

## 今オープンジャッジの江星さんが天野杯で優勝した時のスピーチ

### Learning Death, Learning Life

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“I thought they wouldn’t die!” This is what my little cousin’s son said when we played fireworks several years ago. At first, he was just enjoying fireworks itself, but I soon found that he was trying to kill bugs and insects by the flames of the fireworks. I asked why he did such a thing. Then, he answered they wouldn’t die. I was shocked. Then, I have come to think that children’s concept of life and death is about to change. Children are disregarding how significance lives are. So today, in this speech, I would like to suggest the way to have students realize the finite nature and the preciousness of life.

“Do you think people will return back to life after death?” This simple question was asked to 370 fourth, fifth, and sixth graders of an elementary school by Professor Hiroshi Nakamura in Tokyo Junshin Women’s College in 2001. If you were asked the same question, most of you would answer, “No.” However, children’s answer was quite different from yours. It showed that children’s concept of life or dead has not fully developed. 34% of them answered people would rise from the dead, 32% of them said they didn’t know, and 34% of them thought people could not live again. In short, 66% of elementary school students don’t understand the finite nature and the preciousness of life.

“Life is important.” We have heard this phrase so many times. But why do children still disregard their precious life? The reason is less opportunity to recognize death. Because the traditional family has changed into a nuclear family, children scarcely witness the moment when their grandparents pass away. Moreover, they rather have come to see human’s having many lives. Whenever we watch TV or play video games, there are many scenes in which humans come back to life or never die even if stabbed with knives. These factors surely affect how children think about life and death.

Children who do not understand the concept of death may commit serious crimes as they think life is infinite. Ten years ago, in Kobe city, a junior high school student whose age was only fourteen years old killed a boy and a girl who were in the fourth and the sixth grades respectively. Seven years ago, in Aichi prefecture, a seventeen-year-old high school student killed a woman. According to all of their confessions, the reason for their cruel

action was to check what would happen to the lives of human after being killed. They didn't know life was finite and the innocent lives were deprived.

Now, I would like to suggest one way for students to realize the finite nature and preciousness of life: That is to introduce "Death Education" into schooling. Death education was first advocated in the United States in 1960's, and is well carried out in Western countries. Its course content stretches from reading picture story books to cooperating with hospitals. Students come to realize that death is certain for all human beings, and they also contemplate life at the same time. This is the theory of death education.

Here in Japan, there are several examples of death education as well. Some elementary and junior high school teachers had students dissect fish to visualize death. Other teachers took students to funeral halls to show them death is inevitable. But one method I would like to adopt is to listen to the story of death, especially the story of those who had an experience of almost dying. It's because students can imagine and feel compassion for what the person thought when he or she almost died, and can see the person lives now.

Let me show an example in Hamanogo elementary school in Kanagawa prefecture. A former principal Mr. Toshiaki Ohse held a class based on talking about his terminal stomach cancer. He openly revealed how much of a shock it was to be diagnosed with cancer, how agonizing it was to undergo treatments, and how fearful and sad it was to almost die and say good-bye to all his family, friends, and students. At the last part of the class, he mentioned that life was limited so we have to take life one day at a time. After the lecture, many students were surprised at the fact that there is death to human beings. Some students nearly started to cry, but finally they accepted it and were impressed with the class.

Interestingly, this education also brought another effect to children. They also have come to cherish the lives of others. A girl who took Mr. Ohse's lecture said, "I have come to think deeply about life. My life and other people's lives, both are important. I must keep in mind that we are not allowed to do something to threaten for life, for example, killing, hitting, or injuring somebody." This comment proves death education has a possibility to create a stir in murder or educational issues such as bullying, violence, and juvenile delinquencies.

You may criticize that my plan is too pessimistic and cruel for children who have bright futures, because it shows an "end" to life. I know how you feel because Japanese still tend to regard death as taboo. However, we should not consider our national character too much.

As long as everyone including you and me die, it is significant to contemplate the weight of the finite life and to be a person who can respect and cherish our own life as well as the lives of others. This is death education. Once a great artist Michelangelo said, “If we have been pleased with life, we should not be displeased with death.”

Ladies and gentlemen, life must be cherished because everyone has only one life. Once the life is lost, people will disappear from this world. No one can do anything even crying, laughing, and loving. But, recently, children distort the life-or-dead issue, and this indicates they realize little about life or death. Therefore, I declare the necessity of death education, whose purpose is learning death and learning life. I hope every child in Japan will recognize death and will respect his or her and other’s precious life. You see, no other treasure goes beyond the life.