



## Chikara Nakasone

Hello, everyone.

My name is Chikara Nakasone. I have been teaching at elementary and junior high schools in Japan for about 30 years. First of all, let me tell you about myself.

I remember that I learned how to build a trusting relationship with children at university, but I am not sure if I did it properly or not. I am not sure if I did it properly or if it was too long ago.

I don't think anyone taught me that after I became a teacher, but I was wondering how to motivate children to learn and get involved in learning. I intuitively thought that physical exercise was important, so I went to a precinct of shrine and read Japanese poetry aloud as loudly as I could. Or I often do wrestling with children, growing and harvesting apples with the help of a farmer, and other outside learning activities.

I remember going outside to learn. Looking back on it now, I am not sure what I was doing it for.

I did not have a clear view of what I was doing and why I was doing it. I was proceeding with the project without having a clear understanding of the results of the learning for both the children and myself.

However, after about 10 years as a teacher, I began to lose my sense of myself, and it became natural for me to conduct classes in accordance with the Courses of Study. The Courses of Study are set by the national government and cover the content of education in a unified manner throughout the country. Japanese teachers are obligated to teach children in accordance with these study guidelines, and each revision restricts teachers' freedom in their approach to learning. In addition, each municipality is supposed to select and use textbooks that have passed the national government's certification test. Although the Courses of Study say

that textbooks should be handled with the children's interest in mind, it must be said that the content of education and the textbooks are far removed from the children's lives. Repeating such classes has made me feel that they are insufficient and boring.

That is when I saw that TV documentary, *Children Full of Life*. Like many of you, it was that TV documentary that introduced me to Mr. Kanamori.

I was surprised by the shocking content and strongly felt that this was the kind of education I wanted to pursue.

I was amazed at the way the children were communicating their thoughts to others without anxiety, the way they empathized with their friends and tried to connect with them, the way they wrote about their daily activities, and the way they made friends with each other.

I remember how moved I was by the amount of writing they were doing, and by the letter notebooks in which they wrote down their daily activities and exchanged them with their friends.

That is when my pursuit of Kanamori Sensei began.

I purchased books written by Kanamori Sensei, learned about a private educational circle called the Japan Life Education Association, which I had never heard of before, and began to follow Kanamori Sensei's work. I learned not only about Kanamori Sensei, but also about his surroundings.

I soon began attending the summer meetings of the Japan Life Education Association, and later the Ishikawa winter meetings as well, where Mr. Kanamori and his colleagues lived.

After attending these meetings several times, I found out that I couldn't learn more deeply without presenting my own record of practice.

The first thing I remember Kanamori Sensei advising me was to do my best to write one practice record in summer and one in winter.

In my case, what Kanamori-sensei said to me every time I presented my records of practice was, "What does it mean to listen to the voice of the children?"

What he told me every time I presented a record of my practice, he would ask me what it meant to listen to the children's voices, why I wanted them to learn the material, and how to create the children's original landscape. He also told me to create the children's original landscape.

To learn about Japan's medieval history in social studies, I took up the topic of local warlords. I practiced what I had learned by providing the children with materials on prominent local warlords each time.

I provided the children with materials on prominent local warlords each time. Kanamori-sensei pointed out sternly, "You are just doing what you want to do, but do the children want to learn about it?" He pointed out that this was indeed a teacher-driven unit development. So I asked the children again what they wanted to learn about medieval history, interviewed tourists to find out why people flocked to castles in the city, and clarified the relationship between famous castles in the other city and the local castle in our region. It was a practice that made us realize that there are no superfluous statements to be made in the opinions expressed by the children.

As for listening to children's voices, when I was challenged by the practice of learning about water system in social studies, he told me that children were not able to understand the essence of water cycle just learning from only the textbook content that dealt only with water supply and sewage systems.

The children looked up the amount of water they use in a day, and they posed a question: how can water not run out even though we use so much water every day? We visited the dam where the water is taken with the children to understand how the water is safely supplied. The area was rich in groundwater in many places, and water was gushing out of wells from several locations. Some of the children wondered why some people fetch water from wells instead of tap water, and the research study began. We used the interview technique. But after this, the children continued to exchange opinions, relying on their emotions. Mr. Kanamori pointed out that my lack of guidance was making them do so. I reflected that I should have clarified the facts of what the children had investigated and visualized what they had learned through the exchange of opinions and what they wanted to investigate further. In short, I could not lead the children's exchange of opinions in a direction that they could pursue because of a weak view of teaching and teaching materials. Listening to the children's voices is a multifaceted term, but in terms of subject learning, I learned that the children's voices can be positioned right in the lessons only when the study of teaching materials is well done.

It was after Kanamori-sensei's death that my learning from him began to take shape. I met Mr. Kanamori in 2003 for the first time. It took more than 15 years since I met him that I was able to make convincing lessons. It was only in 2019 that I was able to put it into practice in a way that made sense to me. The practice that made me think so was the soybean field trip in the Life Science lessons. This class was a group of children who were restless, had strong individual feelings, and had trouble keeping their heads together and staying still. I was troubled by the class' lack of progress, and decided to stop learning in the classroom the way I had been. In a positive sense, I left the learning to the children. The area around the school with its expansive fields. We thought that if we rented this field to grow soybeans, which were in the textbooks, it would lead to eating, which the children loved. The children were so enthusiastic about the project that they asked the landowner to rent the field, and they also wanted to visit the soybean field, so they organized their own excursion to see the soybean field by bus and train. During the soybean harvesting process, one girl said, "Sensei, I understood today what cooperation means. I felt sad because I couldn't harvest the soybeans by myself, but my friends helped me. That's what cooperation means. When it came time to make soybean flour, a child who had never been able to talk to their classmates asked them how to make soybean flour, and he spread this method to everyone. It was a practice that made me realize that this is how children's original landscapes are born.

I am gradually beginning to understand and realize how to listen to the children's voices and how to conduct research on teaching materials.

What I learned from Kanamori-sensei has slowly been absorbed into my body, and I think that Kanamori-sensei taught me that it is very important to have a place where we can critique each other's practices together with fellow teachers. Realizing the importance of friends, I started a small circle in my hometown about 10 years ago. I would like to see such a group of teachers in the Netherlands as well.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.

