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A comparative study of the system of five schooldays in Japan and at small schools in the city of Calgary, Canada

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Prologue

The Ministry of Education changed a part of The Law of School Education and set up a system of five schooldays to make the second Saturday a holiday. Following the highly industrial nations, Japan has just started this system within the limits of the second Saturday a month. There have been some controversies among school teachers, children, and their parents, then what does this system mean to children in other countries that have enforced this system for many years?

Fortunately, I (Yokoyama) had an opportunity in 1992, to participate in the exchange program at faculty of education, The University of Calgary, Canada for five weeks. I attended some classes on educational system in Canada for the first two weeks and after that I did student teaching at some schools for three weeks. Before participating in the program, I had decided to research on how children in Canada spend time on holidays and on what this system means to grownups.

Chapter 1. The Contents of the questionnaire

Canada has two different types of government, provincial and federal government. Especially provincial government has a greater power and Canada does not have central board of education nor curriculum as Japanese Ministry of Education has its own central curriculum and great influence, however, all the schools in Canada are entirely controlled by provincial government.

The city of Calgary has two different kind of school boards, that are divided into two sections, Public and Separate. Public board of education governs ordinary public schools

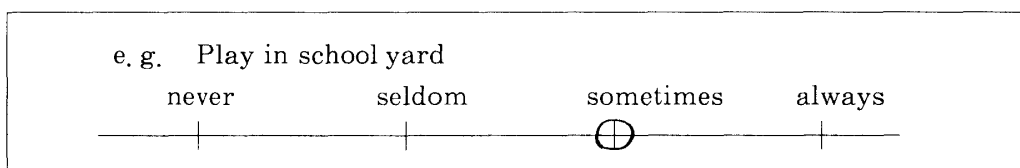
(non-religious) like those in Japan. On the other hand, Separate board of education governs Catholic schools which have religious program based on Roman Catholic, but they are not private schools. In Canada, there are few private schools.

The schools on which I did research are as follow :

Clarence Sansom Junior High school (Public)
St. Patrick Elementary school (Separate)
Chief Justice Milvain Elementary school (Public)

The questionnaire consists of 22 questions, and through these questions pupils can check their activities they usually do on holidays with these terms, "never", "seldom", "sometimes", and "always". These questions are as follow:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. shopping downtown | 11. volunteer work |
| 2. go to church | 12. attend youth group |
| 3. go on a hike | 13. arts and crafts |
| 4. watch TV or videos | 14. bake or cook |
| 5. read books or magazines | 15. Listen to music |
| 6. play video games | 16. clean room |
| 7. go to a private school to study | 17. spend time with your friends |
| 8. play sports | 18. go to a party |
| 9. do homework | 19. go to dance |
| 10. write a letter | 20. go to a concert |



Other questions are follows :

21. Do you like school? Yes/No
22. Would you like longer weekends? Yes/No

Chapter 2. The Result of the Questionnaire

(1) Clarence Sansom Junior Highschool (n=19) ESL class, grade 2

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
always	3	3	1	13	6	7	1	11	8	2	1	2	2	4	14	3	12	4	4	1
sometimes	11	2	9	6	4	2	0	6	2	4	1	2	3	8	4	6	7	9	6	6
seldom	4	4	5	0	8	8	0	2	6	7	7	2	6	1	1	7	0	6	4	9
never	1	10	4	0	1	2	18	0	2	6	10	13	8	6	0	3	0	0	5	3

ESL class (English as a second language) is for students who are not proficient in English. It consists of students from other nations.

(2) St. Patrick Elementary School, grade 5 students (n=25)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
always	0	2	3	17	6	10	0	11	7	0	0	0	2	5	14	2	18	3	3	2
sometimes	14	6	8	3	14	8	0	10	12	6	7	2	8	13	2	14	4	13	6	2
seldom	2	6	9	2	4	2	1	0	3	12	2	2	6	3	8	6	2	5	4	13
never	7	11	4	0	1	1	24	0	2	6	16	18	5	3	1	3	1	3	12	7

(3) Chief Justice MiLvain Elementary school, grade 6 (n=26)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
always	8	5	1	15	9	10	1	8	8	1	1	4	4	3	14	10	7	4	4	1
sometimes	14	5	11	11	9	11	1	10	15	6	5	2	11	10	8	9	16	10	9	5
seldom	4	3	12	0	6	5	0	6	3	11	9	1	6	4	3	3	2	8	6	12
never	0	13	2	0	2	0	23	1	0	8	11	19	5	9	1	4	1	2	7	8

As you can understand in these charts, pupils in Canada don't do any particular activities in the way of spending their spare time. It is obvious that they spend time, in playing video game

or watching TV just the way the large number of Japanese children do so.

In question No.7, some pupils answer "sometimes" in their activities. In this case, this means that parents from different countries as immigrants often get their children to school once a week to offer some unique programs, such as their native language or cultural heritage. In Canada there are not any cram schools to offer special education for an entrance examination like "JUKU" in Japan. In Canadian highschools, if students get B or A marks in their course of study and wish to attend university, they can be accepted by any colleges or universities in any province.

In question No. 21 and 22, they answer in this way :

21. Do you like school ?

Yes 37 (elementary)

9 (junior highschool)

No 8 (elementary)

10 (junior highschool)

22. Would you like longer weekends ?

Yes 42 (elementary)

18 (junior highschool)

No 6 (elementary)

1 (junior highschool)

In question No.21, most of girls, compared with boys, answer that they like to go to school. According to vice president of St. Patrick, this implies that boys tend to be fond of physical activities outside a classroom and on the other hand, girls prefer to talking with their friends in classroom.

