

Diversity and Opacity of the “Other” in Educational Relationships: A Critique of the “Metric Fixation” and the “Tyranny of Meritocracy”

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This paper focuses first on the issue of measuring education. When we consider “education and equity,” we tend to quantify educational outcomes and compare these figures with others. While it is necessary to consider “equity” (or inequity) through comparisons with others, if we quantify the achievement of outcomes and evaluate the management of the organisation, we fall into a “metric fixation.” Next, the paper discusses the issue of meritocracy, presenting a perspective on abilities as social and communal rather than individual. Finally, it discusses the concept of “collaborative learning” as presented by the Central Council for Education Report of 2021. This report states the importance of respecting all others as valuable beings. In order to clarify the significance and value of the presence of others in educational relationships, the paper considers a certain high school discussion situation.

“Equity” in education cannot be realised by comparing personal figures on a particular scale. If we wish to realise “equity,” paradoxically, it is essential that we do not ask whether we are achieving “equity” through comparison with others. Being equally opaque to one another, being diverse, is essential for the realization of pleasurable “collaborative learning.”

Keywords: Metric fixation / Tyranny of meritocracy / Diversity and opacity of the “other”

1. Introduction

Education is a “teaching-learning” relationship. People encounter new worlds and knowledge through others, growing and transforming themselves together in the specific human relationship of education. Educational relationships, as relationships with others, involve uncertainty.

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When discussing the relationship between “education and equity,” the discourse tends to lean towards sociological perspective rather than specific human relationships. For example, consider the significant differences in learning environments and educational opportunities that exist between the rich and the poor, or the various educational inequalities that exist between majorities and minorities. There are structures in our social relations, including education, that disadvantage certain categories of people. A disproportionate distribution of educational resources due to social context results in differences in educational and academic achievement. As a result, class differences are enhanced and reproduced.

Such inequalities need to be rectified. Clearly, sociological research and discussion plays an important role in elucidating the social structures that produce inequalities and in finding ways to achieve social justice through education.

However, it is not easy to answer questions such as what circumstances, if achieved, can be described as “equitable” and what circumstances are “inequitable.” If we are to discuss education and equity, we need objective measures or subjective assessments of value.

When measuring educational outcomes, performance, and the allocation of educational resources using specific measures, there will always be differences. However, it is difficult to determine whether differences in educational attainment are “good” or “bad” because of differences in natural physical and mental abilities, as well as differences in region of birth and family environment.

Miyadera Akio points out the fundamental difficulties with the argument for reducing inequalities. Even if differences between hierarchies are levelled out, it is still impossible to avoid differences in educational attainment between individuals within a hierarchy. Although it is possible to explain even these individual differences entirely in terms of environmental factors, the possibility that inequalities may arise naturally, by chance, cannot be entirely ruled out. Therefore, Miyadera says, when it comes to the issue of inequality, “we need to rethink the problem from the perspective of society and the diverse ways of life within it. There are still problems that require such normative judgements” (Miyadera, 2006: 37).

Achieving equity in education through the equalization of measures faces limitations. Rather, there are problems that arise from quantification.

This paper begins by considering the problems of quantifying educational outcomes and the management and evaluation of educational activities through measurement, which is a fundamental premise in discussing “education and equity.” It then seeks to suggest a different approach to “equity” that goes beyond the elimination of measured quantitative differences, through a discussion of “collaborative learning.” The purpose of this paper is to show the theoretical possibilities of not measuring educational outcomes and positively affirming that the “others” we learn with are diverse and opaque.

“Diverse ways of life” does not mean numerical differences measured on identical scales. Based on Miyadera’s argument, this paper addresses the importance of the diverse existence of the “other” in educational relationships, beyond our understanding. It reconsiders “education and equity” through considering the meanings of not exhaustively measuring educational outcomes, not comparing comparative figures, and the significance of the “Other” as a co-operative rather than competitive partner.

We start by pointing out the problems with measuring educational outcomes.

2. The Problem of “Metric Fixation” in Education

In the current educational context in Japan, from primary school to university, there is pressure to quantify educational outcomes.

The National Assessment of Academic Ability test is given every year in primary and secondary schools. The results of the survey are reported as rankings by prefecture. In some regions, rankings are also given for individual schools. The results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), conducted by the OECD, are also published every three years, along with international rankings. Schools and education administrations exhibit varying sentiments in response to the competitive results and rankings of these tests.

