

USING CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT TO IMPROVE PEDAGOGY - THE JAPANESE EXPERIENCE -

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Abstract

Educational practice itself is in a state of great transition as many nations seek to adapt teaching and Learning activities in an effort to revitalize students' motivation and performance. One such measure, termed 'formative assessment', is a classroom assessment practice that is becoming the heart of the educational framework. This practice promotes continuous learning and assessment dialogue among students and their teachers, creating and sustaining their collective learning identity as respectful and successful group members. Research 'knows' that social engagement has profound psychological effects. It is, therefore, of particular interest to discuss how the interactive instructional methods that characterize 'formative assessment' interplay with the high level of collective action required of Japanese people. This is given a rich socio-cultural context by chaotic aftermath of the catastrophic 9.1 earthquake, named for its magnitude as the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011. It is in the selfless responses to this event that the words "quiet dignity" refer. These attributes of identity have formed across centuries in unique cultural circumstances, and by their theoretical similarity parallel the core elements required for formative assessment, otherwise known as Assessment for Learning (AfL). The cultural development of the Japanese nation sanctions harmonious and reciprocal group action as the sine qua non of a functional society. This fact supports the proposition that Japan is a naturally hospitable research and development context for AfL. Consequently, many aspects of AfL have presented themselves in Japanese Lesson Study (*jugyo kenkyu*) plans since the 1910s. The authors provide unique insights into the culturally embedded pedagogy and assessment. The article is rationalized around indigenous words (e.g. *kaizen*) steeped in deep cultural meaning thousands of years of in the making. When these key terms are explored, they introduce the Western practitioner to novel yet familiar ideologies that assist active practitioners everywhere with their efforts to explore alternative assessment practices and revitalize traditional methods. These terms are key to an understanding about the exportable nature of indigenous assessment methods when they are designed to promote deep learning (internalization), and sustain collective motivation (social cohesion). This article emphasizes those particular aspects of Japanese cultural tradition that drive effective assessment, create well-rounded (*zenjinteki*) students, and prepare young adults for success in life. The authors take various approaches, exploring how classroom assessments are embedded into instructional process around the world, and how these may be creatively integrated with Japanese perspectives on classroom learning and assessment.

Keywords: *Classroom assessment, Japanese lesson study, culture of evaluation, Japanese teachers daily Jargon, kyoukan toshiteno omoiyari (group cooperation and empathy).*

1. Introduction

The Great East Japan Earthquake that occurred on March 11, 2011 created an opportunity to reveal the culture of Japan and Eastern countries to the world. The relationship between spiritual tradition and education are reconsidered on the basis of the mutual interaction between society, culture, and religion. The Straits Times, which is the most-read newspaper in Singapore, published an article titled *Awe by a nation's quiet dignity-World watches amazed at survivors' civility and patience amid the ruins- five days after the devastating earthquake happened*. It represented some aspects of Japanese spiritual tradition such as selflessness, patience and stoicism. The following is the full text¹.

¹ See: <http://www.chinapost.com.tw/commentary/the-china-post/special-to-the-china-post/2011/03/17/294991/In-awe.htm>
See: <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/life/2013/08/24/general/long-gone-writer-tells-it-how-it-is/#.XL12cZP7RsM>

The strengths and challenges of education in Japan is holistic learning as follows. Although schooling is an important social system in any country, the way in which schools in Japan and foreign countries differ greatly. In foreign countries, while the work of teachers is mainly specialized in classes, in Japan, teachers give integrated instruction on subjects, student guidance, club activities, etc., and the zest for living (certain academic ability, a well-balanced mind with heart, character-wise and a healthy body). For example, in foreign countries, staff other than teachers take care of and take charge of school lunches and cleaning of classrooms, etc., in Japan, it is conducted with the students under the supervision of the teachers. In addition, various school events such as excursions and committee activities are conducted under the leadership of the teacher, and the school is responsible for fostering the children. In addition, after school, sports activities are often carried out by groups other than schools such as local sports clubs in foreign countries, but in Japan it is common to carry out club activities in schools. In addition, in Japan, teachers often take part in securing the safety of attending school routes. Such "Japanese-style school education" is highly regarded internationally.