In Canadian schools, many of them, unlike Japanese ones, don't have to spend much time in their school activities after school and many teachers can go home by 4 or 5 o'clock everyday. According to a certain research, fewer parents set a high value on getting into university and they regard the secondary education as the most important in Canadian society, (90% of them) because most of the parents and teachers believe that, on primary or secondary education level, developing children's own identity and personality is the most important and they also believe education is a personal matter and a person who knows what to do for himself has a great power for his/her future. And they think ignorance to everything causes much problem as well. Then what is the current education like in Japan? Most of the pupils seem to be pushed to answer all alike in a certain examination or classroom activities while on primary or secondary level, they are required to build their own identity.

In Japanese class rooms, maybe you would find that many pupils are absorbed in writing down what their teacher writes on a black board and you would probably know there are not discussion or few of them raise their hands even if they wish to ask something for their teacher as well, but in social studies class at junior highschool, 「which I attended」 its topic was " industrial revolution", and pupils were divided into two groups and they discussed it. In that class, they opened a hot debate and emphasis was put on training themselves for having their

own opinion and thinking by themselves. Besides, in math class, its level was not so high as math education in Japan and moreover they have special math or science class, that is called "remedial class" for some pupils who don't have a good listening skill or who can't keep up with the class.

Many of them go to Public facilities, as art museums that are much cheaper than those in Japan, and go to a movie or go camping with their family on weekends, on holidays. This is. I think, due to the perfection of five-school day-system in Canadian society.

Chapter 3 . Meaning of this System in Canada

I have remarked the life style of Canadian students and educational systems roughly. Compared with them who take the system for granted, I wonder what their parents think of it. As you know, Canada is a country made of immigrants from different countries. During short stay as a student teacher at junior high school, I fortunately had a chance to see many parents who work as school volunteers. It's very common in Canada that they share time with teachers and students in doing volunteer work to know school activities better. And some of them were educated in different countries before coming to Canada. I will introduce some specific opinions of them.

(1) A Mother from Nicaragua

She said she was Christian and Saturday seem to mean so much for her. "Saturday is a day for Christian to have a rest without working. I usually get my son to church. I would protest against it if my son should go to school on Saturdays."

She seemed to be very surprised to know that in Japan this system has just begun since September in 1992.

(2) A Father from Bangladesh

He has had an opportunity to study at a college in Soviet Union before. He also remarked that in Soviet Union 6-school day-system has been enforced saying in this way :

"Students in Canada go to school for 183 days in a year, on the other hand, students in Japan go to school for 243 days in a year. I am sure that Japan has become one of the richest nations in the world due to its educational systems. I think educational systems should be reflected upon changing need of society. I personally prefer to 6-school day-system"

(3) School teacher Ms. Karen Nohara

I stayed with her family during my stay in Calgary. She is a Canadian and has Japanese husband. She once lived in Tokyo and Nagoya for about six years. She knows much about Japan.

"I believe family needs to have much time to talk with each other. While we were in Japan, unfortunately we didn't have enough time to share with my husband and my little kids. That's what we moved from Japan to Canada for. My husband really enjoys our life in Calgary."

The concept of holiday seems to look alike in terms of sharing time with family. Also I do think how totally different a father and daughter relationship is from that of the Japanese. That is, they share much time to talk with each other for many hours. They are on good terms in anytime as if they had an intimate relationship. They always get together at supper time at the same time and after praying for god, mother asks each of them what they did on that day,

while they were eating supper. This is the best time for them to get together and family ties are more important than anything else.

In Canada the concept of 5-schoolday-system is that how people and each of them spend time together and enjoy holiday for themselves, Also we can say that the system was set up due to religeous matter in North America not to a political issues. It is entirely up to the individual how he gets a day off and naturally each person must take responsibility to it.

In Japan, however, "effective and competitive industrial society" makes family fall apart, and makes us forget our friendship, and it robbed us of much time to consider the future life we should share with, and of time consider our way of life living with our environment. Ant no need to say, there was some controversies among Japan and other nations that the Japanese works too much, so they should have a drastic reform to reduce work day. In this reason, Japan, being criticized by other industrial nations, could not help setting up this system. Naturally, there has been much fear among teachers, children, and their parents, because the Ministry of Education suddenly informed superintendents at regional board of education about the system almost six months before its enforcement.

Epilongue

By the reformation of a course of study in 1989, the amount of curriculum that students must take grew bigger then the way it used to be. Many newspapers have been revealing the great agony of teachers and students that teachers have to push students to underatand too much of curriculum within the limit of schooltime. Even if this 5-schoolday-system is being enfoced acutually the course of study remaked above is formed under the 6-schoolday-system, therefore many teachers have to make the schooltime much longer or some school activities, like school excursion might be reduced in the years to come.

In present conditions, there has been the movement protesting against a new course of study context, and also asking some public facilities for its reform of service, so this shows that the system would evidently not be a complete one as long as there still remains the central curriculum being criticized for its contents.

What should we learn from the Canadians who put a high value on family? In their point of view, what we should do is not to get children to do something particular. As the questionnair shows, students don't seem to do any particular things on Saturdays and according to some parents' opinion, many of them just have much time to be with family, compared with Japanese students. So, it is clear that we must set up a full five-workday system in every company in the years to come, because the system would be meaningless if parents were not home. Therefore all of us must be required to keep on discussing the meaning of labor and much prpblom of compa-ny-centered society in Japan befor we consider how to spend time on holidays.

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