
Issues of the Learning through Work Experience Program for Junior High School Students: “The 14-Year-Old’s Challenge” in Toyama Prefecture

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There are two perspectives on the junior high school students’ learning through work experience: one focuses on how such an experience effects vocational selection activities, and the other on how current school education should be carried out. In this paper, we examine the effects and challenges of learning through work experience programs as part of a school education by focusing on a program called “The Learning through Work Experience Program: The 14-Year-Old’ Challenge,” which is being implemented in Toyama Prefecture and is in a transition from the former perspective to the latter. This paper used data collected through the “Survey on Junior High School Students’ Outlook on the Future and Job Consciousness,” which was conducted by Ochanomizu University in 2006. The analysis showed that the learning through work experience program enhances junior high school students’ motivation for learning by providing them with opportunity to gain a variety of experiences. However, from the perspective of how the learning through work experience program affects the vocational selection, the analysis indicated that sufficient effects cannot be expected due to the limited range of program activities available, as the program is aimed at junior high school students. More detailed debate is necessary on what the purpose of this experience for junior high school students should be and on what kind of activities are appropriate under this program.

I. Introduction

In this paper, we examine the effects and challenges of learning through work experience program as a part of school education by looking at a five-day program introduced for all junior high schools in Toyama Prefecture as an example. Given that more than 98% of junior high school students advance to schools beyond junior high, it is difficult to evaluate career education and learning through work experience programs that are implemented by junior high schools within the same framework as those implemented by senior high schools and universities, whose students are likely to enter the labor market soon after graduation. Therefore, before moving on to our analysis, let us first organize the perspectives for evaluating career education and learning through work experience programs at junior high schools, and then describe the emphasis on the learning through work experience in junior high school students’ career education.

1. Two Perspectives on Career Education

Around 10 years have passed since the Central Council for Education, in a report entitled “Improvements in Articulation between Elementary and Secondary Schools, and

Higher Education Institutions” (referred to as the “Report on Articulation,” below) and issued in 1999, argued for the need to provide career education from elementary school upwards in accordance with the students’ stages of development. “Career education,” a phrase which was used in a public document for the first time in the Report on Articulation,¹ has since then attracted attention as one of effective measures against the deterioration of young worker’s employment situation and an increase of youth unemployment. There are two perspectives of evaluating the promotion of career education over this period: one is perspective of measures against the problem of the transition from school to work and the other is as reflecting a change in how school education—career guidance in particular—should be carried out.

Taking the viewpoint of people who had called for measures against an increase of youth unemployment and early stage turnover under the deterioration of economical situation and changes in the labor market in the 1990s, the Report on Articulation prompted the implementation of various measures for the purpose of career education. Among those measures are the promotion of career education by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology and programs implemented by other ministries, including the “Youth Independence and Challenge Plan” (2003) and the “Youth Independence and Challenge Action Plan” (2004), both of which featured career education as the pillar.

On the other hand, taking the viewpoint of people who saw the promotion of career education as reflecting a change in how school education should be carried out, it is considered that the career guidance was back on form to aim at a lifelong career development by the Report on Articulation. Career guidance, which aimed at finding employment or going on to school after graduation based on academic achievements, had already started to change around 1990 into guidance that valued individual students’ interests and concerns. The following events can be considered as an event that shows this shift: a decision of not using class curve at career guidance in 1992 (Saitama Prefecture), and an enhancement of way of life guidance in each school stage such as elementary, junior and senior high schools in course of study in 1998.

We give this explanation because these two viewpoints differ not only on the way of assessing the Report on Articulation and the references to career education in it, but also on what kind of people should be the subjects of career education and what measures should be taken to promote career education. From the former viewpoint, the subjects of career education should be people who have exactly faced the vocational choice and the labor market entry, such as high school students, university students and unemployed youth. Meanwhile, the latter viewpoint focuses mainly on career education for junior high school students. In Japan, where high school advancement rate exceeds 98% of high-school aged youths, junior high school students are regarded as still having some time to spare before choosing a specific job or doing any practical life planning.

¹ As researched by Mimura (2004).

Interest in finding the effects of career education—learning through work experience programs and internships in particular—to the vocational selection is observed mainly among people who take the former viewpoint. Past research papers have studied which people took advantage of school career guidance on the transition to work and which failed to do so, and what traits are seen in those who failed to do so as well as what kind of career guidance would be effective. (e.g., Kariya et al. 1997; Mimizuka et al. 2000; Kosugi 2002, 2003, 2005; Honda 2005).

