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Cleaning as Part of TOKKATSU: School Cleaning Japanese Style

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Abstract

There has been a growing interest in the whole child education in Japanese schools, particularly in school cleaning from the countries in the Middle East and Asia. This working paper explains how noncognitive activity, such as school cleaning, is placed within the official curriculum, which is the very important factor, enabling to link the activity to other non-cognitive activities within *tokkatsu* (*tokubetsu katsudo*: the period which covers noncognitive activities in the Japanese curriculum), as well as cognitive subjects. As school cleaning is situated as one of the educational activities, it has the diverse educational functions from developing interpersonal relationships to career education, in short, whole child development, thus it is understood not just the act of cleaning, but a form of learning.

Keywords: Japanese Education, Whole Child Education, Tokkatsu, non-cognitive activities, school cleaning

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1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the whole child oriented aspects of Japanese school education, in countries such as in the Middle East and Asia, and the act of children cleaning their classrooms has been one of the most noted and emulated practices in this regard.

What is less recognized is that school cleaning in the Japanese school curriculum is not something that stands alone, but is part of a group of noncognitive activities which together constitute what is called *tokkatsu* (*tokubetsu katsudo*) in the Japanese curriculum (see section 2, figure 1). A more detailed explanation will be provided in section 2, so it will suffice here to note that the characteristic of the Japanese curriculum is that it contains both cognitive (e.g., reading, math) and noncognitive learning, and that the pillar of the latter is the group of activities which come under *tokkatsu*.

What this means for how school cleaning is conducted is that it has an educational goal (see section 2.) which emphasizes the building of interpersonal relationships, etc., and which links to other *tokkatsu* activities, most notably, classroom discussion. It is the interplay between deliberation (classroom discussion) and collaborative acting (school cleaning), that makes cleaning not simply an act of cleaning, but an act of learning within the school curriculum.

Academic literature on school cleaning is sparse, since it is a taken for granted activity within the Japanese school. In many societies, cleaning is seen as the job of the janitors, whereas in countries such as Japan, students are expected to participate (Okihama, 1978). In Japanese society, cleaning as a form of character development is advocated by a number of different types of agents, including zen monks to company

executives, not just educators (Masuno, 2011).

The following sections will discuss school cleaning in the context of Japanese education, as it is situated in the curriculum.

2. The Present Japanese Curriculum and the Placement of Cleaning

2.1 The Structure of the Japanese Curriculum and Cleaning

Figure 1. is the national curriculum standards for elementary school in Japan. As can be seen, in addition to familiar subjects such as reading and math, there is time allotted to *tokubetsu katsudo*, *tokkatsu* for short.

Figure 1. The Japanese Curriculum for Elementary School



Chart 1. The Yearly Unit Hours of Subjects in Elementary School (School Education Law)

Grades		1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th
Hours for Eachsubject	Reading	306	315	245	245	175	175
	Social Studies			70	90	100	105
	Math	136	175	175	175	175	175
	Science			90	105	105	105
	→ Life Science	102	105				
	Music	68	70	60	60	50	50
	Art	68	70	60	60	50	50
	Home Economics					60	55
	Phy.Ed	102	105	105	105	90	90
→ Moral Education Period	34	35	35	35	35	35	
→ Foreign Language Activities					35	35	
→ Period for Integrated Studies			70	70	70	70	
→ Tokubetsu Katsudo (Tokkatsu)	34	35	35	35	35	35	
Total	850	910	945	980	980	980	

Note: Taken and translated from the Ministry of Education homepage, http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shoten/new-cs/yourcou/syo/index.htm

Tokkatsu is the period which covers noncognitive activities in the Japanese curriculum context, and which engages students in collaborative experiential learning. School cleaning is situated within *tokkatsu*, so this paper will start with a discussion on this period. The *Course of Study* outlines the goals of *tokkatsu* as below:

TOKKATSU (Elementary School) Course of Study

- ▶ Effective group activities aim at the well-balanced development of mind and body and the encouragement of individuality. Participation in the group helps build an active, positive attitude toward improving life and personal relations. At the same time, it should deepen each child's attitude toward life and the ability to do his/her very best. (Translation from Tsuneyoshi ed. 2012, *The World of Tokkatsu*, translated by Mary Louise Tamaru).