The pressure to quantify is even greater in universities. University educators are measured by various indicators, such as the number of papers published and cited, the amount of external funding received, the number of classes taught and students supervised, and student satisfaction with their courses.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with conducting surveys and quantifying the results. It is useful to conduct surveys to understand the current state of children’s academic performance, schools, society, and educational organisations in Japan. However, it goes without saying that increasing the numerical value of survey results cannot be the primary purpose of education. Nevertheless, there have been many efforts to achieve high scores, as if this achievement were the purpose in itself, in order to gain an advantage in competitive edge over other schools and classes¹.

There have been attempts to create incentives, such as including the results of achievement tests in the job evaluations of head teachers and teachers, and rewarding schools according to test results. Similarly, universities and educators have been subjected to performance evaluations based on numerical values according to specific metrics, and research funds have been distributed on a sliding scale. By introducing such systems, a lot of effort is put into quantitative evaluation itself, and increasing numerical values themselves is distorted to become an educational goal.

Many attempts have been made to include the results of achievement tests in teachers’ job evaluations, but most have failed. In some cases it has been reported that children with low academic ability, such as those with high absenteeism or disabilities, were prevented from taking the achievement tests in order to raise the school or class average. Preventing children with low academic ability from taking the test in order to raise the average score, rather than improving the classroom to provide a better education, is a complete reversal of the main purpose of the test. The results of the test must be separated from the quality of the educational content².

Jerry Z. Muller, in his book *The Tyranny of Metrics*, points out the problem of a fixation on evaluation and control through numerical targets. The book has been widely accepted as a discussion of contemporary social pathologies, even in the context of Japan where the pressure to quantify is increasing. Muller discusses the problem of quantification in organizations such as colleges and universities and in school education, alongside problems in medicine, policing, the military, and business and finance.

First, at the beginning of the book, Muller identifies three components of “metric fixation.”

- the belief that it is possible and desirable to replace judgment, acquired by personal experience and talent, with numerical indicators of comparative performance based upon standardized data (metrics);
- the belief that making such metrics public (transparent) assures that institutions are actually carrying out their purposes (accountability);
- the belief that the best way to motivate people within these organizations is by attaching rewards and penalties to their measured performance, rewards that are either monetary (pay-for-performance) or reputational (rankings)(Muller, 2019: 18).

Individual and organizational performance can be quantified, accountability is ensured by making measurement criteria transparent, and linking measured performance to rewards and punishments is motivating: Muller criticizes these assumptions, in which many organizations today are trapped, as cultish beliefs.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), introduced in the USA in 2001 under the George W. Bush administration, is discussed in the book as a specific example of “metric fixation” in schooling. This law judges the performance of teachers and schools on the basis of student assessments, and imposes graduated penalties and sanctions on schools if they fail to improve the academic performance of certain groups of students. The introduction of a system for evaluating schools and teachers on the basis of academic test results meant that a large proportion of classroom time came to be spent on test preparation.

On the issue of evaluation through this system, Muller states that

The problem does not lie in the use of standardized tests, which, when suitably refined, can serve as useful measures of student ability and progress. Value-added testing, which measures the changes in student performance from year to year, has real utility. [...] But value-added tests work best when they are “low stakes.” It is the emphasis placed on these tests as the major criterion for evaluating schools that creates perverse incentives, including focusing on the tests themselves at the expense of the broader goals of the institution (ibid.: 92-93).

It should also be noted that the goal of NCLB was not to find excellence in testing, but to reduce the achievement gaps among ethnic and racial groups, in other words to achieve “equity” in academic achievement. In order to improve the academic performance of Black and Hispanic children, every school was required to set “achievement goals” and be “accountable.” Schools were forced to compete against one another in meeting their targets. This created a situation in which schools were forced to compete in order to narrow the achievement gaps among children from different ethnic and racial backgrounds.

Perhaps the preeminent concern of advocates of one or another form of metrics in the field of American education is the disparity in educational attainment among ethnically or racially defined groupings. [...]Nor is that concern confined to the federal level: it is salient in the educational policy of many states and countless municipalities, and it dominates the agenda of teacher colleges. Schools are increasingly conceived as “gap-closing factories” (ibid.: 96-97).

However, despite the implementation of this law, ethnic and racial achievement gaps remain unresolved. What this US case has highlighted is the simple fact that judging schools and teachers on a numerical scale and making them compete for results will not close the achievement gap. Although managing and judging schools numerically has not improved outcomes, we continue to devote considerable resources to measuring schools and teachers on an ongoing basis.

