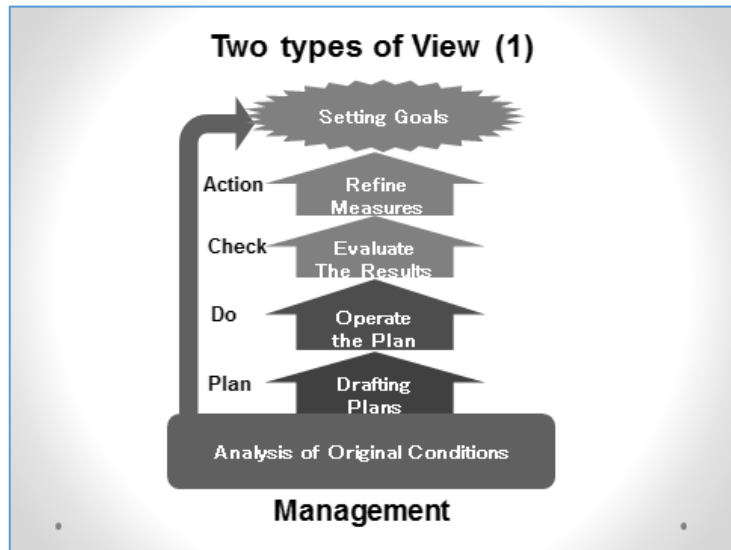


Figure 3. Management

Steve Jobs' view, however, is hard to be fitted into theoretical framework and often seemed as reckless in his view though his speech is more appealing to more participants than Bill Gates' One.

His career is considered to be blessed by many serendipities and most of his breakthrough was made with the help of unexpected accidents such as college dropout, fired by company, and sentenced death. These accidents were helped to give new shapes in his careers as results as is illustrated in figure 4 according to his speech.

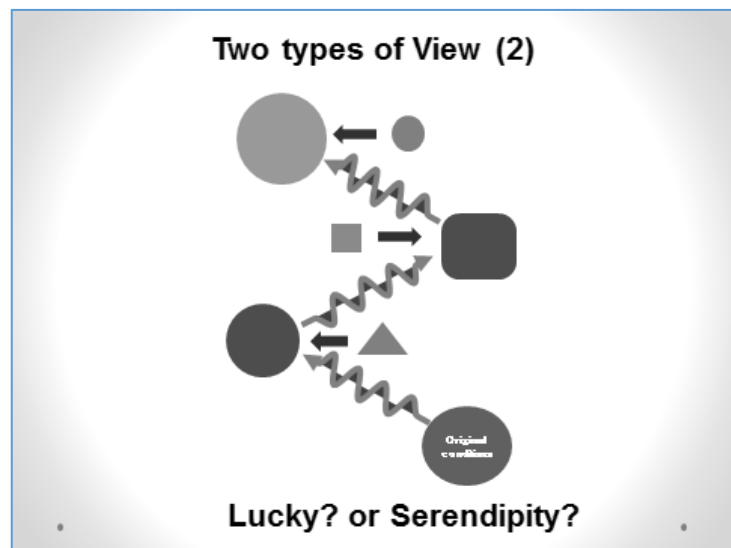


Figure 4. Another Image of Career

Many participants face a dilemma in this point. Many of them feel their career is enriched by the happenstances. However, they do not have proper paradigm to understand this phenomena.

(3) Concept of 'Ba'

The concept of 'Ba' is used to uncover the mystery of this dilemma. The word 'Ba' stands for a 'place' or 'spot' in literal. There are many writings related to this concept, including 'topos' in Greek philosophy and 'Basho' in Nishida Philosophy.

The author believes that the easiest way to convey this concept is to give a thought on

the origin of this word.

Chinese character 'Ba' is a combination of 'soil,' 'sun,' 'rise up,' and 'colors' (Figure 5). Therefore 'Ba' originally means ground with colors when the sun rose up.

The connotation of this word, the instructor tries to emphasize in these workshops, is 'acting field.' This is just as many worms, microbes and plants are start activated when the sun rise up and the ground wormed up.

To convey is connotation, the instructor asks to imagine that scenery to the participants so that they can feel the connotation of this word.

Then, the instructor shows his image and application of that on the basis of figure 4. Then the image of figure 4 changes as more persuasive model to construct his/her career plan.

