Japanese Teachers' Struggle for Active Learning:

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Introduction

I am attempting to discuss the possibility and difficulty of contemporary issues of curriculum reform, which affect the traits of teacher education program in Japan. The reform of the curriculum always leads to the policy changes of teacher education and program.   In particular, the contemporary policy formation of teacher education is not confined to the system but also the curriculum for teacher training.   It had not been a critical agenda by two decades ago what kind of ability and curriculum content the future teacher training ought to aim at attaining.   It had been taken for granted that basic knowledge and skills were essential for all children because they were by any means necessary for higher order thinking such as logical thinking or critical thinking.   However, it was the rationalization for avoiding to clarify what the higher order thinking implied.   It had been unclear and ambiguous till PISA testing provided the breakthrough for a model of reforming what was demanded to children for the 21st century.

The Ministry of Education (shortened form Mistry of Education, Culture, Sport, and Science) became aware of their shortage of the good model of abilities for the 21st century's children.   First of all, PISA shock gave an impact to the Japanese to begin to speculate what kind of content of testing would contribute to the development of logical thinking ability of the children.   So the Central Council of Educational Committee reported the new direction of ability of in the 21st century on the date, November 20, 2014.   This report signified the main title of the 21st century's ability as key competency, International Baccalaureate curriculum, and active learning.   Those three key words have been symbols of the new direction of the newly developed ability in 21st century's children.   Those new Western terms sound fresh for the Japanese masses and inspired them for building a program for raising new ability.   It sounds guaranteeing and encouraging a bright future for educational reform in Japan.

However, there is a fundamental problem in those alleged key words.   There

is no prescription of either what kind of ability the key competency signify as a matter of fact, what ability the International Baccalaureate develop in fact, or what ability the active leaning build.   The statement of the report ended up with the title of the keywords without any concrete example of the ability they were trying to develop. There is a reason for their inability to make explicit of concrete example.   One of the reasons of that is that it is not easy to figure the concrete forms of knowledge of the logical thinking.   Another reason of that is that they are not used to understand the concrete image of what critical thinking is.   Indeed we do not know what we talk about the key competency unless they recognize the concrete examples of their alleged goals.   There are some objections against the new concepts of national goals of curriculum.   However keen their criticism are, it should be noticed that they have not denied the ultimate values of the new curriculum.

Only the condition would hamper the realization of the new curriculum is the mal-recognition of the masses opposing the unknown new curriculum just like the masses were urged by the mass media, claiming that new curriculum called "Yutori (relax)" led to the "mediocrity" of the Japanese children last two decades.   The most plausible unexpected crisis would be generated from pseud-consciousness caused by the anonymous propaganda.   That has the same root as the Japanese fascist militarism were born before the war.   The masses are likely to be uncritically indoctrinated by the authority and the distorted communication avenue.   It threatens the democracy and sanity of the citizenship.   It is necessary for us to be critical with the intrinsic and realistic analysis about active learning.

1.   Officially Exemplified Cases of Active Learning

There is no clear-cut explanation of what "active learning" is, in the report of the Central Council of Education, November 20, 2015, for Ministry of Education and Science.   It states that it is necessary to pursue the in-depth study in the learning, the subjectively and cooperatively learning in the heuristic and problem solving.   It encourages the expression and problem solving.   It says that it is called "active learning."   Only the words we can figure what active learning do are "subjective" and "cooperative."   The report says that it is the task of the course of study issued later on to embody the real cases of "active learning."   But it reminds us of that the last time the promise of publicizing the practical cases of application of the basic knowledge and skill did not realize in the course of study 2011.   So I would rather extrapolate the real cases for the active learning through the cases publicized in the institute affiliated with

the Ministry of Education and Science.

First, in the cases of the improvement of language activities, it says the exchange of opinions each other, for instance, not adhering to one way direction of teacher's lecturing, discussing by using a white board, using posting pads, debating, presentation by posting boards, students' own lecturing.   It has almost the same elements of the project based learning: Subjective initiative for own learning, in-depth learning, learning real society, developing the known and the abstract concept, reflection and prospect for learning, and cross-curriculum learning.   A number of the case of active learning are delineated in a way of simple practice. For instance, the case of handcraft lesson, the students make the individual crafts by talking each other, chattering each other, which is called "collaborative learning."

