



Naoto TSUJI

### *Child centered education by Mr. Kanamori*

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you all. I accompanied Mr. Kanamori on his lecture tour throughout the Netherlands in September 2012, exactly 11 years ago. At that time, I also met Henk at the lecture in Arnhem. I am very happy to visit this country again and to launch this project with the aim of learning from Kanamori Sensei once again. It is wonderful that Kanamori Sensei can act as a bridge between the Netherlands and Japan to improve both our education.

I wrote Kanamori-sensei's last book, "Learning Together in the Classroom," with him, in which I introduced his lectures in the Netherlands. I have worked with Kanamori-sensei for 9 years since 2008 at the same university Hokuriku Gakuin University in Kanazawa City. My laboratory was just next to his one, so we often went back and forth to talk. I really enjoyed the time we spent talking over a cup of coffee. Sometimes we used to go to the cozy restaurant, which was run by the parents of his student, and drunk delicious Japanese sake and talked about various topics.

#### **My Fisrt Encounter with Mr. Kanamori**

I first met Kanamori Sensei at the documentary "Children Full of Life," just like everyone else. It was a very memorable experience. It was aired for the first time on the night of my birthday. I happened to turn on the TV and saw the beginning of the program, and I had a gut feeling that I had to record it. Eventually I was right. I was amazed to see how lively the children were, and more than anything, I was touched by his words. Kanamori Sensei teacher said, "Let people live in our hearts. There is no capacity in the heart." I was a part-time lecturer at several private universities in Tokyo at that time, I always showed the recorded documentary in my classes.

Which scenes are you impressed the most? I guess many people might pay attention to the raft incident and Mifuyu's confession. Of course, these scenes are very memorable. What about the argument scene with the teacher? Children who argue with a teacher like Yo are so few. It is also a remarkable scene that Mifuyu started talking about her father's death by herself.

However, I consider the scolding against bullying scene to be as important as these scenes in the program. Perhaps you remember that when Kanamori Sensei found out some bad words or rumors about classmates were spread in the class, he told children to look at their own ugliness. Such instruction is not often seen in Japan, by the way. I wonder where did Kanamori Sensei learn about the education to look at oneself? In his graduation thesis, Kanamori Sensei researched Toshitaro Murayama, the teacher of writing essays about daily life who was suppressed during World War II. Murayama emphasized that education should be based on real life, and that children should be encouraged to look at their lives honestly from their own sensibilities, and to write about it. That's all about his thesis.

### **First Contact with Mr. Kanamori**

Let me tell you about my personal experience with Mr. Kanamori.

Five years after watching the documentary "Children Full of Life", I met Kanamori Sensei in person, not the one in the video, in April 2008, when I started working at the Junior College of Hokuriku Gakuin University. We had the same orientation on the first day of work. I approached him and introduced myself, saying that I was from Tokyo and that I had shown your documentary in my classes when I was working as a part-time lecturer at the university there. He was surprised, I guess, but seemed to be glad to hear that. After our talk, he suggested me that he could take me to a beautiful place where was known as a place where so many katakuri (erythronium, family of the lily) grow. Katakuri flower is known as the arrival of spring in the mountain forest. I was

surprised that he suddenly took me to such a place so soon after the orientation by his car, but I felt warm atmosphere and familiar with him.

I also had the sense that I could talk to Kanamori Sensei about anything.

### **Invitation to LEA**

It was him who also invited me to join Nisseiren, the Life Education Association (LEA). Nisseiren is an organization that considers education based on the philosophy and ideology of life education. Mr. Tamura will report on the details later. It is a private educational organization of teachers from all over Japan, with local circles throughout the country, and a national meeting is held once a year. This year it was held in Hokkaido last month. In Ishikawa Prefecture, there are two. One is the Kaga Circle in the southern part of the prefecture, and the other is the Kanazawa Circle based in Kanazawa City, the prefectural capital. The Kanazawa Circle was held at Kanazawa University when I was first appointed to Hokuriku Gakuin University, eventually has been held at either Kanamori Laboratory or my laboratory at Hokuriku Gakuin University, too. Currently, Kanazawa University is again the venue, and Ms. Uemori is taking the lead in setting up the place now. Also, Mr. Nakasone, who will introduce himself later, is an elementary school teacher who drove many hours from Nagano Prefecture to join the Kanazawa Circle and was taught directly by Mr. Kanamori.

The circle members who are mainly local elementary school teachers met twice a month, and one or two of them would report and discuss their own educational practices, classes, and classroom situations. The average number of participants would be about 10.

Each time, we carefully and deeply examined and discussed how to talk to children, how to ask questions to them, and whether the teacher's attitude, way of proceeding, and way of thinking were the right.) I myself had no experience to teach in an elementary school. I have taught social studies at a junior high school for two years, but other than that, I have been doing graduate school research and teaching at some universities. However, just like Professor Kanamori, I was in charge of the elementary school teacher training program at Hokuriku Gakuin University, so I really learned a lot about the work of elementary school teachers through this circle. Even at the university where I am currently working, I am in charge of the elementary school teacher training course, but my experience in Kanazawa is of great influence and has a great impact on my way of teaching or thinking. That's also thanks to what I learned from Mr. Kanamori, the Kanazawa Circle and Nisseiren.