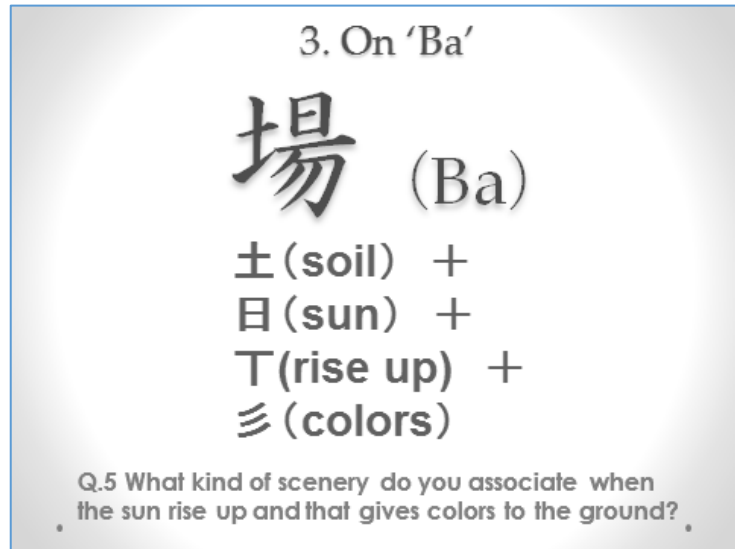


Figure 5 Concept of 'Ba'

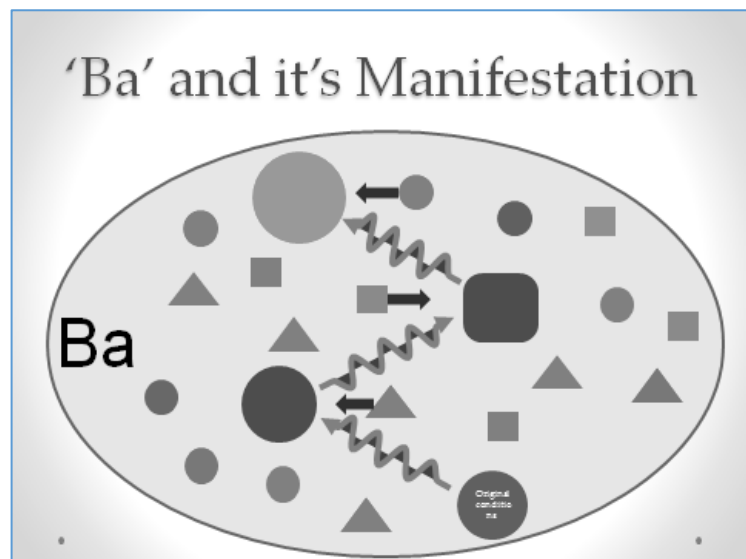


Figure 6 Career image in 'Ba'

2.3 Application of "Ba": Art of Cultivation

(1) A training to imagine beneath the ground

The second session is to apply the concept of 'Ba' to real life. First task participants requested to think is: "What if you casted away in Isolated Island and have to crop by yourself in order to survive?"

This question is meant work as a clue to think about 'What they do not know.' They come to think that they can act on 'What they do not know' by plowing, observing and tasting sprouts come out of ground and so on. This questioning works as creating

readiness to the following tasks.

Secondly, showing left side slide in Figure 7, the instructor attracting the attention of their cognition and compare that with the image of right slide. This is meant to bring their attention to the invisible realm.



Figure 7 What's Beneath the Ground?

(2) A hint from Aikido

As a final task in session 2, the participants are requested to find features of a performer seen in video⁴ of Aikido (one of the Japanese martial arts). The video is showing performance of Gozo Shioda, a master (in the past) of Aikido.

The key of this video is that the master is fighting enemy without much power. Rather he uses the enemy's power to fight against enemies.

This work is to help participants to expand their imagination to the meanings of the unexpected accidents might happen in their career in future. They can change unexpected happenstances as elements which might result in enrich their life.

The workshops are concluded with the open discussion in the participants after answering to the questionnaires (see appendix).

4. Quiet Observation
(Listening)

Q.6 What do you find in the movement of the performer?

A Hint from 'Aikido'
'The strongest technique is to become friends with the person who has come to kill you.'

(Gozo Shioda)

Figure 8. A hint rom Aikido

3 Outcomes from the workshops

Figure 9 is results of the participants' evaluation according to the factors (total answer of three workshops). Though the sample member is insufficient to prove the efficiency, it is estimated that the workshops have served the participants' needs.

It is notable that the mark is especially high in questions asking originalities of the workshop: such as 'new ideas,' 'creativities,' and 'interests'.

