

“Public Achievement”

At the end of last year, I was asked the question by my friend, “How much do individuals need to take action to make changes in society?” She did not believe society would change unless the heads of the political and social systems were replaced.

I cannot get this question out of my head. Looking back on my experience, although I grew up in the Japanese system, I have been very impressed and influenced by the Danish attitudes, which are “being aware that each individual is a member of society, believing that we can modify society by ourselves, and always continuing dialogue and taking action in the community to which we belong.”

However, it would be hard for most of us to recognise society as something we can change. Considering my friend’s question and our dialogue, she would think society is created by someone else or determined by limited leaders. Also, the definition of “society” would be a large organisation such as a nation or prefecture, and these recognitions would keep society away from her.

Certainly, because our population is still more than 100 million, it is almost impossible to dream we can make a prompt change nationwide. In addition, my friend said she had felt hopeless toward politics after the regime change in 2009, as we could not have seen any drastic positive changes since then.

There are multiple backgrounds and excuses why we cannot be proactive toward politics and society. Nevertheless, I do not want to give up. I am worried that we tend to reach a conclusion that we cannot change anything. It means we stop thinking about our lives. It may also lead to a deterioration in the quality of citizens’ voices.

Then, how can we deal with this problem? How can we continue thinking about society and politics and keep moving, even if we feel hopeless?

I came across a method/approach called “Public Achievement,” which was established by the University of Minnesota in 1990.

What is “Public Achievement”?

<https://sites.augsburg.edu/publicachievement/background/history/>

To summarise, the idea is to clarify the relationship between the individual and society, to make individuals feel that they are connected to society and that taking their own action is meaningful. At the last part of its approach, participants implement small action in their local communities.

It is practised in various regions of the world and has also been implemented in Japan by Tokai University. The below article introduces how Tokai University have adopted Public Achievement into their curriculum.

Horimoto, M. and Ninomiya-Lim, S. (2020). Nurturing Citizenship in Higher Education: Public Achievement-style Education at Tokai University. *Educational Studies in Japan*, 14(0), pp.29–38. doi:<https://doi.org/10.7571/esjkyoiku.14.29>.

As I think this approach seems effective, I have just started to think how to put it into practice in the school I run. But at the same time, I wondered whether it would suit the Japanese culture. I can't quite put everything together, and it seems pretty far from the conclusion, but that's what's on my mind at the moment.

The header photo taken by me in Finland. Dining table helps us to have dialogues and compose a small community/society.