On the other hand, many research papers that have studied career education and learning through work experience programs for junior high school students from the latter viewpoint have focused on very practical matters, such as how career education and activities under these programs should be positioned within annual plans for school career guidance, and how to evaluate the results of such activities and use them for future career guidance (Mimura 2004; National Institute for Educational Policy Research 2007). Most of the cases cited in those research papers are highly practical activities conducted by individual teachers who actually educate students at their schools. There are two reasons why this trend is seen among research papers concerning junior high school students.

First, it is widely recognized that the career education being promoted now, unlike career guidance on post-graduation careers aimed merely at enabling the choice of a school, is intended to enable students to think in their own way about life based on an individual's interests and concerns. However, in the current situation in Japan that almost all junior high school students go on to higher levels of education, if the effects of career education are to be measured in terms of concrete results, the concern might concentrate only on the school choice, and is likely to turn back to the old career guidance that was able to abandon at last. Therefore, it is difficult for the effect measurement at the time of graduation of the junior high school to find the effect of the career education as the way of life guidance.

Second, it is also recognized that the scope of career education as part of school education extends beyond career guidance, and that it should be provided in a comprehensive, systematic, and organized way through all of a school's educational activities. For example, learning through work experience programs, which are carried out to meet social needs related to human resource development, are also treated as part of moral education intended to develop sound minds and bodies in young people (under the Basic Plan for Promoting Education). In other words, career education and learning through work experience programs at elementary and junior high schools may be provided for various purposes and through various methods. It has been thought that any debate on the effects of such activities should give consideration to their desirability from the perspective of education, and that it is inappropriate to attempt to evaluate their effects from any single perspective. Because of this, there has been no attempt to find the effects of career education from the perspective of career guidance alone.

2. Emphasis on Learning through Work Experience

The above explanations should also help understand why career education places an emphasis on the learning through work experience. Under the course of study in 1998, the year before the Report on Articulation was written, career guidance (way of life guidance) was enhanced at elementary, junior, and senior high schools. In elementary school, career guidance is not treated as a separate field of education in the curriculum. However, general provision 5 of the course of study, “matters to which consideration should be given in designing the syllabus” stipulated that “in providing instructions concerning each of the subjects, schools should use specific measures, such as providing children with the opportunity to find learning tasks and activities on their own and think about their own futures.”

Under the general provisions of the course of study, junior high schools are required to provide “systematic and organized career guidance through all educational activities so that students can think in their own way about life and choose their career proactively.” The cultivation (establishment) of a view of career and work is regarded as an important link between an understanding of the significance of learning, the cultivation (establishment) of an attitude toward learning, and the examination (understanding) of career aptitudes so as to “enrich school life and enable appropriate choice of a way of life and a career (decision).” Although the phrase “career education” was not used in the 1998 course of study, the emphasis on proactive career choice based on an individual’s interests and concerns can be viewed as the first step toward the implementation of career education.

However, it should be kept in mind that the proactive career choice emphasized in the 1998 course of study was interpreted as a policy change in relation to the existing career guidance, but not as a policy shift toward promoting a smooth transition from school to work. There occurred a significant policy change in career guidance, from a meritocratic approach based on academic achievements to counseling focusing on students’ own personalities, interests and concerns. From the former viewpoint that places emphasis on “work,” this shift may be regarded as a step toward incorporating career education into all curriculum subjects. However, from the latter viewpoint that emphasizes “education,” it was invariably seen as a change in school education in relation to career choice.

And yet at the same time, it is worth noting that following this policy shift, learning based on first-hand experience came to be regarded as important for cultivating students’ view of career and work, making it necessary to secure opportunities for enlightened experience related to jobs and career. This is because the importance of learning based on first-hand experience was emphasized again in the Report on Articulation. Behind the argument for the need to provide systematic career education from elementary school upwards was the recognition that appropriate view of career and work had not been cultivated in accordance with children’s development. The Report on Articulation placed particular emphasis on learning through work experience, acknowledging it as a problem that children lack life experience and social experience in highly urbanized local communities and in families with fewer children, where they can only experience limited human relationships

and limited roles. The National Institute for Educational Policy Research (2007) pointed out that even more than the need for children to develop view of career and work, which is the purpose of career education, children lacked experience with the reality of society and experience in building an extensive relationships with different generations, both of which are essential to their growth, and that they are faced with a situation in which it is difficult for them to find models for the ways they want to live their lives.

