

The Ideology and Practices of “Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata”: Education by Teaching of Expressive Writing

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Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata is an educational method related to teaching of written expression for children that was pioneered in elementary school education settings throughout the 1920s and 1930s, and which was widely adopted in Japan in the 1930s. It is a unique method developed in Japan that uses both school and non-school resources, not only in written expression education, but also as a foundation for intellectual training and character building. Using this method, children and young people craft written compositions using material from their own lives, which they then share with others.

From an international perspective, it has been noted that the Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata movement shares features with the type of pragmatism advocated by Charles Sanders Peirce in the USA beginning in the 1870s. It is also relevant to note there are similarities between the literacy education practices of Paulo Freire, who developed critical pedagogy in Brazil, and aspects of the “living, working academic ability” found in Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata.

The aim of this paper is to clarify the ideology of Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata and identify the features of its practice. In this process, a number of points will be examined. These are (1) the relationship with Japan’s education system; (2) the establishment and sphere of pedagogic action of Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata; (3) the realism of Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata; (4) the collectivism of Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata; and (5) whether or not Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata can be classified as education.

In particular, the ideology of Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata and the features related to its practice will be highlighted through an examination of the background leading to its establishment, facts regarding the realism of the thoughts and actions of one of the primary originators Tadayoshi Sasaoka (1897–1937), and collectivism as practiced by Tsuzurikata teachers.

Key Words: Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata, teaching of expressive writing, education for life, realism education, collectivist education

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Introduction

Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata is one of the education methods created by the Non-governmental Education Movement in Japan (Minkan Shiryou kenkyuu kai 1975: 127–128). Non-governmental Education, in the sense it is used here, is an amalgamation of the words “non-governmental” and “education”. It is meant to signify everything in education that is planned and organized, or that originates and is conducted outside the interest and control of the state, while simultaneously being linked with the official state image of education in a variety of forms, including opposition and parallelism.

The aim of this paper is to clarify the ideology of *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata*, as a method of developing human resources, and to identify features of its practice. In this process, a number of points will be examined. These are (1) the relationship between *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata* and Japan’s school system; (2) the establishment and sphere of action of *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata*; (3) the realism of *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata*; (4) the collectivism of *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata*; and (5) the stipulation that “*Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata* is not education”.

In the Japanese philosophical work, “Contemporary Japanese Thought” (Kuno, Tsurumi 1956: 71–115), the *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata* movement was positioned as “Japanese pragmatism”. It should be noted that *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata* did not start with the introduction of a specific theory imported from elsewhere, but was instead a spontaneous ideological movement born from encounters with children in elementary schools in provincial areas. The abovementioned book defines *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata* style pragmatism as “a school of thought in which methods of thought are not allowed to fossilize, but are instead made flexible by application to problems in everyday life through the process of feeding and nurturing thought with fresh nutrients, thus resulting in a constant state of interplay between thought and action”. That is, both are maxims of pragmatism, with points of similarity being the adoption of problem-solving methods and the idea that action (pragma) comes before thought.

Furthermore, in another philosophical work, “Post-war Thought in Japan” (Kuno, Tsurumi & Hujita 1966: 109–127), the *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata* movement was treated as “popular ideology”. As can be seen in the post-war development of *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata* for children in the works of Seikyou Muchaku (*Yamabiko Gakkou (Echo School)*, 1951), Kenjiro Konishi (*Gakkyuu Kakumei (Class Revolution)*, 1955) and Yoshio Toui (*Mura wo Sodateru Gakuryoku (Academic Achievement for Village Development)*, 1957), the post-war period saw an expansion of *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata* from its pre-war roots as a new method of Japanese education to a method that modified human relations within groups. This expansion later extended to adults involved in the recording arts movement, and was later incorporated into a wide variety of mass movements as a circle/club movement philosophy.

