

How Do Children Think about Their Learning?

Exploring the Meanings of Learning from the Narratives of One JSL Child

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As the number of children studying Japanese as a second language increases, the meanings of learning Japanese has become diverse. Accompanied with that, a lot of researches and discussions have been done. Most of them attempt to make children join the classroom lessons as soon as possible, or to teach Japanese in a more efficient way for them to acquire Japanese quickly. However, from these researches, the meanings of learning for children has not been researched much. Most of them came to Japan because of their parents, so for them learning Japanese is not necessary a meaningful experience but a difficult experience. Therefore, to find the meanings of learning seems to be a really important for them to promote their learning process.

So, in this paper I attempt to analyze how children think about their Japanese language learning, and how they feel about that by interviewing one 9-years-old child who came to Japan because of her father's job. I had supported her Japanese language learning in school and her house for 15 months. I had life story interviews with her two times. One is in Japan, and the other is in Australia (which is her native country) as a follow-up interview. The interviews were held in Japanese and English depending on her choice. To support these interview data, I used field notes recording her learning process as a second data.

From the analysis of her interview, the meanings of learning for her have been revealed. For her, the meanings of learning

Japanese is inseparable for constructing social relationships between other people. For example, her motivation to learn Japanese has been made from relationships with friends. She said, after coming back to Australia, she wants to continue learning Japanese to guide her Australian friend to Japan someday. Also, she measures her Japanese proficiency by how she communicates with her Japanese friends. From the interview in Australia, it is clear that she realized the meanings of Japanese learning in Japan is not in learning content of Japanese or school learning, but in communication with Japanese friends. She still had a strong feeling wants to connect to Japanese friend by using Japanese language.

It is also cleared that, for her the process of learning Japanese is not a straight way but a dynamic way. That is, her learning process is not the same as what teacher designed. Thorough the process of learning Japanese, she gradually constructs relationships between other people, or between what she learned. From these relationships she finds meaningful relationships, and finally she constructs her own meanings of learning.

From these results, I made a suggestion of the importance of relationships between language learning and social relationships. In Japanese language education, we should try to make a learning environment, for example, in the classroom and the community that support making relationships among others by using language, and then develop the language proficiency among these relationships.

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