Core Values of Progressive Education: Seikatsu Tsuzurikata and Whole Language

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Abstract
Seikatsu tsuzurikata is a grassroots movement in Japan that has many parallels to the whole language movement, but it developed completely independently, beginning in the late 1920's. Our research into this movement was conducted in 1984 and described in Kitagawa and Kitagawa (1987). We are now updating our earlier research. Seikatsu tsuzurikata is fundamentally a writing education movement designed to help students develop a strong sense of self by having them write descriptive, detailed compositions about their daily life and the world around them. We want to describe how seikatsu tsuzurikata and whole language are similar and different, just as any set of "distant cousins" might want to know how they are related.

Key Words: Seikatsu Tsuzurikata, Whole Language, Co-spectatorship Role, Belonging Identity, Development of Personhood

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In the 1980's, Mary was teaching fifth- and sixth- grade in a Tucson, Arizona school. The famous writing education researcher, Donald Graves, visited her classroom one day and joined a small group of students engaged in an authors' circle. He leaned forward in his chair with his elbows on his knees, his eyes focused intently on the boy who was reading his journal entry to the group.

"The cat rattled in the garage," Geraldo read.

"Wait a minute. I want to be sure I got that right. 'The cat rattled in the garage?'" Graves interrupted.

Mary thought about how shy Geraldo was and worried that he'd freeze, but he confidently explained how the cat must have knocked over some cans.

Although Graves had not heard of seikatsu tsuzurikata or its proponents in Japan, his words and posture represented an ideal in their philosophy. Seikatsu tsuzurikata teachers strive to read and respond to students' texts taking the same attitude: "I'm here to see what you saw, hear what you heard, feel what you felt."

Seikatsu tsuzurikata basically means 'writing that comes from one's personal experiences or observations.' The word "seikatsu" represents daily life and the word "tsuzurikata" comes from a rather old-fashioned word for making connections like sewing two items together, which may also mean composition writing. Seikatsu tsuzurikata teachers encourage journaling as a way to ground oneself in one's own reality. They begin by asking children to base their writing on "what occurred to me on a certain day, at a certain time" or to "Write so that we can hear and see exactly how it was." However mundane the topic, the teacher-reader's interest is guaranteed. What makes this movement remarkable is the degree to which teachers succeed in making of themselves the sort of trustworthy co-spectators that James Britton, et al (1975) have advocated. As Britton defined it, writing expressively allows the writer to take an onlooker stance, and in a "co-spectator role" the reader can read without any other purpose than to appreciate what has been expressed. Our use of the term is more simplistic than Britton's, but we are borrowing it because of the way teachers word their responses to sound like co-observers of what their students describe.

Commonalities of Seikatsu Tsuzurikata and Whole Language

As unaware as Britton was of seikatsu tsuzurikata or seikatsu tsuzurikata teachers of his research, they have much in common. Furthermore, as unaware as the proponents of either seikatsu tsuzurikata or whole language have been of each other, they share some fundamental tenets. One that immediately stands out is that both start from what the student already knows. In the "process approach" to writing for which Graves is considered a major advocate, teachers recognize innate skills of self-expression in beginning writers (Graves, 1983). Even before the child has learned many conventions of written expression, the teacher reads the text according to the child's purpose in writing it. She considers the text as communication, instead of judging it or seeking mistakes to correct. In fact the reception and support a whole

language teacher provides is often compared to how parents support their toddler's acquisition of spoken language. Seikatsu tsuzurikata teachers talk about how to support the student's nama no koe, raw voice, meaning that the sort of language that is blurted out in natural situations represents the type of directness that they want to foster. While nurturing toddler speech and supporting direct expression are certainly not the same, it is significant that both whole language and seikatsu tsuzurikata look to language in the non-school world for guidance in teaching.

Whole language proponents often link their goals to authenticity, and seikatsu tsuzurikata advocates stress the need for individuals to be able to position themselves objectively in the real world. Other commonalities include grassroots foundations, teacher support systems, the use of qualitative data in development of theories, and the valuing of classroom learning communities with proactive teacher-student relationships. In this paper, as an extension of Kitagawa and Kitagawa (1987), we explore some current activities of seikatsu tsuzurikata teachers as a grassroots manifestation of progressive education that is uniquely embedded in Japanese culture. We will compare whole language and seikatsu tsuzurikata as "cousins" to learn which essential traits they share and how the experiences of each might inform the other in the twenty-first century.