Based on this foundation, the features of the *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata* movement can be summarized with the following five principles:

1. Criticism of the modernization system epitomized by post-war USA. It was an ideological movement that took as its signature task the elicitation of universal principles from Japan’s specific conditions. In *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata*, there needs to be constant reflection on Japanese culture.
2. Situationism, defined as acceptance of the situation one is in.
3. Non-competitiveness. For example, in Yoshio Toui’s (1911–1991) method, children are

always seen as members of multiple groups. Education practices that single out individual prize students are not used, and the principle of equality is taken to its radical conclusion, resulting in a method that strives to eliminate the consciousness of one person with power over others, fostering instead leaders who are not power-conscious.

4. Understanding that it is an education method grounded on a firm sense of emotional (as opposed to objective) realism.
5. Embracement of a philosophy based on goodwill and receptivity.

The present paper does not completely contradict these definitions, but it does explore the thoughts of *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata*, and the features of its practice, through a detailed examination of issues such as the establishment of *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata*, the content of realism as seen in the thoughts and practices of one its practicing primary originators Tadayoshi Sasaoka, and collectivism as it is practiced among *Tsuzurikata* teachers.

1. Relationship between *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata* and the education system in Japan

Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata is an education method related to the direction of expression by writing for children that was pioneered in elementary school education settings throughout the 1920s and 1930s, and which was widely adopted in Japan in the 1930s. It is a unique Japanese method that was prevalent from the period before the Second World War until after the war, and uses both school and non-school resources, not just for education in orthography, calligraphy, and rhetoric, but also as a foundation for intellectual training and character building, by requiring children and young people to craft compositions using materials from their own lives, which they then share with others (*Minkan Siryou Kenkyuu kai 1975: 88–89*).

It is difficult to separate the birth history of *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata* from the history of elementary schools in Japan, which evolved from early modern village educational practices, while simultaneously integrating integrating content and methods adopted from western school systems. In the early 1900s, approximately half a century after the establishment of the Japanese public school system and at a point when the system was fully functional, two powerful movements rose to prominence in response to the problems and difficulties posed by modernization. One was a force that aimed at accelerating westernization, while the other argued for a return to the fundamental education values in place before the establishment of the elementary school system. *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata* belongs to the latter branch, emerging as a rural-based non-governmental education movement within the sphere of public elementary school classrooms in provincial farming, fishing, and mountain districts, as well as in community youth associations.

“*Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata*” originated from the Japanese education subject known as *Tsuzurikata*¹. In Japanese education, this refers to a school subject that focuses on the teaching of expression in written language. By the end of the 1920s, strict bureaucratic control had been established along with a state-controlled system for all school subjects and materials. However, the subject of Japanese *Tsuzurikata*, or written language training, was not allocated a textbook, let alone a state-approved textbook, and so existed as a free zone for teachers.

However, *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata* aimed for realism as a method of expression, and was undertaken as one section of the Japanese language curriculum using a fundamentally different method for teaching composition. Teachers who practice this type of teaching, which had become known

as *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata*, became known as “*Tsuzurikata* teachers”. Within the school education system, teaching involved having students write compositions on every subject, which served as an important method for teaching in all areas, not just the subjects themselves. This teaching process, in particular, became known as the “*Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata* education method”.

The model was created by teachers at public elementary schools, but *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata* (as originally conceived), by its very nature, “overspills” the boundaries that categorize school education. If the work is pursued faithfully, it involves providing guidance in areas such as the employment and lives of children. There were even teachers who withdrew as *Tsuzurikata* teachers in order to pursue new pathways in other areas such as social education.

Education that aimed for freedom, spontaneity, creativity, self-learning, and collaboration, based on the Taisho democracy movement that unfolded mainly in the 1920s, was known as “new education”, and schools that implemented this “new education” philosophy were known as “new schools”. However, the work of *Tsuzurikata* teachers was not supported by, and was not in line with, new school advocates.

