

Special Working Group
“Children’s Safety/Security with a View to Securing Academic Competences”
Considering the Right to Learn
from the Perspective of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

Children’s safety/security is part of the daily activities:
Strengthening children’s sense of self-affirmation

It’s too late when “it” comes – the protection of children’s safety/security has tended to be seen as a special problem, on the recognition that it only concerns extraordinary situations, such as accidents or disasters. Children’s safety/security is, however, an issue for the whole school. The special working group on “Children’s Safety/Security with a View to Securing Academic Competences” redefined the issue as part of daily educational activities, discussing how the teaching staff could strengthen children’s sense of self-affirmation and empower them.

Children’s safety/security can be harmed, not only through disasters or accidents, but also through strangers’ intrusion, corporal punishment, inability to attend school or bullying. Many of them are not extraordinary events. Mr. Akito Kita, advisor to the special working group, opened the discussion by indicating the need to redefine the issue of children’s safety/security as part of daily educational activities.

Another advisor to the working group, Mr. Shinji Hamada, facilitated a participatory workshop, providing a hands-on opportunity to learn how teachers can relate to children in empowering ways. Empowerment of children means helping them to recover their inherent powers and to make use of the powers for transforming themselves as well as society. Teachers who empower children would promote dialogue by “waiting” and “listening”, strengthening their sense of self-affirmation. Mr. Satoshi Takahashi, another advisor to the working group, talked about a sense of self-affirmation from the viewpoint of clinical psychology, providing the basis for interpreting practices.

Ms. Miyoko Nagao, working at Akaiwa City Sakuragaoka Elementary School (Okayama Prefecture), reported about her practice of promoting a child’s sense of self-affirmation through her relationship with a child who could not attend school, which has constituted part of her daily educational activities. The relationship, which started when the pupil was in the sixth grade and has continued for four years even after his graduation, has supported not only the child but also his parents. She has actively supported him so that he could transform himself into what he wants to be, sometimes working like a counselor and at other times like a social worker, which was an impressive part of her report.

Ms. Masako Nakayama, working at Keisen Town Keisen Higashi Elementary School (Fukuoka Prefecture), reported about her practice of helping children to look at their own lives and find connection with others through thinking about sexuality. Children find out that they can live with any sexuality, learning to coexist with others. While sexuality is closely linked with a sense of self-affirmation, it is an issue that is not discussed in the classroom so much. Her practice makes children think about their own

lives through the lens of sexuality as well as through work experience.

The students of Wajima City Monzen Junior High School (Ishikawa Prefecture) had planned to promote their own city, on the basis of their activities in “the class for integrated study” in the first grade, when they made a school excursion to Tokyo in the second grade. After the earthquakes in the Noto Peninsula and in the Mid-Niigata area (respectively in March and July in 2007), however, they began to think that they wanted to do more than mere public relations for the promotion of sightseeing. They thought, “We want to thank the people all over the country for their support [in the aftermath of the earthquake] through public relations”, “We want to help the people in the Mid-Niigata area”. Finally they organized an event at Haneda Airport for “the Post-Earthquake Reconstruction in the Noto Peninsula”. As Mr. Shigeki Yamagishi commented, we can feel the power of children “to transform negative aspects of the earthquake into positive ones”.

There are many reports that children have supported adults not only in Wajima but also in other areas affected by natural disasters. In their daily lives, children are deprived of their roles and responsibilities as well as their rights. Their roles, which are usually taken away by simple words, “Do your work at the desk”, come closer to them in the context of extraordinary situations during disasters. When children are involved in the tasks that cannot be undertaken only by adults, such as cleaning the toilets in relief shelters, fetching water or clearing up, they get back their roles and responsibilities, which in turn promote their development.

Of course, their roles and responsibilities should not be excessive. Mental care should be provided for children affected by disasters, too. We should take note of the differences between two models of mental care, “the emergency support model” and “the disaster model”, indicated by Mr. Takahashi. Under the emergency support model, early counseling is provided with a view to alleviating distress as soon as possible. During the time of disasters, however, it is necessary to reduce the incidence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) by relaxation and other forms of physical methods, at least for the first few months, not attempting to have them speak about their feelings. This and other kinds of clinical psychology perspectives are not well-established among teachers in the field. As the participants could learn a lot from Mr. Takahashi’s comments, it might be a good idea for professionals working with children, such as teachers, clinical psychologists and social workers, to have opportunities to exchange views at the National Meeting for Studies on Teaching.

There were reports from university students as well. Mr. Genta Nakano, who presently goes to university after having graduated from the Environment and Disaster Mitigation Course of Hyogo Prefecture Maiko High School, established an organization called SIDE (Support for International Disaster Education) with his friends on the basis of what he had learned at high school. As has been pointed out by Mr. Seiji Suwa, advisor to the special working group and a teacher at Maiko High School, the reports from the members of SIDE showed that education for disaster impact mitigation would lead to the development of citizenship.

“It’s marvelous that I’m living now. What is normal is marvelous”, said Ms. Kurumi Kishimoto, a member of SIDE. She lost her classmates in the Hanshin-Awaji Great

Earthquake. The earthquake blew away daily routines. January 17th, the anniversary of the earthquake, was the day when she survived. “That’s why it’s marvelous that I’m living now”, she said. It is in fact difficult to ensure “normalcy” for children. Teachers are required to provide educational support for children to ensure “normalcy” for them, which is to learn in a safe and secure environment.

Reported by Yoshie Abe, visiting lecturer, General Institute for Women Researchers, Waseda University