There are now strong expectations that learning through work experience programs in elementary and junior high schools will have effects for young people's future vocational selection from the viewpoint of placing an emphasis on "work." However, when they were introduced at such schools, experiential activities were expected to help secure the opportunity for the life and social experiences that had been lost. Rather than providing the opportunity for children to feel the difficulties and joys of working and to learn about its significance, learning through work experience programs were expected to have a broad range of effects, including enabling children to have the experience of forming human relationships while recognizing their own positions and roles in a group and giving them the motivation to learn based on their first-hand experience (Guidance and Counseling Research Center, National Institute for Educational Policy Research 2002). In this respect, the programs run in elementary and junior high schools are different from the learning through work experience programs and internships in high schools and universities, which are strongly linked with the vocational selection.

3. Implementation of Experiential Activities and Toyama Prefecture's Program, "the 14-Year-Old's Challenge"

According to the "Survey on the Implementation of Experiential Activities in Schools" (fiscal 2006, sample survey²) conducted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, the total annual credit hours for experiential activities related to production, workplaces, jobs, and employment³ totaled 12.6 hours at elementary schools and 20.1 hours at junior high schools (See Table 1). Given that in fiscal 2003, the total credit hours for such activities totaled 10.3 hours at elementary schools and 13.8 hours at junior high schools, the time allocated for experience-based learning increased significantly over a short period of time, indicating that measures to secure opportunities for such learning had been taken promptly.⁴

² Survey subject schools: A total of 564 schools—188 each of elementary schools and junior and senior high schools

³ Average of the total annual credit hours for fifth graders at elementary schools and for junior high and high school students in their second years.

⁴ Excluding experiential activities related to community service such as volunteer visits to social welfare facilities. The total credit hours for this activity stood at 3.1 hours at elementary schools and 2.5 hours at junior high schools.

Table 1. Implementation of Experiential Activities at Schools

	Elementary schools		Junior high schools	
	Fiscal 2003	Fiscal 2006	Fiscal 2003	Fiscal 2006
Experiential activities related to community service	4.3	3.1	2.9	2.5
Experiential activities to foster familiarity with nature	13.1	13.3	5.4	5.0
Experiential activities related to production, workplace, jobs and employment	10.3	12.6	13.8	20.1
Primary industries	9.2	10.6	1.9	2.4
Secondary industries	0.4	0.8	1.9	4.9
Tertiary industries	0.7	1.2	10.0	12.8
Experiential activities to foster familiarity with culture and the arts	5.5	3.6	3.2	3.7
Experiential activities related to exchanges	5.3	5.0	2.7	2.3
Other experiential activities	3.4	3.3	3.2	2.3
Total	41.9	41.0	31.2	35.9

Notes: 1. Compiled from “Collection of Data Related to the Current Circumstances Surrounding Child Development” by Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology.

2. Details of the above activities are as follows:

- Experiential activities related to community service: Cleanup activity on the streets and beaches, improvement and beautification of local environment, visits to social welfare facilities and other volunteer work.
- Experiential activities to foster familiarity with nature: Field excursions, field camping, observation of wild birds and other wild life, nature school, etc.
- Experiential activities related to production, workplace, jobs and employment.
- Primary industries: Experience activities related to agriculture, forestry and fishery such as rice planting, cutting grass, beach seine, etc.
- Secondary industries: Workplace experiential activities at factories, internships, etc.
- Tertiary industries: Workplace experiential activities and internships at local business offices, stores, etc.
- Experiential activities to foster familiarity with culture and arts: Wall painting, Experiential activities related to Japanese and foreign cultures and the arts, etc. Activities to maintain local traditional events, performing arts and industrial arts.
- Experiential activities related to exchanges: Exchanges with young children, elderly people, people with disabilities, foreign nationals and people in other regions.

The increase in the time allocated for experience-based activities at junior high schools was due in large part to an increase in the hours spent on learning through work experience programs. Of the 10,089 public junior high schools, 9,667, or 95.8%, implemented such activities in fiscal 2007, according to the Survey on the Implementation of Learning through Work Experience Programs and Internships in Fiscal 2007 (Outline), which was conducted in March 2008 by the Guidance and Counseling Research Center of

the National Institute for Educational Policy Research. The implementation ratio came to 100% in seven prefectures, Ibaraki, Toyama, Ishikawa, Fukui, Nagano, Gifu, and Shiga, and in two of them—Toyama and Shiga—all schools implemented five days or more of activities under the programs. Irrespective of the initial purpose of their introduction, almost all junior high schools implement some kind of learning through work experience program as a part of the educational activities.