Tadayoshi Sasaoka, one of the early proponents of this model, began practicing *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata* in Oosugi Village, located in the mountainous Kami District of Kochi Prefecture, in the latter half of the 1910s. Sasaoka’s practice appeared among, influenced, and was influenced by other similar practices that gradually spread throughout the country. However, in the context of the time, the spread was foreshadowed by the products of three education restructuring movements (Nakauchi 1970).

The first of these was the diffusion of Japanese language educator Enosuke Ashida’s (1873–1951) “free-choice composition writing”, or a variation of this that was known as “free composition writing”. In this sense, “free-choice” means “liberal” and involved a break from formalist composition teaching methods where the teacher provides directions to children on the essay title, content, and style. This was an attempt to improve education methods through “zen-like” means. Ashida formed the *Keiukai* “companionable society” and spread this practice nationwide. Later, he criticized *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata*, but this group’s core philosophy, “*Tsuzurikata* as a life subject”, was basically the same idea as *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata*.

The second movement was the direction of expressive writing that aimed to promote the legacy of the *Araragi* School colloquial style through the children’s magazine *Akai Tori* (*Red bird*) (the first term; Jul 1918 to Mar 1929, the late term; Jan 1931 to Sept 1936), founded by Miekichi Suzuki (1882–1936). Suzuki advocated composition as one branch of “pure children’s stories and songs with true value as art” and “human education”. He studied under Natsume Soseki, and became famous with romanticist works that emphasized sensibility. The focus on naturalistic works, through the influence of literary sketches in the likes of *Hototogisu*, a haiku magazine launched in 1897, and advice from Soseki, became formalized in the method of teaching written expression to children.

The third movement was the “*Anabol*” controversy, which continued throughout the 1930s. *Anabol* is a portmanteau combining “anarchism” and “bolshevism”, and the debate focused on whether social revolution was possible through education that spawned a naturalistic literary school and proletarian compositions.

These three movements had their own approaches and brought forward various concepts emphasizing realism in the composition movements of the times, while at the same time playing a role in the process by which *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata* was established as one form of realist education.

2. Birth of *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata* and *Kanshou Bunsen/Tsuzurikata Tokuhon*

The first public expression of the underlying concept of *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata* appeared in the following declaration:

“It is for accurately observing the actual problems in society and the situations of children’s everyday lives, understand the principles existing and working in daily life, and teach children to understand them. The establishment of genuine autonomous life is the very ideal and method of education for life. As a group of educators, we believe that *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata* is an essential subject for life, and we intend to work with like-minded colleagues to create the principles and methods of education for life based primarily on *Tsuzurikata* education.” (Sasaoka et al. 1930).

The concept of *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata*, which links “education for life” and “composition”, with the former situated as the aim and the latter as the content/method, can be seen in the logic of “*Tsuzurikata Seikatu* Second Coterie Declaration”.

This declaration appeared in *Tsuzurikata Seikatsu* (*Tsuzurikata Life magazine*) (Oct 1929 to Dec 1937), a magazine for teachers that was linked to the children’s magazine, *Kanshou Bunsen* (*appreciation of recommended works magazine*) (Nakauchi 1970, Hiraoka 2007). This magazine was a rival of *Akai Tori* and was launched by Bunensha Publishers in June 1925 after obtaining support from *Kyouiku no Seikisha* (*Century of Education Society*) and relevant people at *Ikebukuro Jidou no Mura* (*Village for children in Ikebukuro*) Elementary School.

After the Bunensha dispute, Tadayoshi Sasaoka assumed the editorship of *Tsuzurikata-Seikatu* in October 1930 and created *Kyoudo* Publishers, renaming the magazine *Tsuzurikata Tokuhon* (*Tsuzurikata Reader*). *Kanshou Bunsen* content, consisting of children’s stories and songs, sections about literature, commentaries, and similar content, made up approximately half of this publication, while the other half of the magazine consisted of children’s compositions, poetry (poem and tanka, haiku), as well as reviews of recommended works.

