The Challenges of Building a Safe School Environment

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Introduction

On June 8, 2001 at Ikeda Elementary School Attached to Osaka Kyoiku University, the precious lives of 8 children were taken, and 13 other children and 2 teachers were injured, by an unauthorized intruder. This was a tragic incident that utterly devastated the previous aura of safety in Japanese schools. After this incident, school personnel and parents at our school worked together to review the deficits in school safety, revealed by this horrific incident, and to take appropriate countermeasures. We have thereby been extending educational research and practical activities aimed at further promotion of school safety, and have been reporting the results of our efforts to the entire country.

Our efforts aimed at school safety have recently been recognized by WHO Collaborating Center on Community Safety Promotion, and our school has been designated an "international safe school (ISS)." This is the first such designation in Japan. The term "international safe school" does not mean "a completely safe school in which security is ensured," but rather "a school which has practiced organized continuous efforts to assure its safety through the collaboration of school personnel, pupils, parents, and people in the local community."

This article describes our efforts aimed at school safety, including our approach to the ISS designation, from the viewpoints of safety management and safety education.

Safety Management and Safety Education in Ikeda Elementary School

In terms of the facility aspect of safety management in our school, based upon reflection of the 2001 incident, school buildings were renovated to achieve high visibility using numerous paned windows, and equipped with multiple surveillance cameras, warning buzzers, and a number of other security device installations. Thus, our school came to have the highest level of security in Japan. However, the security of a school cannot be assured by surveillance cameras and other security installations alone, but rather depends on an earnest commitment to safety and steadfast practice of safety procedures by all school personnel, parents, and other adults surrounding children. Based on this concept, the personnel at our school are currently working on the enrichment and practice of the so-called "security eye" policy.

Specifically, school personnel conduct daily safety activities, assessments, and management, taking advantage of school buildings with high visibility not interrupting the aforementioned security eye policy. In addition, to complement

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the security eye policy, we are engaged in developmental experiments on safety management systems, such as an information management system for data on children coming in and going out of the school employing small communicators called "radio wave badges" and an in-school positional information management system employing indoor shoes with a built-in IC chip. The goal of these systems is to provide highly effective auxiliary means of collecting the information necessary for school personnel to guide the evacuation of children and to confirm their safety, rapidly and accurately, in the event of incidents or accidents in school or a disaster such as an earthquake or fire.

In addition, based on our reflections on the 2001 tragedy, our school has formulated 7 preventive steps against recurrence to increase the effectiveness of safety measures in school, and is also making efforts toward their optimal practice, enhancement, and evolution. Specifically, these 7 preventive steps comprise the following: (1) regularly (5 times per year) conducting an anti-suspicious figures drill under the school safety division; (2) taking action in personal and material ways to prevent intruders from outside; (3) facilitating the safety of children after school and on the way to or from school, in cooperation with the parent teacher association (PTA); (4) promoting comprehensive measures for children's safety in cooperation with the local police, fire department, and neighboring municipalities including Ikeda City; (5) developing, implementing, and revising as needed (on a fiscal year basis) an original effective risk management manual ; (6) assigning the 8th of every month as "safety day" on which all school personnel responsibly check tangible compliance with the above-mentioned risk management manual; (7) promoting research on educational contents allowing children to obtain the sense that life is irreplaceable in classes on moral education or comprehensive learning, etc., thereby facilitating the growth of each child into a fully cognizant member of a safe society.

In the course of "education on life" addressing "the value of life" in the above step (7), we are endeavoring to cultivate in each child not only the ability to detect and avoid danger but also to nurture a sense of trust based on social support cognition that he or she is cherished and is under the benevolent watch of surround-
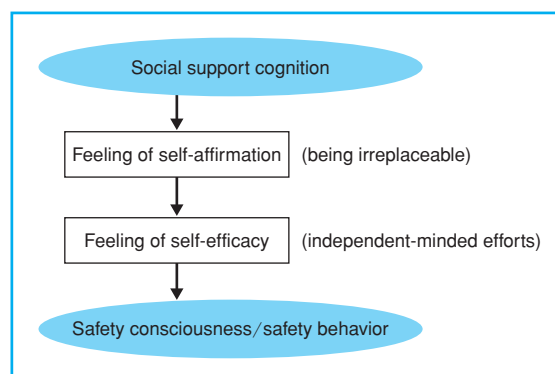

Fig. 1　Relationship between social support cognition and safety consciousness / safety behavior

ing adults. In other words, we are targeting the evolution of safety education to encourage children to become independent-minded individuals constituting a society in which people can feel empathy and shared responsibilities for safety and security. The author considers the development of safety management and safety education with attention focused on children's cognition of "social support" to be necessary for assuring the further safety of children.[1,2] Social support cognition[3] refers to the state of feeling supported, loved, accepted, and deemed valuable by the people around the individual. In this connection, radio wave badges and IC chips, as examined in our school, are expected to serve as means of obtaining the location data on children in school in emergency situations. In addition, we also expect these innovations to help parents approach their children and share information with them by conversing about the route to and from school. These innovations are also expected to facilitate the development of a sense of trust and safety in children with an actual feeling of being cherished and watched benevolently by parents, teachers, and people in the community.

During the process of growth and maturation, children should realize social support cognition that they are cherished and guarded by the adults surrounding them, particularly parents, school personnel, and others. Through realization of the "security eye" that promotes the formation of this cognition, children will become aware of themselves as precious, unique, and irreplaceable. Based on this positive sense of self,

children can acquire both "self-affirmation" and "self-efficacy," thereby stimulating a feeling of trust and safety for parents and school personnel. Supported by this feeling of safety, children may establish their own safety consciousness and safety behavior (**Fig. 1**).

Therefore, we believe systematic implementation of safety education and safety management based on an empathetic approach and shared attitude to safety for effective establishment and promotion of the safety of children in this country. As a practical approach to achieving this goal, our school is addressing the development of "an e-learning system aimed at protecting children from crimes," in cooperation with a research and development project conducted by the Research Institute of Science and Technology for Society of the Japan Science and Technology Agency. In the setting of this project, a demonstration experiment is underway to develop a system enabling children to make a "safety map" on the computer, and allowing parents to access the maps their children have made and to write their corresponding comments.

Although this experiment has not yet been completed, the interim results have shown that a feeling of self-respect may grow in children when they realize that their parents' "security eye" is on them, based on awareness of the aforementioned parental comments. This seems, at least to some degree, to demonstrate the importance of social support cognition in safety education. We intend to continue striving for a more effective safety education system while engaged in this demonstration experiment.

Conclusion

Ikeda Elementary School was designated an ISS on March 5, 2010, the first school in Japan to receive this designation, based on the high appraisal of our ongoing efforts aimed at preventing injuries and promoting the safety of our pupils, school personnel, other school-related persons, and the school environment.[4] This designation reinforced the continuation of efforts addressing school safety based on tangible evidence. With this designation, we would like to verify effective approaches to school safety promotion involving pupils, school personnel, parents, and people in the community, and to extensively release the outcomes of such efforts for the benefit of schools not only in this country but also all worldwide.

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