The generalized traits of active learning are listed in six categories.
A) A student takes part in the activities more than listening.
B) Emphasizing the students' skills development rather than transporting information.
C) A student participates in the critical thinking or higher order thinking, including analysis, synthesis, evaluation.
D) A student participates in activities, involving reading, arguing, writing.
E) A student pursues the philosophy or values of life.
F) Presenting his/her own ideas by speech and writing.

Those general statements try to figure the whole framework but do not help what and how a teacher proceeds his/her lessons.   National Research Institute of Education which is affiliated with Ministry of Education exemplifies the misled cases of active learning as follows: No reflection by a teacher; No real understanding of active learning; instant answer; no further inquiry; dogmatic presentation; losing purpose; no refined planning and others.

Those are not specifically sophisticated principles but just the collection of fragmented misbehaviors of ordinary classroom lesion.   There is no indication of what is really practiced in the ideal way.   There is no ideal model with which a teacher can identify in the practical situation. So it is necessary to create easily identifiable practical model for school teachers.

Example A:

Unit Title: Energy Sources (Inquiry activities)

Middle school attached to Hiroshima University

Task: To find the best conditions of blades of windmill for the maximum power by adjusting one of the conditions of blade at first; To integrate one's own group's result with other groups' results to find the best conditions for the maximization of wind power.

Teacher's Question: What do you try to experiment with what kind of condition?

  Expected answers: Group A ,Size of a blade; Group B, Numbers of blade; Group C, Width and Numbers; Group D, Length; Group E, Shape of a blade; Group F, Angle of a Blade and others.

  Student A: How can we change the size of a blade? Is a funny shape good?

  Student B: How can we change the size of a blade without changing the length of a blade?

 Teacher's suggestion: How do we produce changing the size of a blade, by changing the width or the length of a blade?

This is the best example that National Research Institute could think of at present. The students are instructed to perform the analytical thinking through the collaboration of other groups' works. This is a good practice but not sufficient enough for developing critical thinking.

        The report of the committee of the national curriculum promulgates the way of exploration of the students for active learning that the individual students are required to be aware of the meaning of his/her own task with clear frameworks of hypothesis and the importance of evidence. A student should recognize that the individual student is a subject of critical thinking but not a group. This statement suggests that the student has self-autonomy in the individual thinking. That statement implies that the student is encouraged to develop his/her independence and authority in critical thinking. An individual student is responsible for the formation of hypothesis and verification of his/her hypothetical works without hindrance of others' intrusion. Collaborative works and discussion should be introduced after his/her independent working process.

        I assume that the attitude of the student's irresponsibility and dependence of others' thinking are caused by the excess of emphasizing the collaboration and group activities. The emphasis on the group activities leads to the risk of the avoidance of the own subjective participation for the given agenda in the cultural context of the Japanese. As has been pointed out by anthropologists and psycho-analysts of Japanese culture, "Other-ness" is always dominant in the individual's judgement of critical situation. The judgment is likely to be a passing box easily in the Japanese

grouping activities.   In particular, it became explicit when the individual student confront with moral judgement situation involving conflicting values.   Therefore, I would rather point out the typical potential cased in newly born moral education as following cases.