Akai Tori, with Miekichi Suzuki as its head, billed itself as the first magazine in Japan to publish stories and songs “written by adults for children”. The magazine even published a call at the back of each issue that invited children to submit compositions and poems, which Suzuki would publish along with “comments and corrections”. In the earlier period of *Akai Tori*, the poetry and prose written by children that was commended and published had a romanticist tendency based on “artistic value”, which contrasted with the exemplar model from the Meiji period.

Many of the children’s stories published in *Kanshou Bunsen* were written by authors who had also published stories in *Akai Tori*. However, the radically different ideologies of the editors, Tadayoshi Sasaoka, Yoshibee Nomura (1896–1986) and others, led to the selection of completely different compositions by each publication. In *Akai Tori*, the compositions evaluated generally focused on the beauties of nature and life situations, and were expected to be written in polished standard language. For example, in a composition describing the death scene of a mother, the sentence “Her face looked just as though she was dreaming” (*Akai Tori*1928), might be evaluated as “nuanced”, “impressive”, and “sensitively drawn”. In contrast, in *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata*, scenes such as a chicken being dressed, a frog being skinned by a gang of children, or children at work were published, even if the language expression was coarse.

Tadayoshi Sasaoka, a central figure of *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata*, worked for almost nine years as a teacher in Kochi Prefecture before moving to Tokyo to take up a post editing the *Kyouiku no Seiki* magazine, later moving to Bunensha from the autumn of 1926. Sasaoka gradually gained substantial editing power and eventually assumed exclusive editorial control of *Kanshou Bunsen*.

There, he encouraged children to submit compositions to the magazine and devoted himself to directing the selection and commentaries related to such submissions.

From April 1927, at the height of its popularity, *Kanshou Bunsen* is said to have had a total of 400,000 readers each month. One of the magazine's particularities is that it was almost entirely distributed by hand to elementary school children throughout Japan by approximately 5,000 classroom teachers. These efforts, led by teachers and the editorial leaders of the magazine, had significant impacts on the lives of children all over Japan, and compositions describing those lives can still be read today.

This initiative, known first in *Kanshou Bunsen* as “the subject of *Tsuzurikata* as life creation” facilitated the emergence of *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata*.

Subsequently, *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata* was applied to different regions and grade levels and refined as a teaching system by *Tsuzurikata* teachers throughout the country who had been fostered as readers of, and contributors to, the *Tsuzurikata Seikatsu* magazine. In the mid-1930s, the historical and social ideologies, as well as other views of modern Japan, held by *Tsuzurikata* teachers were formed through the Northern-style debate (Nakauchi 1985a). This debate resulted from divisions that had occurred in the teaching systems and social ideologies of *Tsuzurikata* teachers, which had historically focused on evaluation of *Akai Tori* compositions and investigations into the concept of realism.

Members of the *Northern Education Association* (1934, formed in Akita Prefecture, *Hoppou Kyouiku* magazine) allied with the Northern Japan Japanese Education Federation and *Tsuzurikata* teachers (primarily from the six Tohoku prefectures) to become known as the Northern School or the Tohoku style. In contrast, members of the *Hakusei Education Association* (1933, formed in Tottori Prefecture, *Koku/Go/Jin (Nation/Language/Man)* magazine) and teachers who advocated federation, but were critical of Northern-style theory, became known as the Southern School or the Southwest style.

During the Second World War, *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata* stagnated due to philosophical shifts among teachers who supported the government and due to oppression by state authorities. After the war, the methodology was revived, primarily by Northern-style *Tsuzurikata* teachers, who grappled with significant problems related to reclaiming civic control over education from the state, and the problem of ethnic independence that arose in the particular post-war situation.

3. Tadayoshi Sasaoka's Position of Realism

The thoughts and practices of Tadayoshi Sasaoka, one of the figures who formed the model of *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata*, and the person known as the “originator of *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata*”, continued to find acceptance in the Northern School. This section will outline his thoughts and practices.