History

In the late 1920's, during the Great Depression, teachers in rural Japan found themselves agonizing over mismatches in relevance between the national curriculum that they were required to teach and the desperate poverty of their students. Some of them attempted to ameliorate that disparity by encouraging students to write detailed descriptions about their daily lives. Students wrote about their hardscrabble farm life, describing their parents' toil in specific terms. For example, one student depicted his father's gnarled, soil-encrusted fingers as looking almost like the edible roots he was pulling from the ground. Another described the cracks in her mother's chilblained feet. A small boy's description of his grandmother's horrified reaction when he and friends playfully cut up earthworms contrasted with his textbook models of children's writing about esoteric experiences that poor, rural children never had. The goal of having the students write from personal experience rather than following those textbook models was to empower the students within the realities of their impoverished situations, not for the sake of writing education but for survival strength.

From that beginning, a grassroots movement began which broadened and spread as teachers discovered that all students benefited personally from expressing their own lives in writing. Teachers compared notes to learn how to nurture the journal entries by providing a supportive audience intensely concerned with the reality of the students' lives, whatever the circumstances.

After World War II, seikatsu tsuzurikata enjoyed a period of public recognition and popularity. There were even novels and movies about it. Some people ruefully speculated that children raised to think independently might have been just what Japan needed as an antidote in the lead-up to the war. Since that brief post-war period of public acknowledgement, however, the movement has quietly gone back to relative anonymity except among its zealous proponents. Some administrators and

school boards associate the movement with the progressive national teachers' union and disapprove of seikatsu tsuzurikata to the extent that teachers who work in those schools or districts must be circumspect about what they are doing. It has continued to the present in Japan as a small, teacher-to-teacher movement, rarely taught in teacher education courses and never countenanced by the Ministry of Education.

According to Shiro Murayama, a longtime chairman of the executive committee of seikatsu tsuzurikata's national organization, Nihon Sakubun no Kai, the Association of Writing Education in Japan, there are many people in Japan who know only of the movement as a way to help poor, rural children, so they erroneously assume that Japan's prosperity has rendered that type of teaching unnecessary. Teachers dedicated to this philosophy, however, see no less need for seikatsu tsuzurikata among today's young people than in the past (personal communication, January 2007).

One sign that politicians and progressive teachers may have differing perspectives is the emphasis apparent in education reform legislation passed in 2006, Kyoiku Kihon Ho, Fundamental Directive of Education. The reform language declares that one of the most critical goals of education is to provide the educated workforce the nation requires. This education reform is the first since 1947 when the constitution was revised under the direction of the post-war occupation of Japan. Among the details of the 2006 reform is a statement about the importance of promoting national pride and loyalty. One would see that as an innocuous goal except for the history of nationalistic extremism in Japan's past. While polls among the general public show moderate support for the educational reform, editorial opposition includes warnings that the effort to "teach patriotism" could lead to abuses of freedom of thought and expression. An effect of this reform will be to increase the authority of the central government and decrease regional or local control over educational decisions, including textbook approval. The fear among educators and others who are opposed to this reform law is that such restrictive control will increase, limiting the professional decision-making of teachers and the freedom of expression among both teachers and students. According to Murayama (1985), the time is ever more urgent today for the seikatsu tsuzurikata movement to persist in advocating education as the means by which individuals realize self-actualization.

Our Involvement

We, a linguistics professor and a whole language teacher from the United States, decided to investigate this philosophy in 1984, attracted first by the strength of voice in some writing samples we read. Our research then involved six months of classroom observations and discussions with proponents as well as attendance at study groups, conferences and two national conventions. That research revealed a kinship between the Japanese seikatsu tsuzurikata movement and whole language that transcends many situational differences described in this article. We are currently revisiting Japan in order to explore the parallels between the two philosophies at this point, their supporting organizations, and the leaders' visions for the future.

At the time of our research in 1984, no teacher that we met in Japan had heard of whole language and we were the first educators from abroad to attend the seikatsu tsuzurikata proponents' meetings or observe in their classrooms. Since then the whole

language philosophy has become known in a few educational circles but not among most teachers or the general public in Japan.