2.   Active Learning in the Case of Moral Conflict

 (1) Beyond Retaliation or Rewarding

    Noriyuki Araki is an initiator of moral education practice based on Lawrence Kohlberg's approach which validity is still in the controversy in the United States. Kohlberg's name is not widely acknowledged in Japan yet.   But the Kohlberg's approach has been penetrating among a number of Japanese educators.   It will be more well-known in Japan as a the prospective promise of moral education in Japan.
    Araki's approach is powerful to change Japanese children's value on the basis of punishment or rewards, which are mainly dominant in the values of Japanese traditional folklores.   If you are hit by others, you are right to retaliate others.   The values of making judgement are constituted in "returning" it once you are damaged by others or "returning" it once you are received something good.
        It is a value of return or retaliation.   It is a dominant value prevailing among the Japanese.   This value is not so bad as far as we thank somebody for kindness and generosity.   But it is not so good when we expect profit or retaliation from somebody without publicity.   We cannot stop fighting if we are always thinking of retaliation.
        The Japanese are likely to refer to "shame," which is constituted of others' orientation.   Ruth Benedict characterized the Japanese traditional ethics were lacking in the "ethic of "guilty" as Puritan ethic had.   The standard of value does not consist in the internality but in the other's eyes.   So many students are always conscious of how others think of her/his own self.   This type of other-orientation is predominant among the middle grades' elementary school children.   Their basic criterion of making judgment is that they do it because others do it.   This is the same rationalization of school bullying: "Others pick on somebody so I will do it"; "if I do not it, then it would be my turn to be picked on by others."
        One of the stories based on the moral dilemma was used to encourage the students to talk about the equality of rewards distribution.   The Japanese children are used to be instructed about the fairness or equity of the rewards.   But they sometimes confront with the critical conflict of moral dilemma about what is equality of

distribution of rewards.   How ca we solve the problem of equality and equity?   Should equality should be based on his/her performance or the equity of the results?   Those arguments lead to the serious conflict in the real world.   It is exemplified to the children as follows:

A Case Study X : How do we share cakes? Lower graders of Elementary School

Today is the day for moving.   An old lady raccoon asked a big bear, a rabbit, and a little mouse to help her moving.   Three helpers worked very hard respectively for Lucy.   A raccoon thanked for their hard working.   So she gave six small cakes for three fellows.   But there are obviously large differences in their hard working.   So question is: What is the best way to divide up six cakes for three fellows?

This story is about the matter of equality.   What is "equality"?   What do we think about the division of labor?   Do we should seek the equity of the results or equal chance to work?   Should the distribution of benefits be divided up in terms of the cost-performance or the individual efforts?   Those fundamental questions are to be asked in this story.

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Equality: In what ways?
The first of all, Japanese children of lower grades get used to the equal treatment: a desk and a chair, textbook, uniform, and lunch.   They are likely to find the discrimination even if the distribution is divided up due to the individual differences such as the lunch menu amount distributed depending on a body size difference.   A teacher has to be conscious of the individuals' feelings of being treated differently.   As a result, the teacher is likely to treat the individuals equally by ignoring the individual differences.

What is the equality of the distribution?
But at second, some students started thinking about the justice of equal distribution of the benefits.   They started thinking of their own capabilities to cope with the products equally distributed individually.   A mouse can eat two cakes, cannot

he?   Two cakes for a big bear?   Is that fair?   Gradually they became being puzzled with the mysterious rewards.   Some were following the already described.   Others started questioning of that description.   What is important in this discussion is to listen to others' voices.   Values conflict is involved in this story.

(2)   Araki' s Model and beyond

Araki's method is powerful.   However it is not sufficiently enough to change Japanese children to advance the dialogue and mutual understanding through this method.   Araki's method was tactically good in terms of the clarity and simplicity of evaluation scale but not good enough to identify the moral arguments among the students.   As Juergen Habermas has pointed out, it should be emphasized that we need to develop "mutual understanding" and "consensus oriented dialogue" in our discourse.

AS Habermas has pointed out, Kohlberg's Stage Five is problematic.   In particular, the stage five of Kohlberg's developmental scale requires the consensus on the values for social justice which may go beyond the given law or regulation.   It demands the "publicity" for the arguments among the subjects in the discourse. Araki's method encourages the students to choose what they used to believe in. However, the reciprocity and mutuality of the discourse for understanding are neither emphasized nor encouraged in the students' discussion.

One of the reasons of this shortage is caused by the mixture of others' orientation and reciprocity for mutual understanding.   So it should be made explicit what arguments are reciprocally made and influenced by each other.   The discourse analysis of mutuality is especially important because we can trace what kind of arguments affect the individuals and others.