What Sasaoka sought in written expression was not limited to writing one's own thoughts in one's own words, or the simple realism of transferring spoken word into written form. To him, the most important point was “expressing one's most sincere heart” and achieving “the fundamental target of the author” (Sasaoka 1930). He placed the highest importance on each individual child subjectively expressing his or her views. While Sasaoka agreed with Miekichi Suzuki on realism in terms of representing things “as they really are”, Suzuki followed the Araragi school of realism that eschewed motivation and ornamentation in favor of objective description. Combining this with

estheticism, it can be seen that heterogeneity was connoted. In this way, works of “childish expression”, which were ignored by the earlier *Akai Tori* magazine, were commended by Sasaoka based on the new criteria.

Sasaoka’s selections and comments encouraged children to express the reality of their lives, and to connect this expression to their inner selves, focusing on ways in which children engaged subjectively with their own lives and experiences, and how they interpreted these through such inner exploration. In addition to accepting and writing about the realities encountered in their daily lives as they actually existed, children were required to express their own inner processes of scrutiny, thought, and uncertainty vis-à-vis such reality.

It can be gleaned from the repetition of comments such as “be more like yourself” and “express your most sincere heart” that, in Sasaoka’s view of children and their development, they were essentially social beings and independent people of character who carried the power of self-transformation within them. This view of children stood in direct contrast to that of Miekichi Suzuki, who saw children as “pure” beings who needed to be isolated and protected from society, and also to the principle view of child minds held by the “liberal education” advocates.

Kanshou Bunsen paid closer attention to the existence of children working in villages than middle-class children in the cities. These children were considered to have a hidden existence “not only with an inferiority complex and sadness equal to that of adults, but this combined with surprising courage, surprising objectivity... In a grim, pathetic situation, but with vast wisdom and farsightedness” (Sasaoka 1927). Sasaoka had said that children who attend school while they work are “grim, pathetic, and crude”, but this is precisely what gives them the hidden “objectivity” and “wisdom” that provide them with the potential for self-transformation. In his analysis of Sasaoka’s passage above, Nakauchi said that the observation could be reinterpreted as the perfect embodiment of the essential child involved in creating an idea that had not existed before (Nakauchi 1970). In this case, it follows logically that the work of the teacher is to see children as social beings and to draw out their “wisdom” and secure its content.

The premise of this viewpoint was that children, in the act of writing about what they were learning in their lives, were able to grasp and discover something of themselves through the everyday process of human development, and being able to express that something formed the basis of what the magazine considered to be a good composition.

This position, coupled with the *Tsuzurikata Seikatsu* Second Coterie Declaration, compelled teachers to explore the social issues, reality, and inner aspects of children’s lives through compositions. Furthermore, it was thought that through a process of mutual understanding, both teachers and children transformed themselves, squarely facing life and the development of values enshrined in life principles. This process made it inevitable that the aims of Japanese language education would be transcended. The issues dealt with at the time were of greater consequence than could be resolved by mere reform of the existing education curriculum.

Sasaoka claimed that the reason that many of the compositions from the city lacked substance and vitality was a consequence of city life. This may be a reflection of the times. He felt that the “robust, simple, primitive children” (Sasaoka 1933) described in the compositions of provincial farming and fishing villages needed to be reinforced and regenerated through *Tsuzurikata*. This view of children had previously been expressed by Nomura through his experiences in Gifu Prefecture before entering *Ikebukuro Jidou no Mura* Elementary School in observations noting that “children are people of the fields” and “children are primitive beings” (Nomura 1926).

Some written compositions of the time, describe lives of great poverty, reflecting the soci-

etal situation of depression and ruin, but deep down they have a vigorous “wildness”, and such compositions describe earnest confrontations with nature at work and at play, and the joy and sadness gained from grappling with nature. “Strength of will” in directly facing nature and the realities of life was the standard used for critique of such compositions.