One day in March, 1984, in a break during a seikatsu tsuzurikata leadership conference in Tokyo, Mary began chatting with a Japanese professor, Yogo Shima, whose research interest includes that movement. She described one of her students in Tucson, Arizona, a Native American sixth grader whose writing weighed heavily on her mind. The boy, Joaquin, wrote about his life in ways that were powerful to classmates and anyone else who knew the cultural background he incorporated into his texts. But, Mary told Shima, when she tried to help Joaquin adapt his writing for a wider audience by, for example, asking him to explain what he meant by "dancing with Paul at the funeral," he was completely unable to fathom an audience that would not know the Yaqui ceremonial life. His culture was his world and he could not bridge to an audience that did not share the culture. The dilemma Mary described to Shima was this: Should she primarily promote Joaquin's sense of self by having him continue to explore his own reality through writing without regard for distant audiences or should she focus on getting him ready for junior-high school and beyond where teachers were bound to insist on less expressive, more transactional writing (to use the terms of James Britton et al, 1975). At that point in the conversation, Shima seemed to accept Mary as a "seikatsu tsuzurikata compatriot," not because that philosophy offers an easy answer but precisely because seikatsu tsuzurikata proponents agonize over the same type of issue.

When he learned that she was a proponent of something called whole language, he became very interested in what philosophical similarities there may be between whole language and seikatsu tsuzurikata. We continued discussions with him in Japan, and later in the United States when he came to do some more research and observations, attending the first Whole Language Umbrella Conference in St. Louis in 1990 and bringing with him a number of seikatsu tsuzurikata teachers and another professor.

What makes two educational movements recognize each other as "cousins" -- even though neither was aware of the other for so many years, and even though there are distinctions between them that might make them seem totally unrelated at times? Why did Mary feel she was in a TAWL (Teachers Applying Whole Language) meeting when she attended small support circles of seikatsu tsuzurikata teachers in Japan? How can looking at the similarities and differences help us recognize what might be the crux of what we, whole language practitioners or they, seikatsu tsuzurikata proponents, hold dear?

Seikatsu Tsuzurikata in the Classroom

Seikatsu tsuzurikata teachers believe that writing is a way for children to solidify their sense of self. When they read a child's text, they look for evidence of the student positioning himself objectively. They value writing based on looking straight at daily experiences, at the world around the child, and eventually, at world issues. Teachers ask even first graders to be explicit, but they recognize that whatever a child is motivated to write is that child's best topic. It may need to be noted here that a phonetic Japanese alphabet taught in kindergarten or first grade allows beginning writers to write almost anything they can speak. When teachers exhort first graders to,

"Try to report what remains strongly in your mind," the children can transfer a lot of details into text.

Once the children have written and turned in their journals, the teachers give themselves the sort of challenge Graves would appreciate: to read so as to, "get it right." They try to attain the perspective of the writer and respond accordingly. One strategy for gleaning just what a particular text may mean to its writer is to picture the child's posture or activity while writing, perhaps with her head bent over the paper or struggling to find the right word or scribbling quickly without stopping to reread; a handwritten text often hints at how its writer produced it. Teachers recognize that writing can be a lonely process, so they support the writer with carefully chosen responses written along the margin or at the end, or both. Those responses should be more like "supporting a soliloquy" than participating in a dialogue. Linguists refer to something similar in conversation as "back-channeling." Teachers in the West might think of this as a good way to develop "voice" in our student writers, but in seikatsu tsuzurikata circles teachers talk more about how it helps children become grounded as individuals.

The margin-written responses are called akapen, red pen, but the word has none of the sense of judgment it has in other places. Teachers often use present progressive tense to give an over-the-shoulder tone to their response. "Ah, here you are recalling just how amazed you were to see the layers inside the onion." Or, they join the writer as if they too were experiencing what is being described. "Isn't it hard to be short and unable to see the parade!" "Oh, until you wrote this, I couldn't imagine that odd sound." We can assume that whole language teachers say similar things in writing conferences or authors' circles, and some whole language teachers engage students in dialogue journals with the same sort of support. The only difference here in Japan is the extent to which seikatsu tsuzurikata teachers all devote themselves to their role as responders.

Over time, the relationship between student and teacher transcends even the inevitable impersonality of large classes in Japan. Young students often begin with "Sensei, ano ne" which is something like, "Hey, Teacher, guess what?" It reflects the way that regular journaling along with personalized responses show children that the teacher is genuinely interested in whatever they are motivated to write. And, by writing on a regular basis, children start seeing their daily lives as sets of potential topics. That happens to make for proficient writing, but, from the seikatsu teachers' perspectives, the most important result is that it brings the students' world into school with personal benefits that go beyond literacy.

