



筑紫女学園大学リポジット

The Organizing Process of a Classroom Based on Weick's Theory : The Collapse of Classroom Order in Japanese School

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The Organizing Process of a Classroom Based on Weick's Theory: The Collapse of Classroom Order in Japanese School

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Abstract

Recently, various types of pathological phenomena have occurred in many school classrooms all over Japan. These phenomena seem to have implications that there are some gaps between teachers and students in perceiving the school culture and the reality of classrooms. However, the previous theories of classroom management in Japan have failed to grasp the gaps between them, because those theories have emphasized on how teachers should control students according to plans, on the basis that students follow a teacher's leadership. Therefore, this study clarified what was actually happening in Japanese classrooms by analyzing a female student's notes on being bullied in her elementary school days, on the basis of American social psychologist K. E. Weick's theory.

The Pathological Phenomena in Japanese School

Futoukou (Refusal to attend school)

Nowadays, a growing number of Japanese children are unable or unwilling to attend school. A survey of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology shows that the number of elementary and junior high school students who had been absent from school for 30 days or more in a year for the reason of disliking school, amounts to about 130,000 in the 2002 school year. The number has increased over the last thirty years, about 10 times as many as in 1978. There are various reasons for

these absences, such as being bullied, weak scholastic ability, domestic problems. From 1995, the Ministry began employing school counselors and boards of education have begun establishing support centers for the children. The Ministry has now recognized that *Futouko* is a societal problem rather than an individual problem. As a result, nowadays children seem to feel less pressured to attend school when they are not willing or able, than they used to do. However children are still under tremendous pressure to have to go to school like everyone else.

Ijime (Bullying)

Bullying is said to be a common problem in every generation and every country. But it has become a fairly serious problem in Japan. Bullying in schools can be defined as behavior against a weak student in which physical and psychological attacks are carried out repeatedly, causing deep suffering to the victim. Bullying in the classroom is thought to arise from the structure consisting of 4 layers, assailants, victims, spectators and onlookers (Smith and Morita et al., 1999). In many cases, the group of assailants does not regard *Ijime* as anything serious. Since the 1980's, it has become a serious societal problem, resulting in committing suicides in some cases due to being bullied. These phenomena are often said to indicate that children have less opportunity to communicate and make friends in busy studying, and no chance to release their tension and stress. It is highly possible that such stress or loneliness have caused bullying.

Gakkyu Houkai (Collapse of Classroom Order)

Since the latter half of the 1990's, it has been reported that some teachers cannot perform well in their classes due to chaotic situations in the classroom. For example, children refuse to listen to the homeroom teacher,

talking loudly about unrelated matters, suddenly yelling, and wandering around the classroom without permission. A survey of the National Institute for Educational Policy Research shows that about 30% elementary and junior high schools have such problems. There are many different opinions on why students cannot sit quietly. Some people say that the upbringing at home is not good enough, and children have become self-centered, disrespectful and no sense of propriety. Children who graduate from kindergarten see that individuality is respected too much. Many surveys suggest that the reason is thought to be due to the deficiency in teachers' leadership skills, but some problems occur even in experienced teachers' classrooms.

Review of School Classroom Management in Japan

Ever since the Meiji era, all Japanese schools adopted the same education system at the same time. All teachers use the same textbooks and teach the same material. The traditional style of classroom has been supported by having to sit with proper posture during class, listening to the teacher quietly. In addition, a classroom has been regarded not as a mere space for learning but as the one like a family in which fundamental disciplines, moralistic behaviors are instructed to children. Therefore, all teachers have made efforts to find the way to enhance a cohesiveness of classroom. So it is often said that Japanese students are group-oriented, that is, there is the strong pressure for conformism within the groups.

Classroom management in Japan is characteristic of the method based on collectivism (1960 ~ 1980). Collectivism can be defined as a way of thinking to emphasis on commitments in a group, organization or community rather than on independence of each member. In this theory, all students should share the same goal and responsibility, and are forced to cooperate

with each other especially in elementary schools. So teachers used the method to divide students in small groups for monitoring their classroom activities by themselves to compete with other groups. However these days few teachers are using this method because it unknowingly creates an atmosphere to cause bullying in a group and an extreme pressure for competition with other groups with an ambiguous reason that some student is responsible for the weak performance of the group.

In order to overcome the negative aspects of collectivism, a new approach has been developed since the 1980's. It suggests that classrooms should be changed as reference group and each student should be comfortable and feels involved in the classroom activities. This theory hypothesizes on easy feeling of each student and promoting a good self-esteem with positive interaction among the students. Despite of many teacher's efforts, the situations of classrooms seem to be getting worse and worse.