During the same era in Akita Prefecture, there appeared “Studies of passing things” (*Tsuzurikata Tokuhon* the 5th grade, 1931), which later was expanded to “Inquiry *Tsuzurikata*” and “Scientific *Tsuzurikata*”. This was a ground-breaking initiative that upset existing views of *Tsuzurikata* and was criticized by Miekichi Suzuki and various others, but Sasaoka basically championed the teaching process, which he believed taught understanding of nature through instruction in written expression (Sasaoka 1934).

However, for Sasaoka, the “inquiring subject” had to be autonomous and independent of the “object of inquiry”. In cases where this process was not followed, the works were criticized as “inquired *Tsuzurikata*”. “Inquired *Tsuzurikata*” laid emphasis on results and reporting to the extent of burying the subject in conformity with the object, while “inquiring *Tsuzurikata*” was independent of the object and emphasized the subject confronting the object.

Sasaoka’s teachings on written expression were not based on competitive merit standards of written expression techniques, as seen in the earlier *Akai Tori* magazines, nor were they based on the stance of “self-expression” through “emptying the self”, as emphasized by Enosuke Ashida and others in free composition writing. Sasaoka’s teachings were also different from the “life guidance for expression” widely seen among teacher readers of *Akai Tori*. Sasaoka’s teachings took the position of “teaching expression for life guidance”. This was the position that viewed acquisition of written expression techniques for understanding life to be a path children must follow for personality formation. For Sasaoka, *Tsuzurikata* was the discovery of “principles existing and working in life”, and through comprehending these, helped children in their struggle with nature to gain the power to live independently as members of society.

In contrast to the romanticism (estheticism) of *Tsuzurikata* in the *Akai Tori* magazine, *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata* began from the contraposition of realism. In fact, beginning in the 1920s, there were two branches representing this realism. One was the world of child life verse that repeatedly occurred in and was symbolic of Northern-style *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata*. This was certainly realism, but it was naturalistic realism. This branch circulated among a segment of *Tsuzurikata* teachers and appeared in works in compositions published in the late term *Akai Tori* magazine. It could also be called emotional realism.

In contrast to this, another branch existed from the same period. An example of which is epitomized in Sasaoka’s comment on a composition submitted by a child on the theme of poverty: “Please think carefully about why you are poor and what you can do to get out of the situation.” This is not emotional naturalistic realism. It is objective realism in the sense of thinking things through deeply and actually finding a way out of difficulties. This realism aims at raising children to think about the “why” of everything and was the stance taken in post-war *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata*, first in Muchaku’s class, then in the publications he authored, *Yamabiko Gakkou (Echo School)* and *Yamabiko Gakkou (Echo School) Continued*, and later in school curricula, with the aim of introducing it into basic “thinking” areas such as scientific concepts, images, and language (Hiraoka and Nakauchi 2010).

Sasaoka asserted that children’s compositions contain the entirety of all education. “All subjects, including geography, moral education, and the national language, all instruction by the principal and teachers, all influence of the birthplace and nation should surface in commentaries”

(Sasaoka 1932). Here, the belief that issues concerning the public education system and the will of the state should be clarified through *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata* is manifested.

4. Communal ideology of *Tsuzurikata* teachers

In terms of content, the conceptual aim of life guidance for *Tsuzurikata* teachers in “teaching expression for life guidance” was, according to the Declaration mentioned above, “the establishment of autonomous life”. The content of this is described by Yoshibee Nomura in his book *Life Training and Morals* (1932), where he emphasizes the value of science and the group, and coins the word “*kyoudou*” (collaboration) to link this to the concept of work. Arguing that social order in Japan should be accomplished through “life morals of collaboration”, he stated that, “education is the collaborative, independent organization of social life”. According to Nomura’s *Life schools and Learning Control* (1933), the ideology of “collaboration” is “a succession to the current of Buddhism”.