Source: <http://www.p.u-tokyo.ac.jp/~tsunelab/tokkatsu/>. The original (in Japanese) is available at: http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/new-cs/youryou/syo/toku.htm (as of Oct. 2015)

Since cleaning is listed under *tokkatsu*, whose aim is the holistic development of children, goals for cleaning come under the educational goals of this period. Having said this, however, there are various types of activities within *tokkatsu*, including school events and classroom activities, and children engage in different types of roles and behavior within these activities (figure 2).

For example, school events involve activities as diverse as sports day, ceremonies, and stayovers. All of these activities require student participation, and similar *tokkatsu* abilities such as collaboration and leadership, but they also ask children to engage in different types of activities (e.g., sports day would involve athletic activities, and stayover

might involve cooking together).

Classroom activities incorporate daily routines as well as discussion. Cleaning is mentioned as part of classroom activities in the *Course of Study*.

Figure 2. Activities Under *Tokkatsu*

Classroom activities	Student councils	Club activities	School events
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There are also different types of roles that children take during these activities. School cleaning is a routine chore. Routine chores are called *toban* (discussed in Section 2.2) and students form small groups which contribute to the welfare of the classroom and school. Student groups take turns cleaning different area not only classroom but, depending on the school, hallways, toilets, staircases, and etc. The assigned area for cleaning is rotated regularly so that everyone gets to experience (Tsuneyoshi, 2012).

As part of the period *tokkatsu*, the aim of cleaning is more than keeping classrooms clean. It is an opportunity for students to realize the importance of working with and for others, and to learn how they can work autonomously, how much they can accomplish together, etc. Since autonomous behavior is one of the important goals of *tokkatsu*, it is considered important that students gain internal satisfaction by doing these activities. Rather than telling students what to do, teachers are to encourage students to take the initiative. Students are encouraged to reflect and discuss the meaning of cleaning (see video below), gaining a deep understanding of what they are doing, and developing inner-motivation. Teachers discuss and make monthly, yearly plans, as well as relevant lesson plans.

As seen above, cleaning is part of the content of classroom activities in the *Course of Study* (Monbukagakusho, 2008; Tsuneyoshi, 2012). Cleaning is integrated into the

curriculum along with various activities to nurture children to achieve long-term development goals. As students get older, they are expected to be more independent and take care of more responsibilities. Figure 3 is an example of classroom activities, where cleaning is mentioned. It focuses on “classroom activities” within *tokkatsu*,

2.2 Comparing *Toban* and *Kakari*

As mentioned above, in the Japanese classroom, students take part in a range of responsibilities. There are routine chores called *toban* such as cleaning the classroom and serving lunch which all take place in collaborative small groups. These chores (*toban*) are seen as crucial in promoting the welfare of everyone, so the chores are rotated and every student takes charge. There are also pupil(s) who act as the one-day classroom coordinator (*nichoku*) for that day. Again, the roles are rotated, so everyone experiences the role, and everyone contributes to the basic management of the classroom.

There are also activities called *kakari*. Students can choose what kind of *kakari* they want to participate in. These also take place in small groups, but they have a different function, and children enjoy more initiative in organizing and planning the activity (e.g., writing the classroom newspaper), compared to the *toban*, which is more a responsibility.

Classroom discussions as part of classroom activities interacts with school cleaning and other activities within *tokkatsu* (cf. description of instructional video). There are different types of classroom discussion, those which are teacher-led and thus conveys the instructional goals clearly (as in the video), and those which are more student-led.

In general, because the *tokkatsu* goals emphasize autonomous and collaborative learning, learning interpersonal skills is considered very important, as well as being able to operate without the direct instruction of the teacher. The teacher takes turns over the responsibilities to the children, and peer learning in small groups and roles within them are supposed to make this process easier. In classroom discussions, ideally, by listening

Figure 3. School Cleaning in *Tokkatsu*

The Goal of Classroom Activities

Classroom activities help build desirable interpersonal relations.

Each group member takes part in making school life better.

These activities foster a healthy life style and an active, positive attitude toward problem solving.