### **What Did Kanamori-sensei Consider Valuable or Precious in Life?**

He loved nature activities like mountain climbing. And he often visit beech forests at Kanazawa. I think the beech forest was a special place for him, like a church or place for meditation. He might consider that it was the place where he can return to his true self. It was a place to be still, a place to look back at himself, a place to feel the richness of nature and a sense of oneness with nature. He could be back to his childhood in the nature.

Although he became famous for his life lessons, I guess that Kanamori-sensei's first priority was enjoying life.

As I said, nature is both a place to be still and to return to one's childhood. On the other hand, when he actually saw the children in elementary school, he saw that they were not living their own lives, that many of them were busy to preparing for entrance exams, others for their lessons like piano, calligraphy, swimming, etc. and these things are all being set up by their parents. Just a little free time they had spent only watching TV. Children today also tend to spend their free time just watching videos on their smartphones or tablets, playing games, or working on social networking sites, the situation is very similar, or I should say it's getting worse. Kanamori Sensei had a strong sense of crisis about the children's circumstances. Childhood is the time when life shines bright the most. Children are supposed to show their ability to shine from the inside, but their brightness is fading away now. This is why Kanamori Sensei introduced nature activities in his classes.

### **Wild Activities**

In the documentary, we see children lying in puddles in the schoolyard, kicking with all their might, and getting covered in mud. Or, there is a scene where kids dive into a river! Kanamori Sensei often emphasized the importance of festivals. Schools have too many ceremonies in Japan. Unlike the Netherlands, but in Japan, we have a lot of ceremonies. Entrance ceremony, opening ceremony in each term, closing ceremony also, graduation ceremony, and even the day of field trip or sports day, it is also required long talk by the principal! Children's bodies are bound. Bound body make their mind closed. Once there was a theater director named Toshiharu Takeuchi. I believe that Kanamori Sensei shared his philosophy. Mr. Takeuchi pointed out that schools have become places where children are tied up to make it easier for teachers to teach them. They cannot open their minds. Instead, Kanamori Sensei included, they need time to open both their minds and bodies. That's why they were doing things like that doronko soccer game (playing soccer in the mud) and diving in the river. These

efforts were well understood by the parents. In fact, he invited the parents to come and watch when children were actually playing doronko soccer and diving in the river. (This was, for one thing, to ensure that parents would watch over the children to prevent them from engaging in dangerous activities, and at the same time, to directly gain their understanding and sympathy for his efforts. )

In 1974 and 1975, when Kanamori Sensei was 28 or 29 years old, he worked with the children to cultivate a field to grow some vegetables such as watermelons, corn, eggplants, tomatoes, and sweet potatoes. The number of vegetables were gradually increased, and the children became absorbed in the activity. They considered the cultivating and growing vegetables as their own work, they didn't think that they were being forced to do it.

Since they grew the vegetables themselves, they felt very close to the farming and the harvest, and they often began to pay close attention to what was going on in the rice paddies in the area, which the children in other classes did not even notice. (A girl in the class said that she began to feel a positive resident in this area.) This is the kind of approach that nurtures them in their daily lives, which is an example what life education is all about.

### **Reading Books and Life related Learning**

He also put a great deal of effort into reading literature. As I mentioned earlier, he had learned how to write essays on daily life when he was a university student, he gave the children opportunities to write as what they saw or what they thought. You must remember "letter notebooks" in the documentary. Reading was just as important as writing. This is the fundamental ability to express oneself and understand the feelings of others.

Even in the other lessons, questions were asked that were connected to living. For instance, in math lesson, after measuring the stride length, they calculated how long they have walked during their lifetime. Learning not only by intellectually, but also physically. Children can understand what they learn in relation to themselves.

### **"Be a catcher, not a pitcher"**

Kanamori sensei always said that we adult must be a catcher, not a pitcher. Teachers and parents tend to give instructions to children and do not take their voices into consideration. He thought we have to change the attitude toward children.

He has always supported children and has resisted forces that diminish or suppress the children's true potential. The most important thing for Kanamori Sensei was to protect the environment where life shines brightly.

In order to somehow pull out the brightness of life and the power that should be exhibited from the children, he encouraged the children in various ways to open their hearts and minds. For this reason, you may remember that the teacher himself was very open attitude.

I remember that his lectures in the Netherlands were more overacting than usual, for reasons of language barrier. It was truly a lecture with body language, and even though he was speaking in Japanese, it was as if what he was saying was being understood. In Japan, we Japanese don't have that kind of action. (Kanamori Sensei loved to go to theaters. He joined "Shimin Gekijo" (citizens' theater), where the citizens pay for a professional theater group to come and play, and enjoyed watching the play. I am sure that he valued such theatricality and drama in his classes. I would say that it is action, and facial expressions that grasp and open the hearts and minds of children.)

I hope you could get a deeper and more impression of Mr. Kanamori.

Thank you.



Katakuri (erythronium)

<https://www.noda-kanko.com/photo/2015-04-19-15-45.html>



Nakajima machi, the village where Mr. Kanamori had grown in his childhood.



Forest in lozen mountain in Kanazawa City, where Mr. Kanamori often visited.



Nata Elementary School in Komatsu City, the first elementary school where Mr.

Kanamori was assigned in 1969



Commemorative Graduation Photo, Mr. Kanamori was the 6th grade homeroom teacher.