The Significance of Network Ethics Education in Japanese Universities:
A Global Citizenship Education for Building a Moral Community in the Globalized Network Society

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ABSTRACT

Cell phone abuse amongst Japanese school students, including sex crimes and bullying, are commonly managed with filters and phone bans. Many believe these measures are more effective than moral education. Japanese teenagers therefore enter college without moral education in the Internet society, which can cause problems on campus: students plagiarizing from the Internet, or posting anonymous defamatory messages on bulletin boards. Japanese universities address these problems ineffectively. Problems are caused by both student ignorance of network ethics and moral immatureness. Therefore, it is insufficient to provide only information ethics knowledge; students require a citizenship education to learn to build a moral community in the globalized network society. Here, the authors examine the effectiveness and difficulties in the practice of educating students to be moral subjects in such a society. Students are encouraged to debate ethical and practical issues, to express ethical remarks, and to understand the impact of their remarks.

Keywords: Cell Phone, Japan, Moral Education, Phone Abuse, School Students, University Students

INTRODUCTION

One of factors accelerating globalization is the rapid development of the Internet, which has connected us within networks and changed even our life styles. It has, indeed, made life more convenient, but it has also caused serious social problems among young people in Japan. Around 93% of senior high school students in Japan had a cell phone as of the end of 2007 (Benesse Corporation, 2007). In the last decade, serious problems have arisen with cell phones because they can be used to access the Internet. Such problems include a rapid increase of sex crimes from dating service websites and

widespread bullying by informal school Internet bulletin board. To deal with such problems, filters that restrict access to harmful websites have been introduced, and bans on cell phones in school have been enforced. Many people believe that these technological and regulatory measures are more valuable than continuous moral education, as the former are seem to have had immediate effect. As a result, teenagers in Japan enter college without having been taught moral education in the Internet society, and this causes various problems on campus. Some students steal or plagiarize information from the Internet to write their reports, and also post anonymous defamatory messages on Internet bulletin boards. These are urgent problems for universities in Japan, and yet the universities merely address the problems and lecture Internet morals ineffectively. There are several important questions that need to be addressed. Should we continue to restrict college students' uses of Internet devices, expecting immediate effect? Could only the restriction and punishment work on campus? Would we have any alternative approaches to the current problems in higher education?

In order to answer these questions, this paper will firstly provide an overview of the history of network ethics education in Japan, and identify issues and prospects with regard to Japanese network ethics education. It will then discuss our attempt at an alternative approach in higher education. Since the problems have been caused by not only students' ignorance of network ethics but also their moral immatureness, what we need here, we claim, is a certain type of citizenship education, through which students learn to build a moral community in the globalized network society.

We divide the history of Japanese network ethics education into roughly three periods: the late 1990s (from 1995 to 1999); the early 2000s (from 2000 to 2005); and the late 2000s (from 2006 to present). We analyze what network ethics terms were used during each of the three periods, which means that this analysis aims to clarify what Japanese network ethics education aimed to achieve and the issues it failed to resolve. In the last half of the paper, we discuss the effectiveness of network ethics education at tertiary level institutions, such as modern universities in Japan.

For our analysis of the history of network ethics education, we will utilize research reports of the "Construction of Information Ethics" project, the development of which was entrusted to Chiba University, Kyoto University and Hiroshima University, funded by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, between 1998 and 2002. Some parts of the research project lack cohesion because it was conducted during a period when ethical issues in regard to information had become a social problem in Japan. Nonetheless, the research project offers pertinent material in relation to the history of network ethics education since it analyzed copious materials then available. Hiroshima University was in charge of project research on information ethics education, while one of the authors of this paper, Tetsu Ueno, played one of the central roles in the research. Up to the present time, no other research conducted into information ethics exceeds the scale of this one.

After our overview and analysis, we introduce and critique our attempt, through classroom teaching, to develop students' communication skills and to enhance their moral consciousness as an indirect but ultimate solution for those problems. Students in our ethics classes are encouraged to debate other ethical issues as well as the problems in classroom and on the Internet bulletin board, to learn how to express ethical remarks, and to understand the impact of their remarks. We will also discuss the effectiveness and difficulties of such classroom teaching in Japan.

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