Visit some seikatsu tsuzurikata classrooms and you might see a classroom journal being passed around for a different middle-school or high-school student to write in as homework and other students to read and write responses later that week. Or you might see a group of students discussing a journal entry duplicated and shared, with the author's permission, while that author sits and listens in without commenting until the end. There are many variations, but they all seem to begin with independent expression or opinion followed by the teacher's, or the teacher's and the classmates', appreciation of that unique perspective.

Seikatsu tsuzurikata teachers are educators whose theories come from direct work with actual students in classroom settings. Like whole language teachers, the professional articles they write for publication and the presentations they make to each other in both informal and formal conferences are never about hypothetical students or abstract theories. Organizationally, almost all of the leadership comes from current or former teachers. And, without calling their classroom observations "kidwatching," as whole language teachers are prone to do, what teachers discuss in their evening and weekend study groups is the same sort of qualitative data that whole language teachers share in their meetings.

At their meetings and conventions you see teachers comparing student-written journal entries and teacher-written responses. They bring copies of their class anthologies to trade and they discuss how they decided which entries to include. A large part of the agenda, whenever they gather, is consideration of how to read and respond so as to preserve in the child the natural voice. A teacher's presentation might be to share many of one child's journal entries along with the context of that child's life or relationship with peers. Another session might be based on the class dynamics occurring when middle-school students explore their views on sociological topics, such as violence or war, through compositions they write and share. These activities are not the total of seikatsu tsuzurikata, but they mark the essence of the movement, we believe.

A Common Ancestor?

The subtle but vital differences in the teacher-student relationships that seikatsu tsuzurikata and whole language movements both advocate, and the norms of education promoted by the Ministry of Education in Japan and the No Child Left Behind mentality of the United States Department of Education, can be seen as the difference between education designed to provide the learner with tools to expand the self, and education designed to enable or certify an outsider's entrance into an inner circle. In the latter, typically accomplished by traditional, usually transmission, models of teaching, the "filling of the empty vessel" approach is appropriate. It is assumed that students taught that way supply the country or economy with the type of citizens it needs. In addition, such education is a process by which society is stratified, a means of sorting students appropriately to fill all the roles of an economic or socio-cultural entity. Standardized testing is deemed the appropriate means of accountability, because it accomplishes the goals of certification and stratification. Education to supply the type of citizens needed by the nation of Japan was clearly the goal of the Ministry of Education before World War II, but the seikatsu tsuzurikata philosophy was antithetical to the extreme nationalism that developed in pre-war Japan. In fact, during the war teachers who continued to espouse seikatsu tsuzurikata were criticized. Of these, 135 were imprisoned; at least ten teachers died as a result of the harsh imprisonment (Namekawa, 1983; Kokubun, 1984).

In contrast to education seen primarily as a means to inculcate national values or to generate a country's workforce, whole language and seikatsu tsuzurikata have goals of nurturing each learner for the sake of that individual. We often use the term "authentic" and contrast it with "artificial" because we see learning as a natural phenomenon. Whole language teachers like to talk about developing children into "lifelong learners." Seikatsu tsuzurikata teachers have many ways to express their goals, but all of them might be summed up in a phrase we heard from Yukihiro

Kawaguchi, a professor whose research and teaching centers upon seikatsu tsuzurikata. He described the goal as helping each student "become the author of his own life" (personal communication, January 2007). Learning to think independently, to question what is presented by others as reality, and to express a perspective that may not be shared by the group; these are valued in progressive education philosophies. Thus, the zeal which whole language and seikatsu tsuzurikata teachers share is the same passion that fuels human rights campaigns, and for the same reasons.

Culturally Bound Manifestations

Community building is a common goal among teachers worldwide, and in Japanese elementary schools an observer might wonder if it were not a greater priority than literacy, for all the efforts most teachers put into making their students appreciate teamwork and friendship bonds. But what marks seikatsu tsuzurikata teachers is their linking of that objective with writing and the way they use writing to help children learn to be an individual while still being a member of the group.

The national curricula of Japan today are usually considered pedagogically sound and the system is seen as a model of equality, especially at the compulsory levels through ninth grade. However, the overall system in Japan is geared toward what Adam Curle calls "belonging identity" and "competitive materialism." Japanese schooling seems less successful in general at education for personal enrichment than at education as "the commodity which enables him to buy into the system" (Curle, 1973, p.28). It is beyond the scope of this article to explain Japanese society enough for non-Japanese to understand the extent of group-centeredness fostered in children from the time they are toddlers. We present here a too-simplistic way to explain the difference: American teachers stress community building in order to get their individualistic children to feel responsibility to the class community, but Japanese teachers, embedded in the powerful tradition of the "wa," peaceful and mutually respectful community, ideal, actually find it easy to get their group-oriented students to work as a unit. So, in seikatsu tsuzurikata, what community building means is learning to retain independence in the face of group identity, or how group membership can include appreciating those who deviate from the norm. Obviously, community building contains those threads in both countries, but societal tendencies make for different challenges.