Teacher's Learning is as well. Japan's schooling is largely supported by the high quality of teachers. One of the supporting factors is in-school training. In Japan, a lesson study has been actively carried out for the purpose of improving the situation by having teachers see each other's classes with each other and exchange ideas and discussions. Therefore, there is a culture in which the teachers are focused on teaching plans, class configurations, and teaching skills.

Shields early analyzed the relationship between society, education and religion by using the framework of sacred architecture sites. He pointed out the significance of historical and cultural approach which has its religious foundations mixed with Confucianism, Buddhism and Shinto, for grasping Japan's educational reform from the inside (Shields 1999). It also means if the essence of 21st educational system is a learning environment based on social constructivism, a unilateral educational reform only from the outside might destroy the learning environment embedded in the culture of school (Walker 2016). Based on this, theoretical research on pedagogies necessary for the implementation of formative assessment and on cultural aspects of classroom in Japan has been conducted (Arimoto et al 2015).

2. Objectives

The authors provide unique insights into the culturally embedded pedagogy and assessment. The article is rationalized around indigenous words (e.g. *kaizen*) steeped in deep cultural meaning thousands of years of the making.

This takes the reader behind-the-scenes of the making of, providing insights from the one scene

Brian Simon's question "Why no pedagogy in England?" (Simon, 1981) is still (unfortunately) equally apt for many schools across globe today. Rejecting the notion that pedagogy is a 'neutral-free vehicle for transmitting curriculum content (Alexander 2000, p.30), Alexander moves beyond the contemporary dominance of the socio-cultural theory which emphasizes the relativism of education and knowledge construction.

The 2008 Tokyo seminar on formative assessment was the first one by OECD held in Asia Pacific Region. Strange to say, 99% teachers across Japan don't know the terminology of assessment. But We see in the OECD (2016) statistical report that Japan scores significantly above the average levels related to performance and outcome equity.

They observed the social reproduction of "altruism even in adversity", noting that Japanese inter-relationships (*kankei*) are, "rooted in thousands of years of Japanese tradition and has withstood outside influences". For schools located in regions that suffered damage from the Great East Japan Earthquake and schools that have since accepted children and students affected by the disaster, challenging issues include providing learning assistance to children and students affected by the disaster, and providing special guidance for their mental and emotional wellbeing.

If schools are a preparation for life, should they pay to knowledge creation. This is very important implication. Because the gap between school and society widens increasingly all the time. The question for itself "knowledge-creating school" had been shed in 2002 by D. H. Hargreaves, influenced by Nonaka SECI model of knowledge creation from knowledge creating company.

3. Methods

The author has tried to collect indigenous words and pull out from exemplary school and region vs pilot from students by AfL teachers effort to change teaching for deep understanding against a backdrop of test culture (Arimoto 2018, Howe & Arimoto 2014, Arimoto & Nishizuka et al 2017). The author provides unique insights into the psychology of assessment, being rationalized around indigenous

words steeped in deep cultural meaning thousands of years of the making. These are: *kankei*, *kata cultural script*, *kaizen*, *kizuna*, *kizuki*, and *kyodo tsunagari*.

- *kankei* (Japanese value concepts in replace of those of the Western such as truth, good, beauty. *Japanese society values kankei* (interrelationships) and access to networks of trusted people. Hargreaves (2012) in his “A self-improving school system in international context” for school leadership says as follows, ‘In Japan it is *kankei*, which concerns access to networks of trusted people); no line between *uchi* (inside, us, in-group, inside home) and *soto* (outsider, other groups, outsider the home)