(other categories in *tokkatsu*, such as school events, student councils, are abbreviated)

Contents of Classroom Activities: Overall (all grades)

A. Building communities in the classroom/school

a) Solving challenges faced by the classroom or school

b) Structuring the classroom jobs; taking turns

c) Improving all kinds of classroom group activities

B. Adapting to school routine and studies; safety and health

a) Forming an attitude toward life with high aspirations and definite aims

b) Forming basic daily habits

c) Forming desirable personal relations

d) Understanding the role of *toban* activities such as **cleaning** and the meaning of work

e) Utilizing the school library

f) Fostering healthy, safe daily habits, both mental and physical

g) School lunches which are guided by the perspective of food education (*shokuiku*); forming good eating habits

Contents of Classroom Activities: by grade level

Lower grades (1 and 2):

With the class as the basic unit, make activities fun by encouraging pupils to spontaneously help each other. At the same time, have activities that contribute to forming a positive attitude toward daily school life and studies.

Middle grades (3 and 4)

With the class as the basic unit, make classroom life enjoyable by encouraging cooperation. At the same time, have activities that contribute to a motivated attitude toward daily school life and studies.

Upper grades (5 and 6)

With the class as the basic unit, create an enjoyable classroom atmosphere and full school life based on mutual trust. At the same time, have activities that enhance an assertive attitude toward daily school life and studies

Source: The Ministry of Education, *Course of Study*,
http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/new-cs/youryou/syo/toku.htm, accessed
August, 2016.

to each other's ideas and expressing their opinions, students are supposed to learn to discuss and come to a consensus.

3. *Toban* Activities in Context

3.1 Linking *Toban* with Classroom Discussion for Deeper Understanding

In the sections above, the structure of *tokkatsu* as a collection of diverse activities--everything from school excursions to classroom activities--was discussed. Following this, the structure of activities which can be described loosely as roles in the class, or "chores", were described above as either *toban* or *kakari*. The *toban* were activities which were necessary for the class or school (or community), and which all children participated in, and took turns. The *kakari* were activities which the children chose, so *kakari* would vary depending on the child and school.

Now, the activities most emulated abroad at the present in *tokkatsu* are the *toban* activities (lunch and cleaning), notably cleaning. If seen in isolation, it may seem from the eyes of the foreign visitor, that cleaning is about making the environment clean. The Japanese characteristic, however, is that cleaning is not just about the act of making something clean. Since it is situated in the period of *tokkatsu*, which has its above-stated goals, the aim of cleaning is understood in relation to those goals. It is a process that cuts across the curriculum, rather than an act of making something clean. Cleaning *toban* as *tokkatsu* is linked to building collaborative relationships, to classroom discussion, and child development.

Now, cleaning is promoted in Japanese society from a wide range of perspectives. For example, a monk of a Soto Zen temple, Masuno (2011) is known for preaching cleaning from the viewpoint of *zen*, as part of *zen* training. Company CEOs have spoken out in favor of cleaning. For example, Konosuke Matsushita, the entrepreneur who built

Panasonic in a generation, is known for his support for cleaning as building character (Watanabe, 2012). Indeed, the act of school cleaning, or cleaning in general, is discussed in relation to a number of contexts, not limited to, bettering oneself, learning how to collaborate independently by doing, and acquiring values of responsibility; it is also discussed, for example, in relation to career education.

To give a specific example of cleaning as career education, the Ministry of Education, in its explanations of *tokkatsu*, links such noncognitive activities with a variety of possible aims, such as helping children understand themselves and their future, and their strengths. Thus, cleaning is not only discussed in the context of collaborating and students acting independently, bettering oneself, contributing to the school and community, but also to one's future and career (Ministry, 2011). This width of themes is made possible by situating this as an educational activity within a period in the curriculum, and linking it to other activities/subjects in the curriculum.

In other words, cleaning is closely linked to various activities within *tokkatsu*, especially classroom activities such as discussion, and *tokkatsu* is also linked to other periods of the curriculum, such as the subjects, values education, and the period for integrated studies.