In Toyama Prefecture's program, "The Learning through Work Experience Program: The 14-Year-Old's Challenge," 14-year-old second-year junior high school students do work experiences or welfare activities and volunteer works for five days, mainly in the local community of the school district. Such activities, which have been implemented in the name of "The Learning through Work Experience Program: The 14-Year-Old's Challenge," since 1999, are implemented by municipalities supported by subsidies from the Toyama prefectural government. According to the implementation guidelines, the purpose of this program is to "enable junior high school students in their second year, whose activities broaden in scope and increase in intensity, to become tough enough to overcome the challenges typical of that period of growth for young people, such as developing a consciousness of social norms and becoming more social, as well as thinking about their own futures, by participating in activities that allow them to experience of the world of work and social services and volunteer activities outside their schools for one week" (Fiscal 1999 Implementation Guidelines for the 14-Year-Old's Challenge Program).

In recent years, this program has come to be taken up as a part of a career education initiative that is effective in developing students' job consciousness. However, as indicated in the implementation guidelines, initially, the main purpose of this program was not to develop students' view of career and work. Around 1995, as school bullying emerged as a social problem, each municipality launched and implemented a Community-Wide Program to Prevent School Bullying (in fiscal 1996 through 1998). The purpose of the program was to deal with an increase in school bullying and school truancy through community-wide efforts, by encouraging the recognition that the local community should be responsible for children's upbringing. This program continued as it evolved first into the "Activities for a Mental Education Network in Junior High School Districts" (in fiscal 1999 through 2002) and then into the "Implementation Program for Heartfelt Activities" (in fiscal 2003 through 2005). The 14-Year-Old's Challenge Program started in 1999 as part of these activities.

Therefore, if the situation in Toyama Prefecture is to be understood within the framework of "work" and "education," it can be said that the 14-Year-Old's Challenge Program, which was initially introduced for the purpose of providing education to junior high school students through community-wide efforts, is being forced to change into a work-oriented activity. In this respect, the situation in Toyama Prefecture is different from that in other regions that have started learning through work experience programs in recent

years.⁵ The current challenge for the 14-Year-Old's Challenge Program is how to adapt to the shift in its purpose from education to work.

Shown below are the results of a survey of students on the effects to be gained if learning through work experience program are treated as activities to facilitate the vocational selection. We will also explain the problems related to experiential activities as identified through interviews with local business establishments.

II. Data Used for Analysis

This research uses data collected through the Survey of Junior High School Students' Outlooks on the Future and Job Consciousness, which was conducted as part of the "Communication System Development Program," a project implemented by Ochanomizu University with special educational research funds.

1. Student Survey

The survey of students was conducted in two areas—Area X and Area Y—in Toyama Prefecture in September and October 2006, with the questionnaires distributed to students through their schools.⁶ Questionnaire A asked the students about their school lives and learning environments and about their job consciousness and the career choice they had for their futures. Questionnaire B asked the students about the details of their activities under the learning through work experience program, how they felt about them, and their consciousness of family and workplace norms. These questionnaires were distributed and collected twice, both before and after the students surveyed had participated in the activities. The same questions were asked with regard to norm consciousness before and after the experience so as to make a comparison. The results of Questionnaires A and B were matched by student number. The collection rate and the matching conditions for Questionnaires A and B are as shown in Table 2. In this paper, we treat the survey results in Area X and Area Y⁷ as a unit, with no distinction made between them.

⁵ This provides a contrast to "Work, Work Week Tokyo," a workplace experience activity for junior high school students in Tokyo that started in 2005, whose purpose was, from the beginning, to encourage students to develop appropriate perceptions of jobs and work (Implementation Guideline for "Work, Work Week Tokyo").

⁶ For details of the survey, see Terasaki and Mimizuka (2007).

⁷ The system of implementing the "The 14-Year-Old's Challenge" program in each area is as follows:

- ❖ Area X (four schools): Implemented jointly by neighboring junior high schools.
- Organization: Prefectural education board → City education boards and promotion committees → Groups of implementing organizations → Schools and steering committees
- Businesses that accept students: Schools dispatch teachers to local businesses in their school districts to ask for their cooperation. After the number of students to be accepted has been finalized, each junior high school determines the number of students to be allocated to each. Accordingly, under the program, some students may take part in activities outside their own school district, but

Table 2. Collection Rate and Matching

	A	B (before the activities)	B (after the activities)	Matching
Number of students	556	556	556	556
Number of collected replies	522	523	517	500
Collection rate (%)	93.9	94.1	93.0	89.9