School is not a place to develop measurable skills - in other words, to achieve high test scores. Even without measuring short-term outcomes, students may have developed the ability to work with others in the future. They may have gained confidence and curiosity about the world. The “metric fixation” overlooks these “non-cognitive skills,” or else tries to quantify them as well.

Character development matters—which has led some legislatures to try to incorporate measurement of character into their accountability systems! (ibid.: 99)

If educational performance is quantified and schools and teachers are made to compete, the achievement of numerical targets will one day become the goal of education itself. Putting schools in a competitive environment does not improve education or numerical results. It is impossible to measure all the achievements and outcomes of education. Nevertheless, those who fall prey to a “metric fixation” try to measure and evaluate not only academic achievement tests but also personality factors.

Muller concludes on the issue of measurement in schools as follows.

Thus, the self-congratulations of those who insist upon rewarding measured educational performance in order to close achievement gaps come at the expense of those actually engaged in trying to educate children. Not everything that can be measured can be improved—at least, not by measurement. (ibid.: 101)

3. The Problem of Individualization of Abilities and Meritocracy in Education

The previous section discussed the problem of managing and evaluating schools using numerical figures. Even when aiming to close the attainment gap, setting numerical targets and then evaluating schools systematically will not solve the problem. For all we may try to realize the appropriate value of “equity,” this organizational goal will not be realized as long as we fall into a “metric fixation.”

Next, the paper discusses the issue of measuring individual ability in education. In particular, this section focuses on the issue of meritocracy.

As many sociological studies of education have shown, and as Muller argues, social class, race and ethnicity have a significant impact on “academic achievement” in schools. Those who are born and raised upper class, white, and with higher incomes are generally better educated and more likely to go on to higher education³. This situation is simply unfair. Closing the gap in educational attainment caused by differences in class, ethnicity and gender is, therefore, a key issue in “education and equity.”

In considering these issues, some may argue that affirmative action aims to make com-

petition “fair” by giving individuals equal opportunities to achieve their social advancement. However, rather than taking this stance, this section critically examines the very principle of competition that governs society.

Assessment policies in schools are designed to favor certain groups of people. Assessment in the capitalist society in which we live is also designed to reward only certain skills that meet the needs of industrial society. Nevertheless, we are forced to compete and to form hierarchies in ‘unfair’ situations. We are also forced to accept the consequences of competition as our own responsibility, whether explicitly stated as such or not.

In business, people who can do their jobs efficiently are highly praised due to this system. Academic performance and qualifications are also measured by unbalanced measures. Academic achievement tests are structured to favor certain people.

Imagine that you were born in a different time and in a different country from today. A thousand years ago (or even a hundred years ago) in a region completely different from your own country, the people who have achieved high social status today might not be in the same high position. We do not know whether people of lower status would have been in a lower position.

In the 1970s disability liberation movement in Japan, disabled people argued that the low social status and low wages accorded to disabled people were not due to individual abilities, physical or mental, but to an industrial structure centred on able-bodied people. It is a socially constructed norm that people with disabilities must live by their independent abilities, even though it is difficult for some of them to live independently. People are valued according to whether they are productive or not, just because we have created this standard of evaluation (Yokozuka, 2007, Yokota, 2015).

Majorities have an advantage because the society is created by the majority. The explanation of these situations is almost tautological.

A similar point can be made in the educational context. Only certain individual skills (academic skills) are measured, even though they are not, in principle, the responsibility of the individual, and individuals are placed in a hierarchy based on the results of these measurements. Highly educated people have an advantage because we have created a society that places a high value on the highly educated. We quantify certain abilities, consider them as the abilities that belong to an individual, and then distribute wealth unequally based on these considerations. The winner subsequently tries to justify the results of the competition, even though the rules are not inherently equitable.

Meritocracy in Japan was gradually established in the public education system following the policy of “human capacity development” set out in the 1963 report of the Economic Council and the 1966 report of the Central Council for Education. Meritocracy is at the heart of the principle of capitalist competition, a modern principle that discriminates, selects and hierarchizes people. Since the 1980s in particular, this principle has been reinforced and internalized by the Japanese people.

In contemporary Japan, education has become an efficient selection system for “human resources,” so that domination, discrimination and oppression are justified on the basis of “differences in ability.” The bootstrap principle that individual abilities can be acquired through individual effort and that differences in abilities can be overcome has contributed to the expansion of equal opportunities to receive education (i.e. to participate in competition) in order to develop individual abilities.

