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Preface

Man's maturity: to have regained the seriousness of a child at play.
 – Friedrich Nietzsche

In our ten years of teaching in Japanese schools, we have been fortunate to share classes with many excellent students – bright, articulate young people with perceptive insights about the world around them. These young people have the capacity to achieve great things. They are also held back by a pair of debilitating limitations not of their own making and for which they are entirely blameless. These greatly hinder the students in their natural attempts to act creatively on the world.

The first limitation is the inability to openly criticize aspects of their daily life, due to the fear of social sanctions imposed by those obsessed with maintaining the status quo. Students feel they must adapt to survive, and over time learn to adopt the passive and gently asinine expression typical of the crowd. Yet it is inevitable that not everything students see and hear makes sense to them, because the reality is that not all aspects of life are agreeable – some chafe, others seem morally wanting, needlessly arduous, or intellectually crude. To deny young people the opportunity to express themselves about the things that concern them most deeply is not to resolve their concerns, but merely to sweep them under the carpet, where they fester and become rotten. Indeed, if we accept the truth that solving a problem depends on being able to see it *as a problem*, then the inability to openly acknowledge deficiencies in one's way of life is tantamount to pre-

venting their solution – at least in the conscious, principled manner that best puts an issue to rest.

The second obstacle faced by Japanese students is the burden of rote learning. Despite many recent changes in education, the average school day remains dominated by the practice of shuffling between stuffy grey rooms and attempting to inwardly digest the spoken narrative of a teacher. The process is mentally stultifying, as the faces of students and their attitude to study typically attest. It is stultifying because in these conditions students have so few opportunities to think for themselves, to consult their reason and experience and see what they might supply in the way of answers to academic questions. The constant need to pay attention to information handed down from on high, and the gradual conflation of that process with knowledge acquisition, means that by the end of high school it has become nearly impossible for most to see the inconsistencies or flaws in the so-called “facts” they hear, or to appreciate the inherent partiality of all human attempts at understanding, and the concomitant need to supplement received wisdom with careful thinking.

A key virtue of philosophy lies in its pedagogy. Students doing philosophy learn how to speak not through the words of their teacher, from the textbook, or to please others, but by approaching problems *from the inside, for themselves*; thinking about what kind of response they call for, drawing on reason and experience to supply an answer. To do philosophy is to adopt a peculiarly inquisitive cast of mind that takes nothing for granted and nothing at face value. It helps students overcome sensitivity to criticism by taking it *as foundational* that all aspects of physical and social reality – all the basic concepts we use to talk about the world – are open to improvement. And it overcomes the monotony of rote learning by engaging students in an imaginative search for answers to complex questions, inviting them to articulate clearly *what they believe* and *why they believe it*. Through philosophy,

students learn to orient themselves within a questioning spirit that reveals the deep connection between playful speculation and critical acumen.

It is our conviction that philosophy holds immense value for the Japanese education system; in fact, that it is *the* missing element. The recent prominence of critical thinking and active learning as educational movements in Japan are an implicit recognition that students ought to be encouraged to become independent thinkers. What has yet to be recognized is the power of philosophy – the practice of questioning first discovered over 2000 years ago in Ancient Greece. Philosophy has the potential to remove the impediments to thinking currently weighing on young minds, allowing them a deeper, more powerful, and more articulate engagement with all manner of academic and personal issues, and indeed with life itself.

AD & JH

Teaching Philosophy

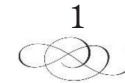
An Introduction in Six Essays

“Philosophy made my world much bigger.”

– Nanako Tajima, Waseda University

“Studying philosophy made me realize that everything in the world can be complicated and that thinking deeply about complicated issues broadens your perspective.”

– Momoko Nishino, Tokyo University



Imagination and Language in the Classroom

I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free.

– Michelangelo

The need for imagination in the classroom is easily overlooked. It is not obvious how it fits into lesson plans, and difficult to see how teachers might make use of it. Imagination is wild, individual, and unruly, stirring up meanings and wandering among them. Neither disciplined nor quantifiable, it is an inconvenience to teachers, who have content to cover and achievement to measure. It is also unclear how imagination relates to the great educational aim of preparing students for life. It doesn't help bake bread, build dams, bore tunnels or balance spreadsheets. The physical world is unmoved by it. By conventional wisdom, imaginative exercises are a pure indulgence.

But what a pleasurable indulgence. To be immersed in the multi-faceted richness of thinking; catching glimpses of the way lines of poems resonate with newspaper headlines; snippets of a song with overheard gossip; the rules of chess with a boardroom meeting. Immediate, non-linear thinking is deeply involving; a working out of what things mean and what follows from them that rewards the spirit in a way that writing down results or tackling problems or composing es-