The term used for sessions of listening to each others' writing is "kansho," appreciation, and the format is geared toward discerning the perspective of another person. There is a word in Japanese, "yomitori," that can be translated to "read in order to perceive the writer's intention." That kind of reading goes beyond seeing the text as an abstract entity, and it is this "yomitori" that children are encouraged to do in appreciation sessions. We think that it is a small but significant difference to read a text primarily to perceive the writer's purpose and point of view rather than to judge the plausibility of the text.

There is something about literature study discussions in the whole language model that reminds us of the appreciation sessions in seikatsu tsuzurikata classrooms. Book clubs allow students to express and compare their understanding without concern for any orthodox response that a teacher might provide in traditional literature

classes. Here too students need not agree with classmates in literature circle discussions as much as they need to acknowledge each other's views. There is an assumption that any reader is expected to have unique interpretations because of the particularity of background he brings to the reading experience. Any book club member who presents a sincere interpretation of a novel must be taken seriously by the others. Whole language teachers who engage their students in such literary activities are providing the same sort of democratic formats that seikatsu tsuzurikata teachers provide to help their students appreciate each others' writing.

An appreciation session we observed in 1984 illustrated to us the community building that must have preceded it. Fifth graders listened to a classmate read a detailed description of life on her family's dairy farm. Then this girl proceeded to listen quietly as each student related what he or she had thought while listening to her. Their contributions were detailed and personal. One boy ruefully admitted that, when she began to read, he thought, "Oh, no, there she goes, writing about cows again." Someone else commented, "I realized that you cannot take a day off when you have cows to milk." And so it went with every child contributing a highly specific question or comment. They all seemed to have listened with the same "I want to get it right" respect that Graves demonstrated in Mary's classroom. It can be assumed that they were reflecting the sort of reactions their teacher had always penned into the margins of their own writing. What was striking was that their commentary focused more on the girl's life experiences than on the quality of her description.

Incidentally, the teacher of those fifth graders, Noriko Niwa, was one of the seikatsu tsuzurikata teachers in her area of Japan who were known to contend that honest writing could not be forced. They would invite students to write in journals but would not mandate it. Some students resisted for a long time, but almost all eventually wrote. Another well known seikatsu tsuzurikata teacher in Tokyo, Goro Kamemura, only required that the journal be turned in on time; a blank page for the day's entry in the journal was not a problem as long as the student passed it in along with everyone else. In this way, he not only avoided calling attention to the ones who did or did not write, but he had a chance to write back to the student. He would find something to comment on. He said that, sooner or later, even the most stubborn non-writers would probably be unable to resist writing in their journals, but even if they were too thick-skinned and never wrote at all, he wanted to write to them in any case (1979, pp.117-23).

The quality of effective seikatsu tsuzurikata teaching that we consider to be mirrored in whole language education may be the determined search for personal growth on its own behalf that educators, whose dedication begins with the student, share the world over. As a grassroots movement, it is rooted in the culture of its locality. As a manifestation of progressive education, it is reflective of ideals that are universal. Listening in on teacher-to-teacher talk highlights both the local and the global dimensions of the philosophy.

Meeting with Fukushima Teachers

An informal meeting of public school teachers in Fukushima Prefecture, a northeastern region of Japan, on January 20, 2007 provided us the opportunity to hear what teachers now talk about when they meet as a support group. As a grassroots

movement that has never been anything but grassroots, seikatsu tsuzurikata continues to be energized only by teacher-to-teacher communication. So when Shukuko Sato invited us along with Prof. Yogo Shima to Fukushima City where eight teachers from the city and two from Kitakata in the same prefecture were willing to meet with us, we were grateful to make the ninety minute bullet train trip north from Tokyo. Sato, now retired, was a middle-school teacher and a primary organizer of the annual convention of the national organization that was held in Fukushima City in July of 2006. She was also one of the seikatsu tsuzurikata teachers who attended the Whole Language Umbrella convention in St. Louis, Missouri in 1990.