2. Local Business Survey

Until now, few surveys have been conducted on the local business establishments that accept students from workplace experience programs and internship trainees. The “Survey of Business Establishments about Learning through Work Experience Programs and Internships,” conducted in 2005 by the Guidance and Counseling Research Center of the National Institute for Educational Policy Research, did not ask business establishments whether or not they had accepted students for learning through work experience program. Although cooperation from local businesses is essential to the implementation of these programs, there had not been any survey, other than simple questionnaires prepared by the schools that asked them their frank opinions on the program. In this research, we asked local businesses that accepted students to cooperate with our survey via the schools, and we accordingly conducted semi-structured, 60 to 90-minute interviews with nine local businesses within one month from the end of the 14-Year-Old’s Challenge Program. The data used for the research is based on the records of the interviews as compiled from tape recordings and written notes. The attributes of the interviewees and establishments are as shown in Table 3.

III. Analysis

1. The Learning through Work Experience Program in Student Survey

When implementing learning through work experience programs, schools ask their students about what kind of works they wish to do, and allocate them to local businesses in accordance with the number of students the businesses can accommodate, in a way that reflects the students’ wishes as much as possible. Table 4 shows the distribution of

within the districts of either one of the other three partner schools in Area X.

- ❖ Area Y (one school): Implemented independently by the school.
 - Organization: Prefectural education board → Town education board and promotion committee → School and steering committee
 - Businesses that accept students: Teachers visit local businesses to ask for their cooperation. After the number of students to be accepted has been finalized, the school determines the number of students to be allocated to each. As the number of business establishments and type of businesses available in the school district are limited, businesses outside the school district are also asked for cooperation.

Table 3. Outline of Interviewees and Business Establishments Surveyed

Interviewees			Business establishments	
Gender	Position	Age	Business type	Years of cooperation
A Female	Instructor	30s	Sales	4 years
B Female	Manager	60s	Social services	3 years
C Male	Instructor	50s	Construction	Approx. 10 years
D Male	Manager	50s	Manufacturing	Since the start of the program
E Female	Part-time worker	50s	Food service	3 years
F Male	Association chief	60s	Agriculture, forestry and fishery	5 years
Male	Instructor	30s		
G Female	Manager	50s	Social services	Since the start of the program
H Male	Manager	30s	Manufacturing & sales	1st time
I Female	Instructor	50s	Agriculture, forestry, and fishery	Since the start of the program

Table 4. Contents of Activities

	(%)		
	Overall	Male	Female
Production, engineering & construction	15.8	28.2	3.2
Services, sales & food service	28.4	30.2	26.6
Child care	30.0	19.2	40.9
Medical & health service	5.1	3.1	7.1
Social services	4.9	1.6	8.3
Cultural experience	2.2	2.4	2.0
Public service	10.8	12.9	8.7
None of the above	2.6	2.4	2.8
No reply	0.2	0.0	0.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	507	255	252

Note: Excluding the respondents who did not reveal their gender.

students by type of business. The largest percentage of students, 30.0%, participated in childcare, followed by 28.4% for services, sales, and food service, and 15.8% for manufacturing, engineering, and construction. It should be noted that there was a gender disparity by type of business in that more female students participated in childcare and a greater number of male students participated in manufacturing, engineering, and construction.⁸

How, specifically, did the difference in the contents of their activities under the program affect the students' overall impressions? We examined the effects of these activities by focusing on the three most popular business categories: childcare; services, sales, and food service; and manufacturing, engineering, and construction.

Figure 1 indicates the results of a question that asked students about what was required of them in their activities. Most of the students who took part in childcare replied that they had been required to think of how to do the job for themselves and be creative (80.7%) and that they had been required to give due consideration to other people's feelings (96.0%). Meanwhile, of the students who participated in manufacturing, engineering, and construction, 91.1% replied that they had been required to exercise their physical strength. This shows that what was required of them differed depending on the type of business they experienced.

Figure 2 indicates the results of a question that asked students about their findings from their activities. After participating in the experience, many junior high school students found that long-term training would be necessary to make it possible to do the job properly. This suggests that these experiences have potential as an opportunity that motivates students to pursue further learning. However, the ratio of students who felt that way varied somewhat according to the type of business; the ratio was slightly lower for services, sales, and food service compared with the other two business categories.⁹

2. Problems Related to the Learning through Work Experience Program in the Local Business Survey

(1) Significance of the Experience: "Heart" Is More Important Than "Skills"

Here, we examine whether the learning through work experience program are recognized as being geared toward the students' future employment or are seen as a part of the students' educations. The results of the interviews show that all business establishments regard it as important that students put themselves in the workplace and have a first-hand experience doing a job. Some business establishments pointed out that the roles that children have in their families are too limited, as did the Report on Articulation.

