

木原雅子さんが語る「WYSHプロジェクト」

子どもの力を引き出せ！

「自分スイッチ」の入った子どもたちへ
オーダーメイドの授業をデザイン



It takes many months to prepare for just one class

Even the students who had never sat still in their seats couldn't take their eyes off of the video on the screen. They were listening closely to what the instructor was saying. They burst into laughter when the instructor said the pain from STDs is as painful as when you get kicked in the crotch. In this class of "Life", it was very impressive to see students writing and expressing their thoughts enthusiastically. Some shed their tears while recollecting their painful memories of being bullied.

This is a story of WYSH (Well-being of Youth in Social Happiness) education which was developed for school students by Dr. Masako Kihara. I was truly fascinated by the thoroughly designed class, which was so fresh and interesting.

Actually, it takes many months just to prepare for this one class. Dull and boring desks were decorated with beautiful tablecloths and flowers. There was also a "theme color" for the class. School teachers who are always in their sweat shirts were asked to wear their best outfits. All these were meant to make this class vividly memorable.

"Each class is tailor-made for the students in each school. It is not just to give them knowledge. Our goal is to make them to be able to think and start doing things by themselves. We need to move their hearts since the first time. That is why I, as a professional researcher, would use all of the techniques that I know to make sure that we reach our goal."

The WYSH project is open for application from schools all over the country. Among the applicant schools, those that are considered to be the most in need of WYSH education will be chosen to participate. A couple of months before the class, interviews and questionnaire surveys will be conducted to understand the

situation the students in each school are in. Teaching materials will be developed, based on the results. After the class, the effectiveness of the classes will also be thoroughly evaluated.

“Composition of the class, PowerPoint, DVD, class room’s atmosphere, etc., everything is prepared thoroughly in detail. The cartoon characters used in teaching materials and background music would reflect the students’ interest or preference, based on what we found from the prior surveys. Even those students, who’ ve never expressed their opinions in class before, would get going when they hear their favorite songs playing.

And to make it easier for them to express their opinion, the theme of the talk that we’ d choose for them to discuss would be something they are familiar with. At the end, we would play a video which, of course, is originally made for them.”

Two-storied education: Raise them to dream and hope

From hearing her story, you might think that Dr. Kihara is an educator. However, actually, she is a researcher on socio-epidemiology. “At this moment, it’ s only us, in the world, who are conducting researches in the field of socio-epidemiology.



Simply put, socio-epidemiology is based on social marketing where It equally combines both medical science and social science. By using both concrete statistics through quantitative (questionnaires) and qualitative (interviews) researches, we are able to comprehend the phenomenon; what the target population need or what they value. Intervention programs and guidance could then be developed more effectively for them.”

WYSH project started when Dr. Kihara, who was then working on an epidemiologic research on AIDS, got involved in an AIDS prevention education project.

Back in 2002, the number of high school students in the 8th grade who had had sexual experience peaked at 40.9%. As the combined oral contraceptive pill became legal in 1999, STDs and AIDS infection increased, and abortion among teenagers also rose during the first few years of the 2000s. Dr. Kihara was then, felt the important of sex education, and started the AIDS prevention education project. “First of all, to understand the situation, we thoroughly conducted questionnaire surveys along with interviews to investigate why people do certain behaviors. Regardless of the region of the schools, we often found the word “I am not sure about this sense!” from surveys and interviews. That was when I felt that “bullying” might be prevalent among them.”

Then in 2004, Dr. Kihara started investigating on bullying. At that point, she was pondering about what the biggest problem was, and what can be done to solve that.

While trying to find the answers, the scope seemed to grow bigger and bigger.

“Whether it’ s sexual behavior, bullying, loss in ability to communicate, etc., these different problems share the same backgrounds of declining self-esteem and weakening bond with surrounding people. To address only what can be seen on the surface is nothing more than symptomatic treatment. That is why I decided to develop an education for schools to help them deal with the deeper parts of the problems.”

It was when Dr. Kihara was interviewing a female student who had had experience of abortion with intense risky sexual activities, that she noticed that the student had no aspiration for her future. “She (the student), herself, knew that she could get HIV/STIs, or put herself in danger, if she kept doing the same things. Despite all that, she said she does not care as long as she has someone with her to keep her accompanied. I, then, felt the importance to raise children to dream and hope; otherwise the problems will never be solved.”

And that is why WYSH education was designed as a two-storied education. The first floor of the education is a fundamental education as a human which aims to help them boost their self-esteem and bond with people. The second floor is the education of “life” , “preventing bullying” , “sexual behavior” , “communication education” , etc. The goal is for them to be independent, being able to think and learn to overcome obstructions themselves.

“I want to bring out their potential” : Science & Passion

“In the past, family and local community used to be the place where children learn the fundamental education. However, the influence of family has been decreasing and connection of people within community also has been weakening. Thus, now we need to include the education into school. And in order to truly convey our messages to them, whether it’ s ‘stop bullying,’ ‘protect your body’ , etc., we need both science and passion to work together.”

“Children have huge potential, but they are now just living passively; their “self-switch” has not been turned on” , said Dr. Kihara. “They have different potential. It can be art, sports, or academia. It’ s such a waste for them to spend their energy that can be used to bring out their potential on some fights or dramas. I want to help pull them out of that negative situation.” She also stated, “Human won’ t make a move without passion. But, mere inspiration cannot change society. To change the society, you need scientific data. Both science and inspiration are necessary.”

Although WYSH education takes time and effort, there are certain changes in the hearts of the students after the class. Emails from students keep coming to Dr. Kihara’ s inbox incessantly, asking for advices or updating their lives to her. “But they would stop contacting me once they’ re fine,” said Dr. Kihara with laughter.

In order to involve more teachers into the project, Dr. Kihara is now working on a book of case-studies which includes examples of model classes, essential data. She is also conducting workshops for school teachers.

“With a glance, Japan seems to be a wealthy country, but there are a lot of children who are suffering in places we cannot see. We need to try to look at them more, and make sure that they discover what they’ re good at, and exert it. I want them to shine, very brightly. I think that is what a “wealthy country” truly means. Sole criticism will not change the world. As long as I live, I want to keep this activity going to help them, even if it’ s only a slight part.”