Prof. Shima chaired the informal discussion. Here is a translated version of what we consider the nub of each teacher's contribution to the discussion. Rather than a transcript, the italicized portions slightly indented are encapsulations of each person's extended part in a three hour dialogue. All but one were either middle-school language arts (MS-LA) teachers or elementary school (ES) teachers, three of them now retired. In our introductory remarks we indicated that they should share what they would normally discuss when they get together, but we also indicated that we would like to hear about their relationship to parents, administrators, other teachers and the general public.

> Shuji Sato, MS-LA: *Teachers here are relatively free to pursue seikatsu tsuzurikata; if there is administrative pressure against it, it is soft pressure and not an obvious impediment.*

Fukushima Prefecture is known to be unusually supportive of seikatsu tsuzurikata. Teachers also cited examples of colleagues who, though they did not call themselves seikatsu tsuzurikata proponents, followed the same journal writing practices. This confirms our previous research finding that, although Nihon Sakubun no Kai has a small membership, the philosophy has had a substantial impact on writing education in Japan.

> Shin'ichi Takahashi, MS-LA: *I can cite the example of a college professor here who criticized seikatsu tsuzurikata saying that students' "writing from the heart" does not constitute good writing. Rather, he feels that it is the textual quality that makes writing successful. That is one of the types of criticism that we have to contend with, even in a place like Fukushima.*

> Michiko Fujita, MS-LA: *Kids like to write and want to contribute to class journals, but one of my concerns is that students tend to write what they assume teachers expect, even sometimes telling lies in their writing. I want to shift that by letting them know I want to read what they sincerely want to express. What makes a difference to kids is who the reader will be. If they are going to write what they assume is expected of them, then the most important thing I can do is convey that my expectation is for them to sincerely express their own view of reality.*

> Kimie Tokue, ES: *In my school genre writing has become the norm, with first and second graders writing primarily personal narratives. From third grade on expository writing is stressed, but most teachers continue to have children keep journals.*

> Kumiko Kanno, ES: *The time allotted for language arts has lessened, but many teachers in my school continue to have children write in journals because they feel they can make connections with students through writing back and forth with them.*
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> Teruko Nikaido, ES: *Many of my fellow teachers complain that children always write the same things, so they said that responding to their writing is boring. For seikatsu tsuzurikata teachers, though, we know that the 'akapen'* (supportive responses described earlier in this article) *makes all the difference. Parents get involved, too. Upon reading their child's writing and the teacher's responses, parents become aware of the impact of such writing on their children and that relieves any concerns they might have about children describing out-of-school experiences with honesty.*

This last was in response to our question about parents' possible reservations about children describing their personal lives in journals.

> Fumihiko Kikuta, MS-LA: *I teach in a small village with only 140 middle-school students in all, so my classes are small, as few as nineteen students. You might think that in this rural area, students would not have feelings of alienation, but actually they do. We have a high percentage of students who simply refuse to come to school. Four never attend at all, and five others rarely come. I want all students to be able to overcome the sense of alienation many seem to have. What I find with journals is that kids really want the teacher to know them as an individual. If I don't return the journals at the end of the day that the students turned them in, they are disappointed, so I know that my response is important to them. Even if they said they didn't want to write, they look forward to my response.*
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> Shukuko Sato, MS-LA: *It is not surprising that you recognize a sense of alienation. Small villages in which the same families have maintained the same household in the village over a long period are not necessarily easy to live in. Most people know each other well, but that in itself can be a reason for a child growing up with a sense of alienation*
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> Takuji Tadaki, MS-LA*: I agree. In a small village, more than in a big city, the household is such a powerful unit that children can lose their sense of personal identity. It can be like living in virtual reality. To overcome that sense, it is important that students write honestly. When I have students for three years of middle-school, it takes the whole three years to get to that point with some students. For me, the day when a student writes in his journal how much he hates writing, I feel that such honesty is the beginning I have been looking for.*
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> Seiya Fujita, MS-Social Studies: *I want to have kids think, "We can change the world. We can change society." So in my social studies classes, I have students do investigatory reports, for example about war experiences people have had.*