However, disabled people continue to have an incapacity gap, an incapacity deficit, which will never be eliminated by education.

It is possible to state in the abstract that “despite our differences in ability, we are all equal as human beings.” However, in a society centred on “able-bodied” people, the measure of ability itself is based on “able-bodied” people, and “sick” and “disabled” people are placed at a lower level in society because of their “difference in ability.”

In a society that emphasizes abilities such as “strength,” “speed,” and “health,” the “sick” and “disabled” are seen as inferior, discriminated against and oppressed as “incapable.” By viewing abilities as individual skills that can be acquired through hard work, “disabled” people are kept at the bottom of the social hierarchy. In order to overcome this situation, the situation of disability needs to be rethought as a problem between the individual and the social environment, rather than as a “lack” of individual ability.

Michael J. Sandel, a political philosopher, takes a critical look at meritocracy and the theory of self-responsibility in his book *The Tyranny of Merit*. According to Sandel, about two-thirds of Ivy League students assume that university enrollment and academic achievement are the result of personal effort, even though they come from families in the top 20% of the income scale.

It is simply unfair that there should be a difference in the educational qualifications that can be obtained according to differences in income. However, if the aim is to reduce income inequalities and level the playing field, then meritocracy itself must be accepted, where individual ability and effort determine social status.

In an unequal society, those who land on top want to believe their success is morally justified. In a meritocratic society, this means the winners must believe they have earned their success through their own talent and hard work (Sandel, 2021: 13)

Meritocracy is a system in which social and economic status is determined on the basis of “merit” earned through talent and hard work. Certainly, a system in which social status is determined by individual effort seems far more “equitable” than the pre-modern “aristocracy”. However, as noted above, even in modern times, social achievement varies according to attributes that lie outside the responsibility of the individual. “Aristocratic” realities are masked by “meritocracy.” And the modern school functions as a device for approving and accelerating “meritocracy”.

Let me quote, although at some length, a paragraph in which Sandel points out the negative effects of a meritocracy in which social status is determined on the basis of educational qualifications acquired through individual hard work and talent.

The tyranny of merit arises from more than the rhetoric of rising. It consists in a cluster of attitudes and circumstances that, taken together, have made meritocracy toxic. First, under conditions of rampant inequality and stalled mobility, reiterating the message that we are responsible for our fate and deserve what we get erodes solidarity and demoralizes those left behind globalization. Second, insisting that a college degree is the prejudice that undermines the dignity of work and demeans those who have not been to college; and third, insisting that social and political problems are best solved by highly educated, value-neutral experts is a technocratic conceit that corrupts democracy and disempowers

ordinary citizens (ibid.: 73)

Competition for academic degrees does not promote social mobility. Overemphasis on academic degrees divides people, undermines the dignity of work, and corrupts democracy. Sandel's critique of meritocracy is harsh. The attribution of abilities and achievements to individuals, the grading of jobs according to whether their holders are educated or not, and our slavish submission to this meritocratic tyranny are a set of attitudes that divide people and make democratic solidarity difficult.

Sandel's critique goes beyond the issue of academic meritocracy. He also argues that the association of meritocracy with rhetoric such as "responsibility," "hard work," and "motivation" has led to the individualization of supposedly social issues, justifying unequal social regimes and contempt for the poor.

We will have to reconsider "merit" as something that happens in relationships rather than something attributed to individuals. It is within relationships that someone can develop a high level of ability. Should a given person happen to receive higher education, this is an occurrence within a relationship and does not mean that the individual is more or less valuable because of their education.

Akiro Takeuchi, in discussing the relationship between "able-bodied" and "disabled" people, provides the "communality theory of ability," which considers "ability" in relation to "others," as opposed to the individual ability perspective, which considers "ability" to be the property of the "self."

Simply and abstractly defined, the basis of abilities is "the interrelationship between the "naturalness" of the individual abilities concerned and the environment and others (including social products, etc.) itself." Even if the theory of the "weak" may be too much, from the perspective of this communality of abilities, the "low abilities" possessed by the "weak" individual can also be attributed to the inadequacy of the environment and other abilities, including human factors, which compensate for the "lowness" at the moment of identification (Takeuchi, Akiro, 2005: 194-195).