⁸ The percentage of students who replied that the contents of the activities had not satisfied their wishes was 17.9%. This number did not differ significantly according to the contents of activities.

⁹ The impact on the perception of a student's future career or the motivation for learning did not differ significantly according to the contents of the activities.

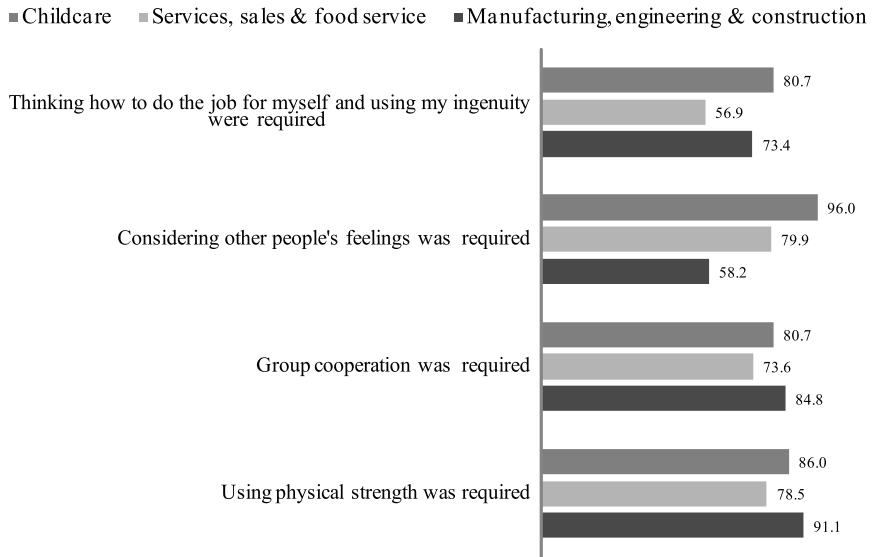


Figure 1. What was required in the Experiential Activities (“Yes” + “Yes, to a degree” [%])

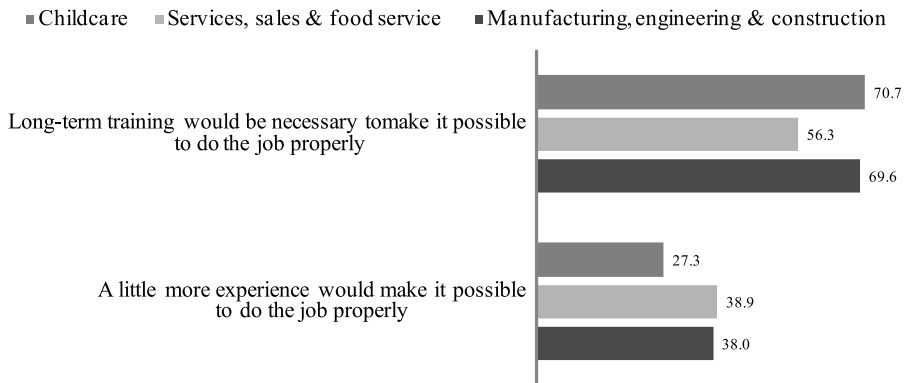


Figure 2. Students’ Findings from the Experiential Activities (“Yes” + “Yes, to a degree” [%])

Interviewee A: It's important to provide an opportunity for the kids to work, and more than that, it's also important for them to learn how to act in society – to learn about social norms. It doesn't seem like most kids really know how to act anymore. Parents don't do anything about it, and more and more kids expect their parents to do everything for them and don't think about trying to learn that kind of thing by themselves. We have to encourage them to want to try.

In our interviews, it was only once that we heard the view that the activities that the students participate in under the learning through work experience program help to provide information about a job. Rather, these activities are expected to promote communications between parents and their children by providing young people with opportunity to get a feel for the real world and gain first-hand experience in society. Having the children gain experience on what a given job is like is not seen as the top priority.

Interviewer: The 14-Year-Old's Challenge Program has two purposes. The first is to provide the opportunity for young people to gain the experience of working and the second is to provide them with the opportunity to have contact with adults other than their parents and teachers through work. Which of the two do you think is more important?

Interviewee I: Well, I would say the second, if I had to pick. If we're talking about engaging in a job... I think probably the schools' education policy places more emphasis on the second one. Having the kids be engaged in society, so to speak... It seems like the schools' policy is to broaden the kids' perspectives, of course to show them the right ways to behave in school and in their classes, but also to show them what the real world is like. That's what it seems like, anyway. Also – and I think a lot of the local businesses want this too – I really want to do something to keep an eye on them and help them grow, you know, to develop as people.