> Fumihiko Sato, MS-LA: *Exactly. My goal is to produce students who wouldn't just pass by if things are strange or not acceptable. Through writing they develop in that way. They see themselves as responsible individuals.*
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> Shukuko Sato, MS-LA: *When* (a person she was tutoring after she retired) *showed me her writing, I realized that she had not had any training in writing the facts. I helped her to write by looking at facts and seeking to depict them without attempting to make any explanation. And I also showed her what I meant by sending her to see Michiko Fujita's class. After that observation, she said to me, "Oh, that's what 'byoosha' is." Byoosha means describing the scene as it is but without explanation; look at the facts until you recognize with certainty what you are observing and then write just what you are moved to express.*
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> Teruko Nikaido, ES: *I gave a questionnaire to fifty college students asking about their experience of writing education in public school. All of them indicated that they had never had a chance to write in such a way that they would feel: "I'm glad to have written that." Teachers should be aware that their students do really want to write no matter what they may say. I have met adults who describe their experiences as students in seikatsu tsuzurikata classes. Even years later they recall, "We were connected by writing."*
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> Shukuko Sato, MS-LA: *Yes, students look back and say, "When we were in middle-school, we could communicate with each other frankly. In our workplaces now, we don't dare to do that. So, when we have days off, we just go fishing."*

As the discussion began to wind down, several teachers passed to each other copies of some compositions their students had written. This fits the pattern at all the circle-group meetings we attended. What really matters is what the students want to express and how best to respond. As classroom teachers, it is classroom evidence that matters.

A Seikatsu Tsuzurikata Teacher's View of Language Arts

Michiko Fujita, one of the teachers cited above, points out that today's language arts textbooks for Japanese middle-school students no longer contain personal experience compositions as models for students. In our 1984 research we heard from both seikatsu tsuzurikata proponents and one staunch opponent that one striking bit of evidence of the impact of seikatsu tsuzurikata on writing education as a whole was that a large number of model compositions used in textbooks were compositions by children in seikatsu tsuzurikata classrooms; they had come from seikatsu tsuzurikata anthologies. That is no longer the case.

For her part, Fujita incorporates seikatsu tsuzurikata by conveying expectations different from those implied in the textbooks. The textbook models lend themselves to communication with a reader without first laying the foundation of what Fujita considers the grounding of the self. So, following the textbook, a student might learn how to compose an organized letter, how to use a comic book format for a graphic report, or how to write a newspaper article. If there were a rubric to judge

such compositions, it would not include the qualities Fujita values such as self-motivation and a sense of personal connection to the facts. Fujita says that, when a student finishes a piece, he should experience satisfaction at the way he was able to express himself sincerely.

The prescribed curriculum has slots at the end of each unit for students to write reflective pieces. Recognizing how easily many students churn out rather abstract but superficial writing once they get used to this assignment, Fujita substitutes her own expectations. At the beginning of the term, she assigns the "certain day, certain time" descriptive writing that enables writers to write concretely on the basis of specific personal experiences. At the end of each unit, she assigns similar writing based upon the "aha" moments the student recalls experiencing in the course of the unit. In this way she follows the curriculum she is required to teach and also the seikatsu tsuzurikata qualities in which she believes.

Another example from Fujita's class demonstrates a research model that reminds us of Kenneth Macrorie's "I-Search" papers (Macrorie, 1980). She reports the way that one boy's decision to use bamboo in making a visual display about a prehistoric period in Japan, and her question, "Did they have bamboo in Japan at that time?" led him on a quest similar to those Macrorie described. The resulting paper was a factual, chronological sequence of the investigations and discoveries he made, all described with the concreteness of "a certain day, a certain time." Fujita would not have read Macrorie's books, but it is interesting that she too has discovered the merits of such an approach to research.

Is Seikatsu Tsuzurikata Language Arts or Self-Actualization Guidance?

The history of that question might show how a grassroots movement develops theory even while being enmeshed in daily practice. Although the issue was already under discussion in the fifties, it heightened in the next decade. In the post-Sputnik paranoia that rocked education in the United States in the early nineteen-sixties, educators found themselves defending their pedagogy in terms of the space race. In Japan the same dynamics led the public to question "the scientific basis" for curricular policies, and seikatsu tsuzurikata teachers were under similar scrutiny, especially from other progressive teachers' associations specializing in disciplines other than language arts. Perhaps the need to show writing education as a "discipline" explains why five levels of abstraction defined principally under the leadership of a seikatsu tsuzurikata pioneer, Ichitaro Kokubun, were officially adopted in 1962 by Nihon Sakubun no Kai as being the appropriate developmental sequence in the seikatsu tsuzurikata writing curriculum -- over fierce objections from some members (as articulated in Murayama 1985). Here, at the risk of over-encapsulating a complex subject, are the basic categories. Step one begins with straightforward personal narrative of a single event. Step two allows an explanatory style of writing with an actual or implied time span that is longer than step one writing. Step three is a combining of steps one and two in order to achieve generalization with concrete examples. Steps four and five include research papers, formal exposition and fiction writing; however, with examination pressures taking precedence in middle- and high-school, where presumably those higher levels of abstraction would be achieved, they are not well developed in most language arts classes.