The Characteristics of Weick's Theory

Weick shows us the importance of understanding how organizations really work. His theory focuses on the process of organizing rather than on the structure of the organization itself. In other words, he considers the organization as a system taking in equivocal information from its environments (Weick, 1979). As Sutton has argued, organizations scan or interpret the environment in order to understand the external forces of change so that they may develop effective responses which secure or improve their situation in the future (Sutton, 1988). He also concluded that scanning provides a structured process which encourage people to regularly participate in face-to-face discussions on planning issues. He added that an organization's ability to adapt to its outside environment is dependent on knowing and interpreting the external changes. According to Weick's

theory, organizing uses the process of enactment, selection, and retention. Individuals within the organization utilize the “double interact” to reduce multiple meanings of equivocality and making sense out of the information they receive (Weick, 1979).

Enactment: defining and beginning to manage information,

Selection: narrow down the equivocality, decide what to deal with and what to leave along, ignore, or disregard.

Retention: decide what information, and it’s meaning, they will retain.

There are three steps to the “Cycle” of communication. The three steps consist of act, response, and adjustment. Weick regards this interconnectedness as the primary feature of organizing life. The cycle consists of loops that take the form of interviews, meetings, phone calls, discussions, and chats that help to process information. It can also range from casual conversation at the lunch table to a formal market research program.

Another important aspect, “Rules” are stock responses that have served well in the past and have become standard operating procedure. Weick believes that rules are fine when equivocality is low if material is presented orally or written. Thus, organization tries to interpret the environment with the given information. But it sometimes fails to remove uncertainty in a situation where many conflicting interpretations are possible, because the perceived environmental uncertainty is determined by the perceived complexity of the external environment. The below figure shows the rules and processes those are directed toward reducing the perceived level of equivocality.

The diagram illustrates the conceptual model of the assembly rule hypothesis. It shows a flow from Enacted equivocalities to Ecological Change, then to Perceived amount of equivocality in put, and finally to Perceived amount of equivocality in put. This leads to Cycles and Assembly, which then leads to Assembled rules. The process is iterative, with feedback loops from Assembled rules back to Perceived amount of equivocality in put and from Assembly back to Cycles.

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graph LR
    EE[Enacted equivocalities] --> EC[Ecological Change]
    EC --> PEP1[Perceived amount of equivocality in put]
    PEP1 --> PEP2[Perceived amount of equivocality in put]
    PEP2 --> C1[Cycles]
    PEP2 --> A1[Assembly]
    C1 --> AR1[Assembled rules]
    A1 --> AR1
    AR1 --> PEP1
    AR1 --> PEP2
    AR1 --> C1
    AR1 --> A1
  
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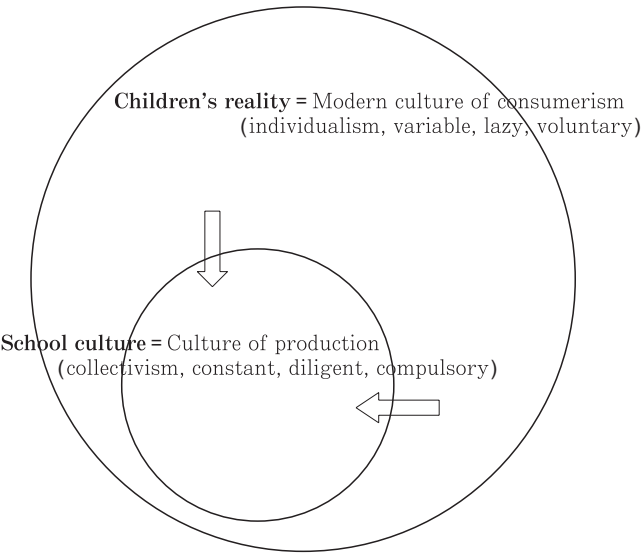
As Stapleton has recently argued, Japanese schools traditionally have ignored individuality. Students all studied the same subjects at the same pace in large classes. They had to memorize what they learned for exams, and this allowed them little creativity in their answers. Students learn about group values from an early age in order to be good group members, and they are forced to behave in the correct way so that they do not break the harmony or stand out in the group. Under these school cultures, individual experience has been only meaningful when one is part of a group. Such a strong focus on human relation has meant that it is the values of the group that are most important (Stapleton, 2001).

