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Happy Learning - Collaborative Learning to Weave Happiness Together

How can we achieve a happy society?

In this paper, we propose the creation and implementation of a new academic program called "International Social Studies" (a.k.a. "Happy Learning"), in which students in Japan and the U.S. are connected online and work together across national and cultural borders to think about solving international problems through international cooperation, in collaboration with public education in both countries.

As the program's nickname "Happy Learning" suggests, the objective of this program is not to merely acquire knowledge of international issues or acquire problem-solving and communication skills, but to acquire the ability to explore the fundamental question, "How can we realize a happy society?

According to a study by Professor Tyler VanderWeele, of Harvard University, Generation Z youth have a low sense of well-being and are increasingly lonely. He points to economic insecurity, anxiety about social issues such as climate change and conflict, and social isolation as the main factors (VanderWeele). On the other hand, Angela McRobbie, in her book "The Uses of Cultural Studies," points to the broadening and increasing complexity of social issues, as a major factor in young people's disinterest in social issues (109).

Wealth has long been a favored measure of happiness, but it has also created some of the global social challenges and social isolation described above. There is one thing that is needed to solve global social problems and to eliminate social isolation. It is the

"cooperation" of people.

"Cooperation" is also a means to break free from the existing uniform value system and economic framework of "accumulation of wealth through competition for limited resources and markets," to share instead of take, to work together to solve problems instead of holding each other responsible for them, and to create a world where everyone is happy, not just "someone" but "everyone"

The most effective way to change people's attitudes is through education. Albert Bandura has demonstrated that teaching self-control skills can reduce aggressive behavior(4). In addition, studies have shown that the generation that studied in school after the 1990s, when environmental education became popular in Japan, showed a change in environmental awareness and behavior (Matsumoto, et al.).

Educational programs to create the soil for international cooperation are effective when created through international cooperation. International cooperation requires an understanding of different cultures and values, and the best way to understand them is to be exposed to them.

The International Social Studies program consists of three parts.

 (1)Deepening mutual understanding

Research has shown that disclosing personal topics such as hobbies and daily life to each other and building relationships are effective in promoting cross-cultural understanding (Hall 116).

As a way to introduce each other's culture, it may be beneficial to cook each other's local dishes together on the Internet. This is because some studies have shown that cooperative learning can deepen mutual understanding (Johnson 55). Collaborative learning

has also been emphasized in the PISA academic achievement survey, with data showing that the ability to learn collaboratively correlates closely with other learning abilities (PISA2015).

(2) Consider issues from multiple perspectives

Next, we use role-playing techniques to examine various international topics such as historical awareness, environmental issues, conflict, and poverty from multiple perspectives. The same fact can be seen differently when viewed from different directions. Even history textbooks have a different focus and perspective in different countries (Ishiwata).   In his book, Arthur Binard, an American author living in Japan, mentions that in American society, the attack on Pearl Harbor is taught only from the viewpoint of the U.S. government (20).

An example of the use of role-playing is the Model United Nations. In Model United Nations, high school and university students simulate the role of representatives of various countries and discuss international issues from their respective standpoints. By simulating and considering issues from a perspective different from your current one, you can acquire the ability to view things from multiple perspectives (Goldman 17).

By looking at various issues, not just historical issues, from various angles rather than from a single perspective, and by examining and discussing the pros and cons of various approaches rather than finding a set correct answer, students will develop the ability to grasp the essence of things.

(3) Practice

The last part is "practical learning". Participants learn the process of not only discussing solutions to social issues at their desks, but also thinking about what they can do now, creating action plans, implementing them, verifying the results, linking them to improvements, and continuing and developing the activities. Naturally, the major significance

of this program is that it is directly linked to solving social issues. At the same time, however, research data shows that the effects of this type of learning, called Problem-based Learning, which is based on practical issues, is to improve problem-solving and clinical reasoning skill (Dochy).

There are three significant reasons for the initial Japan-U.S. commitment to this "International Social Studies" program.

First, both countries have a great deal of influence: the U.S. ranks first in the world in terms of GDP, and Japan ranks third, together accounting for about 30% of the world's GDP (IMF). Not only are they economically influential, but their economic activities have also been the cause of various international problems. In other words, both countries have a great responsibility to solve international problems.

Second, both countries have a history of deep ruptures, including World War II and the incarceration of immigrants. It is a strong message that these two countries have overcome their past and are now working together to create a history of cooperation for the future.

Third, it is possible to take advantage of the differences between the two countries. In the PISA survey on reading comprehension, Japanese students showed relatively lower ability to find, evaluate, and ponder information than their American counterparts, while their ability to comprehend was higher (PISA2018). According to the Cabinet Office's "Survey on the Attitudes of Young People in Japan and Other Countries" (2018), about 40% and 30% of Japanese youth respectively believe that they want to be involved in social issues to improve

society and that their participation might slightly change social phenomena they want to see changed, both This is more than 20% less than the percentage of young people in the United States (内閣府). These trends can be attributed to differences in traditional values in education. In "Americans and Japanese" (1990), Yasuo Imai, a former MITI researcher, painstakingly compared and analyzed Japanese and U.S. textbooks and noted that American education encourages strong individuality in a group, while Japanese education tends to encourage self-sacrificing, friendly group membership Japanese education tends to encourage self-sacrificing, friendly group membership (78-288).

In other words, neither is superior to the other, but rather each has its own characteristics formed by differences in history and cultural backgrounds, such as the multi-ethnic U.S. and the homogeneous Japan. Differences allow us to compensate for what we lack in each other.

It is not easy to modify the public education curriculum. It is even more difficult to do so across national borders. However, it is possible to start with a school-based partnership on a trial basis.

If the new learning that emerged from the small dots between the U.S. and Japan can spread not from the top down, but from the bottom up, and eventually spread among people around the world as a tool for thinking about a happy society, it will remain as a history of the role played in international society by the citizens of both countries, a pride shared in the hearts of the people of the two countries.

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