It should be noted that the levels, or steps, are not taught to children. They are simply goals by which teachers make curricular decisions. While young children are encouraged to write straightforward description, teachers know that they will also naturally express themselves in steps two and three ways. Furthermore, it is assumed that writers avoid overgeneralization when they have a level one (straightforward) connection to factual reality, if only as some kind of prewriting. Those teachers who emphasize steps one to three and those teachers who consider any definition of steps to be antithetical to their self-actualization aims are often similarly successful as language arts teachers because, in either case, their students' compositions ring with voice.

While we do not have room in this paper to explore the language arts versus guidance issue fully, what is most important is that it is a topic; it shows the grappling that accompanies both classroom decisions and profession-wide dialogue. Grassroots teachers, who confront issues about practice every single day in the classroom, cannot always be theoretical purists. Still, the repercussions over the adoption of five steps split the organization badly in the subsequent years. By the time we did our research in 1984, however, reconciliation was beginning and has continued. People can still tell us which famous teacher adhered more to the language arts domain and which person or area was noted for emphasizing self-actualization. For our part we suspect that there is enough overlap to answer the questions, "Is it language arts?" and "Is it life guidance?" with the single answer, "Yes."

Core Values of Progressive Education

The language arts versus life guidance issues described above have been controversial topics discussed in seikatsu tsuzurikata journal articles and at conventions, but in the classroom, advocates of one or the other emphasis differ very little. Similarly to whole language, teachers may disagree rather significantly about this or that practice, but their classrooms reflect fundamental values of the philosophy. Identifying these linking ideals enables us to avoid distracting battles over incidental differences.

Mary calls herself a whole language teacher but has not been involved in the so-called "reading wars" that are often cited as conflicts between whole language advocates and opponents. As an upper elementary-grades teacher, she has been less concerned with the place of phonics in reading instruction and more with how literature study empowers readers.

The essence of whole language that keeps her attention is on the level of teacher-student dynamics. Mary recognizes in whole language classrooms something she calls, "the democratic politics of a learning community" where the parameters of responsibility and investment are more mutually shared between teacher and learners than in traditional settings. When she sensed the same dynamics at work in seikatsu tsuzurikata classrooms, she realized that all the obvious differences between these and whole language classrooms would not prevent her from implementing some version of seikatsu tsuzurikata into her whole language classroom, which she did.

The Future

This article is being submitted by electronic mail, crossing the Pacific Ocean in an instant that anyone cramped in an airplane seat over the same ocean can only envy. It can be transmitted to readers at the same speed. While we were doing the research, a teacher friend, Keerthi Mukunda, in a school in India emailed us about a project she is doing with eight- and nine-year olds. It reminded us that whole language and seikatsu tsuzurikata are merely two of many manifestations of progressive education.

Keerthi's students visited the rural village near their school and after meeting the villagers they compiled questions and curiosities to investigate in future visit. She said she wanted them to raise their own questions, and she was initially surprised at how few of their curiosities involved the past. Back at her school, however, she showed them an Internet view of the area and suddenly they wanted to know things like, "Were those rivers always dry?" "Did people in the past live over there instead of over here?" "Did this area ever have more trees than it has now?" We use this illustration from a school that is neither whole language nor seikatsu tsuzurikata by identification to show that its teachers agonize over similar questions as those of teachers from both those movements. The school in India, Centre for Learning, is one of many alternative schools in various countries dedicated to the educational philosophy of J. Krishnamurti. On the homepage of our friend's school is this quote.

> "Surely education has no meaning unless it helps you understand the vast expanse of life, with all its subtleties, its beauties, its sorrows, and its joys"
> – J. Krishnamurti

In an increasingly electronic world where everything seems communicatively possible, grassroots teachers dedicated to progressive causes have to get to know each other. As whole language and its cousins exchange insights in ways that modern travel and communication make possible, we recognize more of what we value and stand ready to advocate in our own cultural contexts. We all stand together with teachers like those in Fukushima and "want to produce responsible individuals who, when things are unacceptable, won't just pass by." We know we each can speak in our nama no koe, raw voices, because we will understand.

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