

My thoughts during the first training activities since 28 years ago

Between February and October in 1988, I taught practices of the country-focused group training course on vegetable seed production for the Philippines held at the Tsukuba International Agricultural Training Center, JICA (TIATC). Last year after 28 years, I had a chance



Participants photographing grafting with mobile phones

to teach the same course. What I thought changed from before was that all the participants had mobile devices and were taking photos during practices. Previously, I couldn't imagine that they were communicating via

video calls with family in their home countries. I guess this frees them from being homesick. But for an old mind, it felt that it may have a negative influence on their spirit to learn technologies in a faraway country, for their own country. What I also felt was that there was an increasing attitude of taking this overseas assistance for granted. I felt this way because when we were preparing materials for individual experiment, there were demands for items that are difficult to obtain or install and requests for study trips in Japan.



Visiting broccoli farm during the study tour

My stance as a training instructor is that we nurture their own thinking desire to learn, and this has not changed much for the last 28 years. We learn together, and sometimes we scold or encourage participants through a pep talk. Ultimately, if we can establish a trusting relationship during the course by providing them guidance and their acquiring technologies, there is nothing more to hope for.

I taught at the Koibuchi College of Agriculture and Nutrition for 24 years. The school's crop and horticultural experiments and practices, as well as dissertations were equivalent of shared experimentation, practices and individual experiment of the vegetable training courses. Although our participants are more



Practice on water melon grafting



Seed potato planting during a common experiment

adult than students, their attitudes and temperament towards learning and importance of motivation are very similar to those of students. In addition, the way they tend to be "big headed" in learning techniques is also very similar.

The 4-year education at Koibuchi College is a bit like teaching baseball. In the beginning, we build up legs and abdominal strength (i.e. work sense – ability) by training in running (farm work) without showing clear purpose, and we teach them forms (cultivation technologies). I have taught students using medicines as an example that volume can change quality and that different scales of cultivation operations change appropriate cultivation technologies. I also taught that by repeating the same work many times, one can acquire technologies and the real meaning of particular technologies. However, in this training course we are rather limited in terms of plot size and the time we have, and it is difficult to implement a curriculum such as I used at Koibuchi College. Participants are not real farmers and therefore there is no need for such a curriculum either. This is a little bit frustrating sometimes. Still I try not to bother about it because this can also be said for Japanese students. We may be interested in acquiring ideal forms, but in reality, one really needs to train legs and body in order to realize the ideal forms.



Practice on carrot threshing



Practice on compost making

When I started working at Koibuchi College moving from TIATC 28 years ago, I remember I wrote the following rather audacious first greeting as a new member of staff. "People working in agriculture are putting excessive importance to experience. If one is an experience supremacist, he or she tends to try to guard their territories and does not accept newcomers' ideas. Theory is born with experience as a mother. At the same time, if experience is not nurtured by theory as a father, experience alone can lead to wrong conclusions." After that, in addition to lectures in classrooms, I experienced crop cultivation for many years having belonged to the Practice Division of Agriculture. As a result, maybe also due to my age, I came to think that agriculture is such a deep and complicated profession, one simply cannot explain everything in theory. I might have been audacious when I was younger, but I think it was after all not bad. I hope that participants will be able to utilize the theories they learn in Tsukuba after they return to their home countries.

(By Oikawa, January 2017)