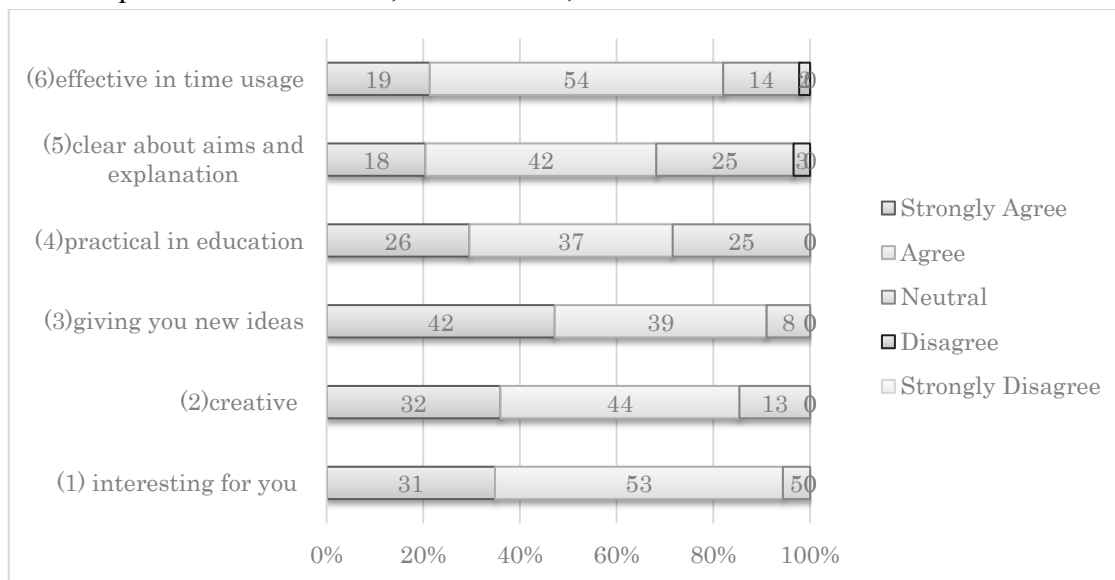


Figure 9 Participants' Evaluation of the Seminar (1): According to the factors (N=88)

Following figure 10 is total evaluation of the workshops according to the occasion. Not much are evident since each figure is based on very limited in number of the samples. However it is notable that the mark is higher in Indian participants than Japanese in general. Therefore, it is not valid to assume the idea works only in particular cultural settings at present.

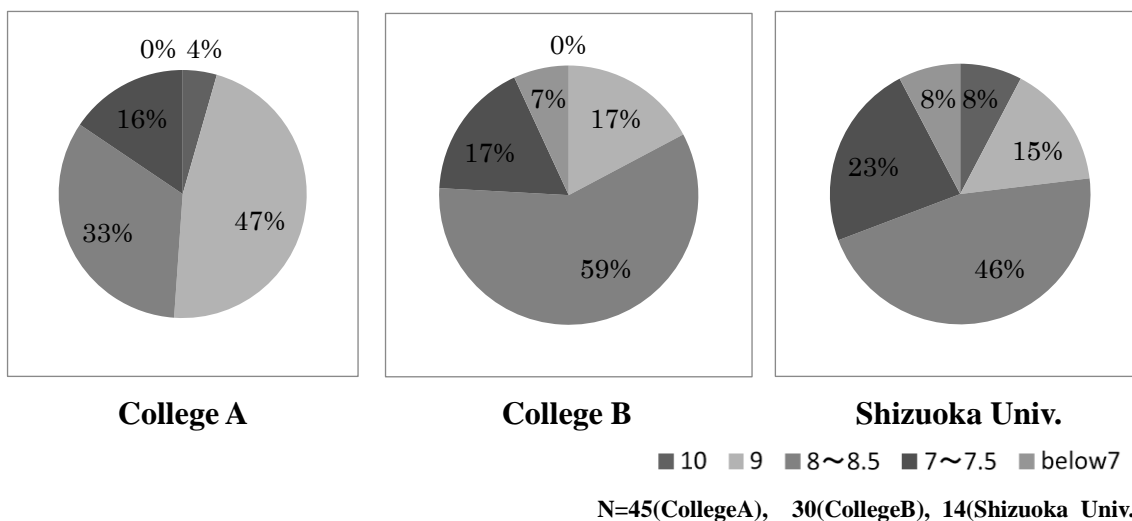


Figure 10 Participants' Evaluation of the Seminar (2): Mark the whole seminar out of 10 points

4 Implications

The attempt is still in initial stage. I have to admit that the action researches are very limited in quality of data so far. With all these defects, following two points are able to be suggested from these attempts.