- *kata cultural scripts* (collective-consciousness-based form (how to do it, e.g.-copy masters’ *kata* or their ways of performing/doing; -breaking with masters’ *kata*; -the creation of their own *kata*). It functions as a hidden curriculum in social cohesion embedded in organization learned by cultural constructivism such as inheritance of type. According to teaching gap, *people within a culture share a mental picture of what teaching is like. We call this mental picture a script. The script is, in fact, a mental version of the teaching patterns we identified ... Scripts are mental models of these patterns. We all share this cultural script.* *Kata* had led to remove the defect and limit of prior behaviorism learning theory into together at school & together in life. It related to informal and nonformal learning.....);

- *kaizen* (refers to the continuous improvement down to the smallest and most detailed level of self-introspection, is another important cultural concept.);

- *kizuna* (another aspect of outcomes, growth rather than performance; bond, ties, wet human relationship like *omoiyari* (compassionate consideration for others) based on “innate nature is goodness”, dignity..... Japanese teachers maintain a social bond with their students, based on the (Buddhist) theory that the stronger the bond, the more successfully young learners will become *zenjinteki* (well-rounded) in character and reproduce similar communities around them.);

- *kizuki* (new mindful awareness/ notice, realize, recognize, Japanese culture demands a strong focus on collective competences (e.g., peer collaboration), on persistence (*gambaru*) towards outcomes and on mindfulness (*kizuki*) as an L2L competence / exists as a more multidimensional and multi-level. concept than the Western terms “alignment” or “congruence” imply, it strengthens vertical loop aspects as multi-layered. Life is real. Culture of evaluation); *Kizuki*: constructing a new understanding of the targeted issue with; *Sasshi* as metaphor: the attentive meta-cognition of surroundings and feelings; *Mitate* as visual image: the image of some other object corresponding to the real one and so on. As well. The OECD (2012, p. 193) notes that Japan ‘seeks to build its education system around [L2L], this is the heart of the Japanese education system’ This is what double-loop learning is all about. The *ringi* serves the dual functions of allowing people to challenge core operating principles and, in both the process and the outcome, affirm and reaffirm the values that are to guide actions. Paradoxically, it is a process that mobilizes disagreement to create consensus. It is also a process that allows innovation to be driven from all directions and for “intelligence” to evolve to increasingly higher levels. ... 'Learning to learn' is the final principle of holographic design brings us back to our earlier discussion of organizational learning (Arimoto et al 2016, Morgan 1986).

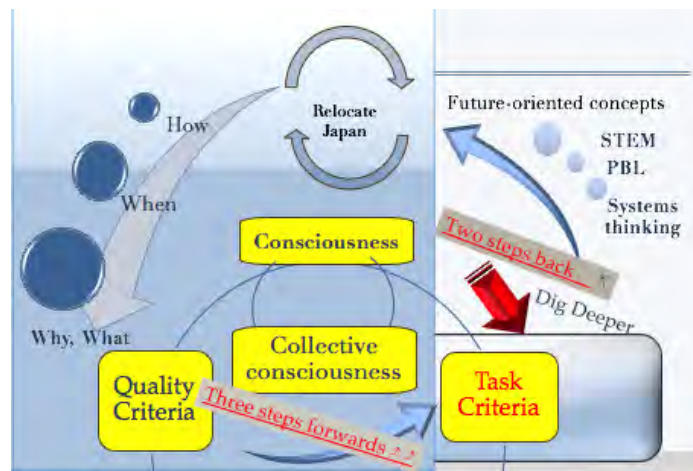
- *kyodo tsunagari* (Under the prerequisite that native place, birth-place, one's old home is an epitome of the present-day world, a kind of metaphors such as *indra-net* of “each gem is dispensable for reflecting each other” as a kind of worldviews. The homeland rich with mountains and rivers, adjacent to the sea, and blessed with abundant blossoms comprised of local food from the ocean or the mountains; homeland in *tohoku*, including a cuisine rich in regional flavour and geographic region for breadbasket for Tokyo, therefor rich-biodiversity and disaster-prone region. It related to tangible cultural heriage e.g. festival, food, events etc.) .