Interviewee C: Giving 14-year-olds their first opportunity to have contact with working people... I'm not real sure, but I guess that's one of the purposes. It seems like the goal is to get the students not just to talk with other students and teachers but to communicate with working people, not so much to get them to learn how to do a job. What's important is giving them that experience.

(2) Problem 1: Insufficient Labor

The problems related to the implementation of activities, which were identified on the basis of frank opinions expressed by local businesses, can be divided into two categories: problems that are inevitable for activities undertaken by 14-year-old junior high school students and problems that could be improved upon if some measures are taken.

A decrease in business efficiency is a problem that cannot be avoided when junior high school students are accepted into the workplace under the supervision of an instruc-

tor.¹⁰ In Toyama Prefecture, many of the local businesses that accept students under the program are small and medium-size companies with relatively small workforces, and the activities presumably impose a significant burden on such companies. However, in most cases, this problem was overcome because of the goodwill of local businesses that believed in the importance of the effects of learning through work experience.

Interviewee D: Teachers will ask us if their students are doing it right. But, frankly speaking, there's no way that they can be doing it right. We wouldn't be able to accept students if we didn't allow for the fact that this is learning through work experience. It's been 14 or 15 years since this program started, but it wasn't until a few years ago that our employees started to be willing to really accept the students. No matter how you look at it, it's just faster for us to do the work ourselves.

Another inevitable problem is that although the business establishments would like to have students engage in jobs useful as experiential activities, it is difficult to do so because they cannot afford to allow product quality to deteriorate from the perspective of their commercial interests. Consequently, students tend to be assigned to do peripheral jobs—which are not directly related to business—such as cleaning and dish washing, and this tendency is particularly notable in the manufacturing industry.

Interviewee H: First of all, we took care to ensure—if I may say so—that the quality of our products would not change. We were also careful to prevent the kids from sustaining any injuries.

Interviewee C: To tell the truth, I know that the kids want to work with a hammer and nails while the carpenters supervise them. But if we let them do that and our customers see it, it would turn into a big thing about 'How could you be letting kids do that!' I guess they used to let the kids do it, wearing a helmet and all. So we at least let them wear the helmets this time, too. I couldn't believe how happy it made them to put on those helmets. So they wore their helmets and we had them clean up a bit, and this and that. But I don't think that letting them work with a hammer and nails would be a very good idea. We're talking about products that customers are going to buy, so that's asking a little too much.

¹⁰ Toyama Prefecture requires the local businesses to appoint an instructor to supervise junior high school students accepted into the workplace. One person we interviewed stated that compensation ranging from several hundred yen to 1,000 yen is paid to the supervisor. The precise amount of compensation was not revealed.

(3) Problem 2: Poor Communications

The problem cited most frequently in interviews with business establishments was poor communication with the students' parents. In both Areas X and Y, junior high schools prepare notebooks for the students to use specifically for the activities under the program. These notebooks list matters related to directions to be provided to students before and after the program. It also contains a section for students to write down what they did each day and a section for comments by the instructors and the parents. However, in the worst cases of neglect, the notebooks were crumpled, with nothing written in them. When the students and parents take this attitude, it discourages the receiving businesses.

Interviewee C: I want them to make sure that the students understand what it means for them to participate in the 14-Year-Old's Challenge Program and what they need to do as a part of it. And I want the students to communicate with their parents. The kids bring the notebook to record their activities every day and the instructors go to all the trouble of writing down an explanation of the activities on that day, but the section for the parents' comments often comes back blank. I just can't understand it.

It has also been pointed out that since surveys of the business establishments conducted by the schools after the activities are completed have become a nothing more than a formality, the problems pointed out by the local businesses are not reflected in future activities. From this, we may presume that state of communications between the local businesses, families, and schools is poor. The poor state of communications was indicated by the comment that the 14-Year-Old's Challenge Program has become a matter of formality and by the doubt expressed about the significance of the activities under the program.

Interviewee D: Every year, I'm more and more at a loss about how the kids really feel. There are things that I can't tell, like whether they appreciate the experience of doing a job or whether they understand how difficult it is. I know it's partially because there's a bigger age gap between me and them every year, but they seem to be apathetic about these things, whereas every year I become more aware of these changes in the kids. So I wonder whether the fact that they become quicker at doing a job or better at selling products is really an effect of the 14-Year-Old's Challenge Program.