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pathological phenomena reflect the greater individual freedom that is being given to Japanese students, and which may reflect a lowering the teacher's status. While there are many changes occurring in the Japanese education system, some things remain the same. The Ministry of Education still has central control of education for the entire country, which means that they decide which courses and textbooks are allowed. This shows that the strong authority still exists in Japanese school.

The reason why classroom management in Japan had been successful is not because the theory itself was very effective, but because the teacher's authority was respected with the children, parents and local people. It means that the gaps (equivocality) between the school culture and the outside environment used to be low both for teachers and children. The bellow figure shows the gaps between school culture and children's reality.

Figure 2



Recently, the gaps have expanded and given rise to some uncontrollable situations within a classroom. However, school rules or culture have not changed over time, so teachers have no choice but to rely on the limited stock response that worked well in the past. On the contrary, this cycle of communications such as meetings and discussions increases among teachers, and stricter discipline has resulted in a high number of students suffering from depression. Otherwise, students express their frustration in violent outbursts of anger or aggression. So nowadays classroom does not become a reference group in which the children can feel at ease and proud to be one of the loyal members of classroom. These circumstances seem to have caused too much stress on students, and possibly such pathological phenomena in Japanese schools are occurring.

A case study: the analysis of one female student's thoughts on being bullied

Based on the above perspectives, a female student's notes (written in 1998) on her own experiences of being bullied in her elementary school days were analyzed as change in the teacher students' relationship and the collapse of classroom order.

The below phrases present some bullying incident occurrence in a classroom without teacher noticing during a music class.

It was Mr. Y who had been selected as our homeroom teacher. He introduced himself to us, "Good morning, everyone. In my college days, I belonged to a football club. I'm looking forward to teaching a physical training with you". We whispered, "Oh, he used to play football. I'm sure that he will be happy in the physical education class."

At the beginning of the term, we were getting along with each other. He was especially popular among boys. As the time went on, his popularity waned. It was due to his poor teaching ability of music.

Everybody often said that his ability of music was like an elementary school child. We have never heard him playing the piano. A music class could not be conducted without piano. Those who have taken piano lesson at home were asked to play piano in every music class. For school graders, that was a painful experience because every one has to stop singing if the person playing the piano made a mistake. They hoped their turn would not come. Soon, such kinds of uneasiness and fears spread quickly among my classmates. Subsequently, all the students went mad in every class, and the teacher was always criticized harshly for whatever he did. And even if he greeted everyone, or got angry, all the students ignored him completely.

Under such a chaotic situation, the bullying took the form of being ignored by her classmates in which this girl became the target. If the teacher's leadership had worked well in the classroom, that might not have happened because a teacher could have shared a form of social construction with the children that a classroom should be a reference group. However, the teacher didn't seem to understand why and how this chaotic situation occurred. According to many surveys, it has been reported that even experienced teachers face the same kind of problem.

Gaps in recognizing reality between teachers and students

Why is it difficult for teachers to resolve the problem of bullying in a classroom? It is the teachers' intervention that sometime fails to change the students' relationship on a cognitive map that creates bullying. If a

teacher does not change himself/ herself, the teacher's efforts are in vain. In fact, those efforts possibly cause more serious problems.

One day, class teacher Mr. Y began talking to us in the homeroom class. Until then, nobody had listened to him and talking loudly. But then, silence prevailed over the classroom. He said, "I know that she has been bullied by everyone". I nearly fainted upon his words and afraid that it would make the bullying situation much severe. I was dying to get out of the classroom and return home. But the class teacher continued speaking to us as if he knew everything. But I wanted him not to speak any word in this regard in the classroom. And, I thought that if he had known what was happening all along, he should have spoken about it long before and should have done something for its prevention. I kept my head down looking at floor and my palms were sweating. Mr. Y said to the students confidently, "Why are you doing such silly things? I will never forgive the people who bullied her". I was nearly dumfounded to hear that and believed that Mr. Y seems to know nothing. And I thought nobody is scarred of him. Definitely, he won't be able to protect me from being bullied from the classmates. I felt angry with him because bullying might have disappeared soon if he had not spoken any word in this regard for me. After that, I scared more at thinking that bullying may start again and will be worse than before because of his words. I really wanted him to stop talking.

Conclusions

The educational issues occurring in Japanese schools are shaking the basic principle of classroom management that worked well traditionally on

the basis of collectivism. As a matter of fact, the Japanese students seem to have different reality than a teacher knows. It is expected that Japanese teachers will pay more attention to what students are really thinking or what kinds of relationship they want to make with each other, rather than using much energy to reorganize students on the basis of traditional collectivism. Therefore, Weick's theory gives us clues to understand the children's realities much more.

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