From 1935, one idea that emerged from the practice and views of *Tsuzurikata* teachers of the Northern School was the “image of the collective person” (Miyasaka 1963). A *Tsuzurikata* teacher from Yamagata stated the aim of *Tsuzurikata* practice to be “throwing away the old type of person for collective individuals who unceasingly progress toward a bright collaborative society with conscientiousness and creative spirits” (*New endeavors in Tsuzurikata Seikatsu*, November 1936). Another *Tsuzurikata* teacher from Yamagata also made “working toward Japan as a collaborative society” his research aim for *Tsuzurikata* in the book, *My Systematic Plan for Tsuzurikata Guidance* (1935).

The most relevant feature of *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata* practice for Michita Suzuki (1907–1991), a teacher from Miyagi, was to link practice with the work of restoring order in life. The key point was the importance of groups or communities in the school and classroom. All actions that could hinder the bonds of the group were eradicated. Acting for one’s own purposes and individualistic actions were all severely sanctioned by the group. Suzuki named his own practice “collectivist education” (Suzuki 1951).

5. Stipulation that “*Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata* is not education”

In the mid-1990s, it was stipulated that *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata* was not “education”, but was instead directly related to personality formation. According to education researcher Toshio Nakauchi, the *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata* movement “should not strictly be seen as an education movement, per se, but should instead be seen as personality formation process activities, which ‘overspills’ the education category”. He states that, “It appeared to be an ‘education’ movement because it was organized in the classroom space of elementary schools within the ‘education system’.” In fact, however, in Japanese society of the 1930s and 1940s, school classrooms were viewed as the foundation for children’s “formation” process, which was promoted in organized educational forms. As a result of this trend, an anti-educational nature of elementary schools at the time became the norm (Nakauchi 1994).

As far as the “inconsistency of intentions and methods of *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata*” is concerned, in the Education for Life controversy that occurred in the 1930s, Kiyoo Tomeoka (1898–

1977) made the claim that *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata* was striving for something that could not be achieved within school education (Tomeoka 1937), and so the conceptual framework came to be “formation”.

Similarly, according to Nakauchi, *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata* needs to be understood “not as education, but as one method of life training” (Nakauchi2008), or as an act of “instruction”. The aim of life training is to foster moral feeling and “children with interpersonal competence”. This method is the work of *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata* (Hiraoka and Nakauchi 2005).

Conclusion

This paper has described the ideology and features related to the practice of *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata* in Japan. By extrapolating “education” from the *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata* perspective as specifically human development, and viewing it from children’s perspectives and realities in which they are situated, concepts such as appropriateness and rights and wrongs, as they pertain to the act of education itself, are reinterpreted and forged anew. According to Sasaoka, this is because the subject matter taken up in *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata* is the sum total of all educational aims, teaching processes, and materials, and thus should all be open to critique and revision.

If perspectives from the thought and practice of *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata* were to be applied to the contemporary education curriculum, the following issues could be raised: (1) how relationships between children and teachers, children and children, parents and teachers, and school and community should be developed; (2) perspectives on formation of scholastic ability, or lesson creation that takes into account the integration of education and science or similar issues, based on the integration of life and education. In particular, the perspective that states the ability to write compositions fosters competencies in thinking, judgment and expression; and (3) perspectives on exploring ways to guide children’s hearts and lives, life training and life guidance, and perspectives on how to support children’s lives.

All of these perspectives are issues that arise from the ideal that “education is not set in opposition to society, but carries it on its back” and “the competence known as scholastic ability is not merely knowledge or innate talent, but unlike these, bears the heavy chains of human life” (Nakauchi1985b). In practice, *Seikatsu-Tsuzurikata* is closely linked to the issue of how to conceptualize extra-curricular activities in the education curriculum, but it is not limited only to this. It also serves a role by proposing ideas and concepts for human formation in the act of working toward “education”, from the point of view of life as it actually is.

Notes

1. “*Tsuzuriji, shuji, and shotokubun*” (elementary school curriculum in 1872) became “*Sakubun*” (elementary school curriculum outline in 1881), which then became “*Tsuzurikata*” following the revision of the Elementary School Order in 1900. Through this renaming process, a system for acquiring written expression techniques that was separate from the education system was developed.

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