"Low ability" is not the result of an individual's "naturalness." i.e. their innate physical and mental abilities alone, but of the environment and relationships with people around them that compensate for these abilities. "Disability" is not a matter of individual abilities, but of social relations that compensate for the individual's lack of abilities. Takeuchi's view of disability is similar to the important concept of the "social model of disability" presented in disability studies⁴.

Ability is not something that is inherent in the individual. It is morally and logically wrong to attribute abilities to individuals and then to measure, rank, and hold individuals accountable for the results of competition. We are public beings who can only live in relationships. By affirming this obvious fact, it is possible to escape the tyranny of meritocracy.

Sandel argues in the concluding section of the book that.

The meritocratic conviction that people deserve whatever riches the market bestows on their talents makes solidarity an almost impossible project. For why do the successful owe anything to the less-advantaged members of society? The answer to this question

depends on recognizing that, for all our striving, we are not self-made and self-sufficient; finding ourselves in a society that prizes our talents is our good fortune, not our due (Sandel, *op. cit.*: 227).

The realisation of an “equity society” is not a society where there is “equality of opportunity,” where everyone can achieve social advancement (attainment of higher education) through their own hard work and talent. It is a society where “equality of condition” has been achieved, where people are recognised by others simply for who they are, regardless of their background, status or title. These are Sandel’s conclusions⁵.

If property is redistributed according to academic achievement and ability in a situation of different starting conditions and natural “differences,” “equality” in the sense of the same income for all will not be achieved. However, it is possible for everyone to contribute to the community to which they belong, while respecting and accepting their “differences.” At least in learning situations at school, we can find positive meaning in the existence of “difference” without seeing others as competitors.

So far, we have discussed the problems of quantifying educational outcomes and systematically managing and evaluating them, and the problems of individualizing abilities and socially valuing them. On the basis of these problems, the following section will consider the meaning and value of education as distinct from both the “metric fixation” and the “tyranny of meritocracy”. Thinking about the meaning and value of “learning” as a relationship free from numerical assessments and devoid of individualized judgments on ability should lead to the consideration of the concept of “equity.”

4. Diversity and Opacity in “Collaborative Learning”

4-1 “Personalized Learning” and “Collaborative Learning”

In January 2021, the Central Council for Education published a report entitled “Aiming to Build ‘Japanese-Style School Education in the Reiwa Era’ – Realization of Learning Environments Most Appropriate for Individuals and of Collaborative Learning Opportunities” (Report). It is difficult to evaluate the Council’s report, including its political positioning, as it strongly reflects the demands of the business community for education administration. However, the content of the report is likely to have a strong influence on Japanese school education in the years to come. In simple terms, the report can be read as an orientation towards an education that is different from the “metric fixation” and “the tyranny of meritocracy.” Let us begin with the content of the report.

The two characteristic concepts presented in this 2021 report are “personalized learning” and “collaborative learning.”

According to the report, “personalized learning” is a combination of “personalization of teaching” and “personalization of learning.” “Personalization of teaching” refers to the flexible provision and setting of teaching methods, materials and learning time according to each child’s characteristics, learning progress and level of achievement. “Personalization of learning” means tailoring learning activities and opportunities to each child’s interests and career aspirations. The concept that organises “personalization of teaching” and “personalization of learning” from the learner’s perspective is “personalized learning.”

Children are diverse beings and have different learning progress and interests. They should be able to study the content of their individual interests in a way that is appropriate for each of them. If such “personalized learning” is realized, it will be unnecessary to evaluate children’s learning in comparison with others.

In addition, the concept of ‘collaborative learning’ is of particular interest in this paper. Following the description of “personalized learning”, the report describes ‘collaborative learning’ as follows.

Furthermore, in order to ensure that “personalized learning” does not become “isolated learning,” it is also important to enhance “collaborative learning,” which has been emphasised in “Japanese-style school education,” through inquiry-based learning and experiential activities, to enable children *to respect all others as valuable beings*, to overcome various social changes and to become creators of a sustainable society, while working together with others, including local people, as well as with each other and with various other people (Central Council for Education, 2021: 18)

“Collaborative learning” is necessary so that “personalized learning,” where different learning tasks are learned in different ways, can enable students to respect all others as valuable beings and avoid becoming isolated from one another.

Respecting all others as valuable means respecting them equally, regardless of their education, ability, income, status, race, gender or any other characteristic they may have. Accept people of all academic levels as equals and learn from one another as peers. Do not rank people. This is required by the Japanese Education Administration. These principles should also serve as a stance against the “metric fixation” and the “tyranny of meritocracy.” Learning is “collaborative,” so the results and outcomes of that learning cannot and should not be measured in terms of individual ability.