Firstly, though ideas of this approach are inspired by Japanese (or Mandarin) concept of 'Ba,' it is suggested that the idea can be used in other cultural settings where there is no equivalent concept to this word. Further explorations in different settings are to be made in order to build up for general use of this approach.

Secondly, regarding to image creation in career education, diffusing approach is no less important than focusing approach in career education. The experience of appeared to be most effective in opening up flexible image about their future which tends to be neglected in the goal oriented approach. This maybe more true in the society where peoples career life is embedded in the social structure.

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APPENDIX

<p style="text-align: right;">Seminar on 'Ba' and Education</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Name or ID _____ age() male / female</p> <h3 style="text-align: center;">WORKSHEET</h3> <p>Q.1 Now I am studying in this university because of:</p> <p>1) my own will, capacity 2) the environment, 3) ... I can't answer. or effort. happenstance or fate.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/></p> <p>Q.2 Compare the two speakers in the videos and describe the difference of two speaker' mental model (cognitive framework) to see the human growth or life.</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="width: 50%;">Speaker A</th> <th style="width: 50%;">Speaker B</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="height: 150px;"></td> <td style="height: 150px;"></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Speaker A	Speaker B			<p>Q.3 Which speaker's view do you feel to be more agreeable?</p> <p>1) Speaker A 2) speaker B 3) I can't answer.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/></p> <p>Reason</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 20px; width: 100%;"></div> <p>Q.4 Do you expect 'the day educationists dreams come true'?</p> <p>1) Yes 2) No 3) I can't answer.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/></p> <p>Reason</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 20px; width: 100%;"></div> <p>Q.5 What kind of scenery do you associate when the sun rise up and that gives colors to the ground?</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 50px; width: 100%;"></div> <p>Q.6 What do you find in the movement of the performer?</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 50px; width: 100%;"></div>																																						
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<p style="text-align: right;">Seminar on 'Ba' and Education</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Name or ID _____ age() male / female</p> <h3 style="text-align: center;">QUESTIONNAIRE</h3> <p>1. The seminar was:</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center;"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Strongly Agree</th> <th>Agree</th> <th>Neutral</th> <th>Disagree</th> <th>Strongly Disagree</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>(1) interesting for you</td> <td><input type="radio"/></td> <td><input type="radio"/></td> <td><input type="radio"/></td> <td><input type="radio"/></td> <td><input type="radio"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>(2) creative</td> <td><input type="radio"/></td> <td><input type="radio"/></td> <td><input type="radio"/></td> <td><input type="radio"/></td> <td><input type="radio"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>(3) giving you new ideas</td> <td><input type="radio"/></td> <td><input type="radio"/></td> <td><input type="radio"/></td> <td><input type="radio"/></td> <td><input type="radio"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>(4) practical in education</td> <td><input type="radio"/></td> <td><input type="radio"/></td> <td><input type="radio"/></td> <td><input type="radio"/></td> <td><input type="radio"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>(5) clear about aims and explanation</td> <td><input type="radio"/></td> <td><input type="radio"/></td> <td><input type="radio"/></td> <td><input type="radio"/></td> <td><input type="radio"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>(6) effective in time usage</td> <td><input type="radio"/></td> <td><input type="radio"/></td> <td><input type="radio"/></td> <td><input type="radio"/></td> <td><input type="radio"/></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>2. Mark the whole seminar out of 10 points</p> <p style="text-align: right; margin-right: 50px;">/10</p> <p>3. What was the most impressive point in the seminar?</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 30px; width: 100%;"></div> <p>4. What kind of question do you have attending the seminar?</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 30px; width: 100%;"></div> <p>5. What do you suggest in order to improve the seminar?</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 30px; width: 100%;"></div> <p>6. Free Comments</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 50px; width: 100%;"></div>		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	(1) interesting for you	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	(2) creative	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	(3) giving you new ideas	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	(4) practical in education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	(5) clear about aims and explanation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	(6) effective in time usage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
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- 1 <http://www.icedc.org/#!about-icedc/c1bte> (viewed 2015.10.13)
- 2 https://www.ted.com/talks/bill_gates_unplugged (viewed 2015.10.13)
- 3 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hd_ptbiPoXM (viewed 2015.10.13)
- 4 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kj0TgZTs2cg> (viewed 2015.10.13)