CONFERENCE REPORT

Report of Symposium on Education in the Social Studies Department's Research Association in 2021

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Symposium: Background and Issues

The 32nd annual meeting and symposium on Education in the Social Studies Department's Research Association (ESSDRA) were held online on 13 Feb 2021. The topic of the symposium was "Coming of Age of One-Person, One-Device! Exploring Possibilities of Online Classes in Social Studies Education." Global and Innovative Gateway for All (GIGA) School Initiative, proposed by MEXT. This initiative has been accelerated by the Corona pandemic, which has forced schools all over Japan to adapt to remote learning. As a result, the ICT environment in schools has improved, and simultaneously, the learning environment with one tablet PC per student is becoming a reality. What is the role of ICT in social studies education, in which information selection decisions, values, and exploratory learning are becoming increasingly important? How can ICT be used for optimum effect?

Overview of Each Report and Discussion

On the day of the symposium, four speakers reported on their ICT-related practices. Later, two designated discussants, a social studies researcher and a researcher in educational methodology, presented arguments on this topic, and a lively discussion took place with the participants. The speakers reported on their creative teaching practices, such as online classes utilizing LoiLoNote and remote classes that connect classrooms with local communities and experts. They also reported on the utility of online classes and ICT terminals and noticeable problems when teaching while using them. It was emphasized that both teachers and students have to get used to ICT environments by actively using ICT terminals. Also, the three stages of ICT routinization were described: (1) "The exciting stage," when new and expected effects increase; (2) "The challenging stage," when problems in daily guidance increase; (3) "The stable stage," when excessive expectations of ICT are eliminated, and the role of ICT terminals in the school becomes almost routine.

ICT is helpful for teachers because they facilitate presenting color material, including photographs and paintings, without having to print them. Moreover, ICT use could become a movement that changes teachers' working styles. Students also have merits in accessing media individually and working together using information exchange tools and learning portfolio functions. The ability for students to see learning material on their devices and the ease of processing text on the screen makes it facilitate their understanding of relationships and sequences in the learning material. It is also possible to immediately reflect map data, allowing students to understand

regional trends and makes it possible to analyze and summarize such data. Moreover, regional comparisons are facilitated by examining whether regional trends can be generalized to the national level. Furthermore, social studies lessons utilizing ICT terminals are designed to foster, pursue, collect, compare, classify, and correlate information and develop conceptual knowledge. In doing so, it is essential to realize that students should not only collect "visible objects" but also discover "invisible things" and pursue "their questions" to achieve "proactive, interactive, and deep learning." In this regard, teachers reported that practices encourage students to notice "the joy of connection" and "diverse ideas" through dialogues with students in other schools during remote classes. Furthermore, students listening to experts' explanations in dialogues with experts also learn about their real feelings, which helps them reconstruct their knowledge. Teachers reported that this has become a process of pursuing students' own "questions," presenting their ideas, and reflecting on the entire learning unit. Therefore, dialogues with others using ICT enable external personnel's participation and connect multiple points, allowing students to consider issues like students' own "questions" and network and expand their factual knowledge. As a result, students can reflect on their learning methods with a sense of empathy and achievement and adapt their knowledge, skills, and thinking methods to other learning units, which result in "deep learning."

On the other hand, several problems encountered while using one device by one student were also identified. For example, specific trends were reported when online classes were first conducted. These included a reduction in assignment submission, comprehension and retention, and polarization of regular examination scores. Several schools also reported broken iPad screens and students' problem behaviors, such as photographing, videoing, and recording lessons. In response to these events, it was indicated that visualizing, sharing and focusing on thinking were essential for improving the lessons. It is also crucial to encourage students to think about using ICT terminals and develop rules for their use, which could be a turning point in whether the daily use of devices takes root or dies.

One of the discussants emphasized developing indicators in each school to cultivate information use skills and evaluate students' abilities in these skills. He also suggested that a transition to blended learning might occur in the future, with remote classes being used to provide explanations only, whereas face-to-face classes would be used for exercises, experiments, and collaborative work. Moreover, students would be required to develop information for society from social studies education perspective, aiming at social participation. Therefore, teachers must teach their students how to judge the content of information based on the reliability of its sources and information morals. Another discussant in social studies stressed that using ICT terminals should not make social studies classed mere activism but rather should approach the nature of social studies and achieve the aims of lessons. The use of ICT to achieve the aims of social studies can help students develop their social recognition and citizenship, and therefore future teachers and educational administrators would be asked to tackle the management of the above-described stages in the daily use of ICT.

Based on the discussions, one of the coordinators stated that examining the organizing principle of ICT use in social studies by critically considering ICT content could lead to research within curriculums and instructions (subject pedagogy). Another coordinator at the symposium concluded that the opportunity to introduce ICT tools to social studies education is expected to deepen and broaden the scope of social studies' lesson studies.