IV. Conclusion

The 14-Year-Old's Challenge Program in Toyama Prefecture started as part of community-wide efforts to help children's development, as importance was placed on giving children the opportunity to get the feel of society and to gain first-hand experience in it through learning through work experience program. Implementation of out-of-school activities is regarded as a change in how educational activities should be conducted and as a posi-

tive development. This is evidenced by what we have heard through interviews with local businesses, such as that children should grow through community-wide efforts and that it is good for students to form relationships with people with whom they usually do not have contact. Local businesses expected not that these activities would lead directly to future career choice or career plans, but that it would help to facilitate smooth communications between parents and their children by providing the opportunity for students to get the feel of society and gain first-hand experience in the real world—even though the results may sometimes be disappointing for them because of poor communications between schools, business establishments, and parents. The 14-Year-Old's Challenge Program in Toyama Prefecture is an activity that has been conducted as part of efforts to study how school education should be carried out from the viewpoint of "emphasizing education."

Fundamentally, businesses operate based on a rationale that is different from that on which school activities are based, such as the realities of economic rationality and profitability. Nonetheless, local businesses have cooperated with the 14-Year-Old's Challenge Program, because they see educational value in schools' efforts to improve the state of education. As schools and businesses have shared the idea that the purpose of activities under the program is to raise children through community-wide efforts, no questions have been raised about the difference between the rationales of businesses and those of schools, nor about specific effects—such as acquisition of skills and improvement of the quality of labor. The efforts to reconfigure the 14-Year-Old's Challenge Program from an educational activity implemented by the schools into a career education activity with a view to helping students' smooth transition to the labor market is directing attention to these issues, about which questions had not previously been raised.

In interviews with the local businesses, some of them pointed out that the role of this program is limited to providing an opportunity for students to gain new experiences that they cannot have at school, rather than providing vocational training and increasing familiarity with jobs, because of the practical constraint that the program is aimed at 14-year-old junior high school students. A decrease in work process efficiency caused by the acceptance of junior high school students into the workplace imposes a significant burden on the local businesses. In addition, although these businesses would like to have junior high school students engage in jobs that provide them with a useful experience if possible, the range of jobs that can be assigned to them are limited when considering their commercial interests. If the 14-Year-Old's Challenge Program is to be positioned as an activity related to the vocational selection from the viewpoint of "work," it will be necessary to review how to evaluate the insufficient aspects of the program, because of which the students are unable to be involved in a full share of the work. Through our survey, we identified a case in which a student who took part in activities at a construction company under the program only engaged in cleanup of the site every day, and a case in which a student who participated in activities at a university did nothing more than keeping parked bicycles in order all day long. Of course, for some types of business, students cannot be allowed to do jobs that require

special training, jobs that would bring them into contact with private information or those that may involve company secrets. As a result, their activities are limited to simple jobs, making it difficult for students to gain a variety of experiences and professional knowledge. This situation, which has been accepted from the viewpoint of placing an emphasis on education, that is, from the viewpoint of placing importance on having the students form relationships with people outside school, can no longer be easily tolerated from the viewpoint of placing an emphasis on “work,” namely, from the viewpoint of stressing the effects of the activity on vocational selection. From now on, it will be necessary to consider how to enhance the contents of experiential activities.

Gaining the cooperation of business establishments with the program is also an important task. Junior high school students have learned many things through these experiences, such as thinking about how to do a job for themselves, giving consideration to other people’s feelings, and exercising their physical power, and found out that they would need education and training to do the job properly. It is evident that the program has increased their interest in jobs and given them the motivation to learn. However, these results depended heavily on the goodwill of local businesses and their expectations about the educational effects of the experience as allowing children to feel and experience the real world and facilitating smooth communications between them and their parents. As a problem related to the program, some local businesses have already pointed out the poor communication with parents and with schools. If the schools continue to rely on the local businesses’ generosity, they may soon lose the community’s support. In fact, some companies have refused to accept students due to the increased burden of the recession in recent years. While 95% of schools nationwide are now implementing some sort of experiential activities, business establishments that accept students have come to feel an increasing burden. Finding out how to reward cooperative businesses and how to secure the cooperation of the parents through appropriate communications will be the key to the success of learning through work experience activities.

In conclusion, the question bears raising: Is it possible to set specific benchmarks and goals for junior high school students in terms of their view of career and work? In Japan, where almost all students who complete junior high school continue their educations, to answer this question, it will be necessary to overcome the difference between the perspective of placing an emphasis on “education” and that of placing an emphasis on “work,” and to discuss in detail what kind of activities junior high school students should engage in under this program and for what purpose.

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