Of course, it would not be impossible to try to measure the quality of “collaborative learning.” Quantifying “collaborative learning” in order to objectively evaluate learning activities is not in itself completely nonsensical. However, quantification and improvement of quantification cannot be the aim of “collaborative learning,” nor can its results be attributed to individuals.

4-2 “Collaborative Learning” Expanded by “Others”

Next, to explore the concept of “collaborative learning,” this section presents an episode from Jiyunomori Gakuen (a junior and senior high school whose name means “forest of freedom”).

The school’s introductory website states⁶ that Jiyunomori Gakuen Junior & Senior High School was founded in 1985, based on the educational pedagogy of the mathematician Hira-ku Toyama, aiming for a new style of education which does not follow the traditional ranking system by number scoring. Toyama thought that this system, which has widely penetrated school education in Japan, was an obstruction to the development of children as individuals. Children who are compelled to measure themselves apart from their own will and sensitivity and who think studying is only in preparation for tests are far from the pleasure of learning and cannot demonstrate their energy for learning and growth. As a remedy to this situation, Jiyunomori Gakuen is a school that attempts to realize an essential education

through classes which are not based on the principle of competition.

In the context of this paper, Jiyunomori Gakuen is a school with an educational philosophy that counters the “metric fixation” and “meritocracy” of Japanese schooling.

Photographer Hiromasa Takeuchi looks back on discussions among high school students when he was a student at Jiyunomori Gakuen as follows.

The discussions centred on truancy (absenteeism). Some students argue that attending or not attending class is a personal choice and one’s own responsibility. The counter-argument by the other student to the claim that one has no right to be told by others what to do about one’s absence is impressive.

“My freedom to learn is violated if you don’t come to class.”

“Classes at Jiyunomori are not a place of one-way knowledge transfer from teacher to student. They are a place of learning where teachers and students work together to open up unknown areas of knowledge.”

“In class, the knowledge and direction given by the teacher is naturally important, but it is the inspiration and realizations inspired by the comments of friends and classmates that are most interesting. Through this, a sense of “expanding myself” is created and I am fulfilled. That’s the real pleasure of learning in a classroom with a group of people.”

“If you leave the classroom, then I lose the freedom of learning that I could have experienced through you. That’s why I want you to join me in class. Come on, let’s attend class together.” (Jiyunomori Gakuen Shuppan Project (ed.) , 2009: 139-140)

Inspired by the comments of classmates, students expand and fulfill themselves. By encountering the opinions of others who are different from themselves, they encounter ideas that they had never thought of before, and their learning becomes more open and free. Encountering others and the world in a way that is not possible in “personalized learning” alone is an important aspect of “collaborative learning.”

In doing so, the diversity of children and teachers must be guaranteed.

If there is already a “correct answer” that should be arrived at, and learning is based on the question of whether the student knows the “correct answer,” free imagination will not be able to arise. Rather, the diversity and freedom of teachers and children will be a disincentive if they are trying to efficiently reach the only “correct answer.”

Not rejecting any opinion, not rating children according to what they can or cannot do, and respecting the ability of all others to be who they are. Celebrating the existence of others who are different from one another. Building relationships where the diversity of all participants in “collaborative learning” is mutually beneficial. Neither meritocratic self-responsibility nor quantification on a specific scale is necessary for “collaborative learning” to be realized.

Of course, not all learning in schools is “collaborative.”

“Collaborative learning” is designed as a set of “personalized learning,” in which children learn at their own pace and in their own way. In schools, learning to acquire basic knowledge and “personalized learning” are also necessary and important.

On the other hand, there are other phases of learning that cannot be reached alone. The existence of a diversity of others in the learning community can result in an experience of “expanding oneself”. In dialogue with other students, new ideas can develop and identity can

be transformed in ways that would never have occurred to the student before. The experience of learning together, where one's own learning is enriched by the presence of others, is essential for "collaborative learning."

4-3 Positive Affirmation of Opacity

Muller, cited in section 2, has the following to say about intimacy:

Our very sense of self is possible only because our thoughts and desires are *not* transparent to others. The possibility of intimacy depends on our ability to make ourselves more transparent to some people than to others. [...]