4. Discussion

Figure 1 is the hypothetical sketch of cultural constructivism to explain quiet dignity. Despite the (European) Enlightenment's legacy of pervasive rationalism, we encounter specific fragments of Buddhist tract as Europe's political institutions, such as UNESCO's International Commission (“Delors Report”, 1996) prepared for the 21st-century. The official language of the Delors Report urged schools to lift the “minds and spirits” of their children to the “plane of the universal and in some measure to transcend themselves (1996, p. 18).

This culture has brought certain things to the level of collective consciousness, and systematic use, which cannot be grasped by an individual subject's consciousness. These are tacit understandings that individualistic cultures have identified in European and North American nations, leaving them in the realm of unconsciousness (and which are therefore unmanageable).

Figure 1. hypothetical sketch of cultural constructivism to explain quiet dignity
 “Three steps forwards two steps back” see Shimojima & Arimoto(2017).



The amalgam six k's (*kankei, kata cultural script, kaizen, kizuna, kizuki, and kyodo tsunagari*) leads to quality criteria. *Omoiyari* exists underlying six k's as Japanese-style sympathy: Japan has traditionally been noted for the extraordinary exclusivity of its culture—a factor that is now recognized as one of the country's most serious handicaps in its dealings with the outside world. The exclusivity of the Japanese mindset goes beyond the intangible features of culture, such as philosophy, morals, ethics, values, and so on; it also includes race, food, and other aspects of life. The importance of human ties and interconnectedness often were specifically expressed in prosocial utterances stressing the need for others through elements of *amae* and *omoiyari* – values encouraged in *shudan seikatsu* as essential features of a “human-like” person.... Children also demonstrated their capacity for self-regulation in the context of cleanup behavior, in which they showed no reluctance to remind each other of mutual responsibilities (Arimoto et al 2013, Kelly 2001)

5. Conclusions

It is widely understood that Japanese cultural philosophy places high implicit value on the socio-emotional aspects of social life and learning. The 'mind-heart nexus' is, perhaps without their intent, implied in Black and Wiliam's (2009) reference to learners' "inner mental life". As a single concept, "inner mental life" suggests the interior complexity of the 'heart or mind nexus'. It would seem safe to presume that Buddhist canon was not in Wiliam's deliberations in that paper of 2009, entitled 'Developing the Theory of Formative Assessment'. Coincidentally then, these differing theoretical constructs, one from 20th-century social cognition, the other from traditions 1000s of years old, underpin similarities in interactive learning environments of the 21st-century (Arimoto & Clark 2019).

Japanese teachers maintain a social bond with their students, based on the (Buddhist) theory that the stronger the bond, the more successfully young learners will become *zenjinteki* (well-rounded) in character and reproduce similar communities around them. (Arimoto & Clark 2018).

Further, calls for a focus on "self-improvement" (Voss, 2009) suggest opportunities for an integrated approach (Mikulas, 2007) to learning-theory, and the creative-integration of lesson-study cultures into European school level systems.

Buddhist principles stress the importance of evaluation, since they refer to the possibilities and choices which guide actions. Recognizing arrangement of possibilities and choices to improve the psycho-bio-socio-cultural condition means to realize the importance for man in forwarding to more complex levels of understanding and evaluating life's experiences (Voss, 2009, p.18)

We in Tohoku are living in the Eastern edge of Silk Road and has kept traditional Golden Hall of *Chuson-ji* Temple (850, 1224-) *Shumidan* (Buddhist alters). There we can notice traditional Gorgeous decorations of gold, silver and *raden* (mother-of- pearl inlay work), *shitan* (rosewood or red sandal wood) from South-East Asia, Ivory from Africa. Behind the scene, Four heavenly kings (guardian kings) are believed to guard the four directions. In modern, dynamic Buddha is located in central position as human potentials, which shows a kind of world views. Robert Thurman in *Inner revolution*, powerfully outlines the process required to attain understanding of inner world of cultural traditions and how it relates to social and educational change. We need to explore the dreams of a better world our cultural ancestors had and the strategies they devised for fulfilling their dreams. James Shields call this “sacred architecture”.

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