Habermas has encouraged dialogical advancement among the students for mutual understanding and consensus beyond Kohlberg's developmental approach. But he has not provided any empirical case studies proving the validity to what he has claimed.   So it is demanded to exemplify the real cases of what he has asserted in the critics about Kohlberg's developmental approach.

I have conducted empirical studies of this approach and successfully figured out the process of argument for the mutual understanding.   It has significantly shown the advance of interweaving reciprocal understanding of the individuals though it has some difficulty in attaining consensus of the participants' discussion.   Being based on these empirical studies, I will try to prove the possibility of the mutual understanding

in curriculum practices of morality.   No attempt has been made to embody the practice of Habermas' idea of moral education in a real classroom not only in Japan but also in other countries.

(3) A Case Study Y: A Dilemma of a Photographer at the North of Main Japanese Island

This is a story of a camera man who lives in the north of main Japanese island.   There are Japanese monkeys living in the most north latitude in Japan.   In winter, they have to struggle for surviving in the hard heavy snowing environment. They are strictly protected by national law because their lives are heavily secured as natural memorial animals as Japanese national treasures.   That is an area extremely cold.   There are only few human population because of such a hard environment. Because of this unique species, Mr. Matsuoka, a professional photographer, unusually moved to the north peninsula, he has kept shooting photos of those unique monkeys because he loved monkeys very much.

The village people hated him because he loved monkeys while monkeys are enemies for the villagers.   But one day, a serious problem happened in the village, the village people could not stand any more with the bad behaviors of those Japanese monkeys.   Some claimed that they had bitten women's foot to be injured.   Ohers said that they occasionally attacked the people and had stolen the foods and agricultural products, which amount were not tolerant for them anymore.   So they got a special permission from national government to select the bad monkeys with meeting certain criteria: male, older than ten years, not a group leader, and others.

They noticed that nobody could make distinction of those monkeys except Mr. Matsuoka.   One day, Mr. Matsuoka suddenly received a phone call from a villager to ask him a help to discern the bad monkeys.   He had fallen in a critical dilemma: he should help the villagers or not help.   So what would you do?

This story was broadcasted in the national education television and well-documented by the director.   A couple of elementary schools had experimented this true drama to the children.   Some children supported the opinion for collaboration with the villagers, others did not for the reason for compassion with monkeys or the villagers.   Bothe sides had respective reasons.   But there was no dialogue in those

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discussions in TV video.   The students addressed their opinion but neither response nor reaction.

Our fellow teacher used the same story for his fourth graders students and encouraged their discussion with a structured format.   He cited the students' voices on the blackboard and classified their opinions in terms of the five stages of Kohlberg's developmental frameworks at first.   The students could identify with their own status in the structured scale.   At second, they returned to the discussion after their identification.   They started to understand what other students claimed while they did not even listen to others' voices in the beginning.

Beyond Ego-centric Attitude

Gradually they were getting out of the "ego-centric" attitude and started objectifying what they think about.   They began to be aware of their changing reasons during the course of discussion.   The teacher carefully delineated the charts of the students changing opinions and reasoning.

Reasoning with Abduction (Pierce)

Those processes of changing reasoning is neither inductive nor deductive but in the process of "abduction."   They had mastered the "subjunctive" form of reasoning. They became aware of that there are the different perspectives and difficulties to understand others.   They learned the necessity of learning contextual knowledge of others.   Their struggles for conquering the ego-centricity at first and the simplicity of their making judgment are encouraged.   The struggles are important process of their deepening the reasoning of the problem.   They are required to understand the context of their making judgements and others' making judgments.   The students are reciprocally required to the others' contextual knowledge.   The process of the arguments are more complicated but it is demanded in this approach.

Conclusion

As has been stated, active learning has provided an opportunity among Japanese educators to implement a drastic change in their practice in the classroom. They have to critically think of how they realize that practice.   However, they have not step forward to go beyond the traditional instructional methods. They need a radical reflection and model providing a breakthrough in the real practice.   As a part of active learning models, innovative moral education groups have provided outstanding

practical models which have been already demonstrated in the classrooms.   The case of demonstration of active learning of mutual understanding and consensus oriented dialogue has shown the well-sophisticated result for active learning.

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