In interpersonal relations, even the most intimate ones, success depends on a degree of ambiguity and opacity, on *not* knowing everything that the other is doing, never mind thinking (Muller, op. cit.: 160).

The above point can also be applied to educational relationships.

For "collaborative learning" to be driven, the self and others must exist as diverse existences. When the self and others are quantified and ranked, when they exist as competitors to one another, when they already know what the other is thinking, then true "collaborative learning" cannot be achieved. This is because no experience of "expanding oneself" or "fulfilling oneself" can occur with quantified competitors.

We are able to activate our desire to learn by being around consistently opaque others and the world. When we maintain a level of opacity about ourselves, we are also able to enter into relationships based on "equity". Paradoxically, if we want to achieve equity, it is essential that we do not ask whether we are achieving equity in relation to others. It is important to be diverse and opaque with each other in order to achieve pleasurable "collaborative learning."⁷

Equity in education will not be achieved by closing measured numerical gaps. Equity will be realized through our opacity, when we exist as diverse, uncertain beings who cannot be measured on the same scale. If we focus on "collaborative learning," then "equity" will have to be realized in the educational (learning) context of human growth and development, where we respect one another's diversity and affirm our opacity.

5. Conclusion

Based on the discussion so far, the conclusions of this paper about "education and equity" are presented here.

'Equity' in education cannot be realised through simply measuring, comparing and trying to reduce numerical differences in educational outcomes. It is important to point out the "inequity" that exists in society from a macro perspective and aim to reduce it. However, trying to quantify (visualize) educational outcomes may result in a "metric fixation," where quantification itself becomes a self-objective.

Furthermore the "ability" cannot be considered as an individual property. "Ability" is a relational concept. The "lack" of ability is also a social problem. From this perspective, a meritocracy that makes individuals compete for "ability" will not lead to "equity," no matter

how equally the opportunities for competition are prepared.

When we reconsider “education and equity” from a new perspective, it is not enough to ask whether “equity” is realized through comparisons of figures between individuals and between groups. The crucial factors are as follows: recognizing and affirming one another’s diversity, whatever attributes and experiences they may (or may not) have, and recognizing that it is important to acknowledge the existence of others as unquantifiable and opaque in order to expand our own learning. It is necessary to reconsider the act of education from the perspectives of diversity and opacity, as opposed to quantification and comparison.

In today’s society of competition and rating, such discussions may seem idealistic. They may also seem to affirm the status quo, diverting attention from the “inequalities” that exist in reality.

But this is not an unrealistic fantasy. If we look at our educational relationships, we will find a positive affirmation of one another’s opaque existences in diversity and the acknowledgement of “differences” that cannot be measured on the same scale.

In order to bring principled consideration to and relativize the issue of “education and equity,” which is often discussed in sociological and statistical terms, it may be necessary to explore the importance and value of the existence of areas that are not measured and cannot be measured.

Notes

- 1 Recommendations have been made by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on multiple occasions regarding the competitive environment in which children in Japan are placed. For example, the 2019 recommendation includes the following points.
Right to life, survival and development
20-(a) Take measures to ensure that children enjoy their childhood, without their childhood and development being harmed by the competitive nature of society;
Education, including vocational training and guidance
39-(b) Strengthen measures aimed at relieving children from stressful school environments, including an overly competitive system (<https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000464155.pdf>)
- 2 See Kawaguchi (2020), for a discussion of the problems with the National Assessment of Academic Ability Test, particularly the problem of the conflation of “academic achievement survey” and “improvement of educational guidance.”
- 3 For the classic discussion of the sociology of education discussion, see Bourdieu, Pierre & Passeron, Jean-Claude (1970). For a famous classic of educational sociology on meritocracy in Japan, see Takeuchi, Yo (1995).
- 4 Michael Oliver proposed the “social model of disability” as a counterpoint to the individual model of disability (medical model), which sees “disability” as an individual problem. See Oliver (1980).
- 5 When considering Sandel’s conclusions provided here, i.e. “equality of conditions,” as a pedagogical theme, there is a connection with discussions on inclusive education and citizenship education, which will be explored further in a separate paper.
- 6 See Jiyunomori Gakuen English-language introductory website. (<https://www.jiyunomori.ac.jp/gakuen/english.php>)
- 7 For a positive perspective on the world and others embracing “otherness” - in the context of this paper, “opacity” - and a critical overcoming of egocentric meritocracy and eugenics from the perspective of the “desire for the other”, see Morioka (2022).

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