Since these links are what make school cleaning not just an act of cleaning, but a form of learning, we will illustrate the link between cleaning in *tokkatsu* and classroom discussion using an instructional video on *tokkatsu* (Center for Excellence in School Education, Graduate School of Education, The University of Tokyo).

3.2 Instructional Video on *Toban*

As a response to the demand abroad for a visual example of *tokkatsu* at work, the Center for Excellence in School Education, Graduate School of Education, The University of Tokyo project on 21st Century Models produced the first volume of *Tokkatsu* DVD series²

in March 2015. The purpose of this DVD series is to explain the basic idea of whole child education, and how it is embedded in the curriculum and to show how it is practiced in daily collaborative activities in schools. The expected audience are school teachers, MOE staffs, and education researchers in many countries, hoping to promote the international discussion on strengths and weakness, issues of localization of *tokkatsu* and so on.

The title of the first volume is “Japanese Whole Child Education: Learning from Cleaning and Lunch”, and it contains three chapters as below.

Chapter 1: The Japanese Model of Whole Child Education: *Tokkatsu* – The lecture of
Tokkatsu (Tsuneyoshi, University of Tokyo)

Chapter 2: *Tokkatsu* Classroom Activities on Cleaning: Encouraging Inner-Motivated
Collaboration – *Nibukata* Elementary School, Tokyo

Chapter 3: Collaborative Learning Through Lunch – *Bunkyo Gakuin* University Girls’
Junior & High School, Tokyo

Chapter 1 is a lecture about *Tokkatsu* in which one of the authors, Tsuneyoshi, explains how *tokkatsu* – non-cognitive activities – is situated in the curriculum, and illustrates the elements of *tokkatsu* such as *toban* and *kakari*. Chapter 2 is a scene of a classroom discussion about cleaning in Nibukata Elementary School in Tokyo. The children think and discuss why the classroom is not so clean, what the consequences are, and what they can do to make it cleaner. The teacher asks the children questions and invite the janitor. The school janitor responds to questions from the teacher, which is seen as helping their understanding of the meaning of cleaning. This period is a teacher-led classroom discussion, but it shows how the act of cleaning is linked to classroom activities such as discussion, and how inner motivation is encouraged. Understanding the janitor something

akin to the teacher, an important member of the school community, which children are a part of, are also part of the aim. The classroom discussion of cleaning shows how the understanding and the sharing of the meaning of cleaning is as important to school cleaning as is the act of cleaning the school itself.

Chapter 3 takes scenes from students in a girls' junior high school, Bunkyo, serving lunch; a school newsletter about the lunch menu and its nutritional information are also provided. It also shows what is aimed to learn through school lunch, and the basic act on food education within the *tokkatsu* framework. The nutritionist is seen in the background, giving out some directions, but not directly engaged in setting the table. The students are working quickly together, setting the table, since it is a *toban*, and it is a routine. However, as part of *tokkatsu*, this period should not end as just an act of serving. Classroom discussion, much like the one in chapter 1 of the video would take place. In addition, the act of serving is linked to subjects such as learning about nutrition in home economics. Newsletters, as well, convey the perspective of food education (figure 3, B., g).

4. Discussion

The previous sections have outlined the framework of *tokkatsu* of which school cleaning is a part. This working paper shows how the structure in which school cleaning is placed in Japan within the official curriculum, allows it to interact with other noncognitive activities, notably classroom discussion within *tokkatsu*, as well as with other periods and cognitive subjects within the curriculum. The goals are diverse, from building interpersonal relationships, bettering oneself, to career education. The commonality is, however, that one learns by engaging in the act (learning by doing is one of the pillars of *tokkatsu*), that it is autonomous and collaborative learning, and that it is conceived of as an activity that has multiple functions. In other words, school cleaning,

widely understood in Japan, tries to link practice (in this context, the act of cleaning) and theory (in this context, what cleaning means), and to link it across the curriculum.

Notes

- 1) This paper was prepared for the seminar at the National Institute of Education, seminar, “Cleaning as Part of School Education Japanese Style: The Framework of TOKKATSU”, Thursday, 25 August 2016.
- 2) For more details, please see the website:
<http://www.p.u-tokyo.ac.jp/~tsunelab/tokkatsu/teaching/2016/03/30/333/>.

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