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Mentors For Japanese College Students

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1. Introduction

Guided by Vygotsky's idea which suggests that the activities and the person with whom children engage in the activities are the two 'locomotives' of their mental development, a Japan-US collaborative research project was launched several years ago. In the course of conducting several studies, it has been found that Japanese college freshmen show salient 'same-sex-peer-orientedness' when asked to name the important people (signigficant others) in their life, and that American parents play wider and stronger function roles on their children than the Japanese (Wakai, 1989). Factor analysis on the function roles of the significant others revealed five factors, namely 'Teacher', 'Challenger', 'Ego-ideal (Model)', 'Supporter', and 'Companion' (Matsuda, 1994).

As many psychologists note, social encounter and experiences are critically important for human development. Theoretically, as time passes our society is expected to move forward into more and more comfortable and supportive world. But enigmatically enough, as our highly 'developed' society changes, there are more and more people who suffer the difficulty and problems in human relation. The problem is particularly serious for young people, because they are just in the process of establishing ego identity and relationship with the outer world.

Although abundant studies have been done on adolescents, we still witness a paucity of evidence which shows what kind of social network they live in and who they find as the significant others. This study is a derivative of our cross-national study between Japan and USA on mentors, led by Urie Bronfenbrenner of Cornell University.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this study is two fold. One is to probe into the significant others for Japanese college students (Study 1), by adopting simpler method than that we used in the previous studies. Second, it was aimed at getting the firsthand data on how the contemporary Japanese younsters conceptualize 'Mentors' or 'Excellent Teachers' (Study 2), again by using more direct approach than that in our precedent studies.

Part of the results reported e was presented at the 13th Biennial Meetings of the International Society for the Study of Behavioral Development (ISSBD), June 26-July 2, 1994, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. The presentation was made possible by a travel grant from the Japan Foundation. The author expressed here his sincerest gratitude to the Foundation.

Methods and Procedures

A. Study 1.

1) Subjects. The subjects in Study 1 were 91 male and 75 female college students in the sophomore year, who were taking an introductory course of education taguht by the present author. In a year they are going to select the major fields respectively, ranging over all the disciplines.

2) Data collection tool (VIP Questionnaire). A simplified questionnare was devised to collect data on the important people (significant others). Subjects were asked to name a single person (hereafter, 'associate') among the people they thought very important and to state the associate's sex, age, occupation, relationship to the subject, the ages when the relation began and ended and reached to the peak (the most intensive).

3) Procedure. Using part of the regular class hour the questionnaire forms were distributed to all the students attended, and after a brief instruction about the purpose and the nature of the questionnaire they were requested to answer each question, beginning with naming a single person as a significant other. Subjects were also asked to write down the reasons (up to five) for the naming.

B. Study 2

1) Subjects. The subjects for Study 2 were 70 male and 71 female sophomores of the same college. Most of them answered the questinnaire for Study 1.

TABLE 1 Rating Scales for Mentor's Traits

A. Professional capabilities	*B. Personal traits* (1)	*C. Personal traits* (2)
1. Knowledgable	6. In stable mood	11. Calm
2. Intelligent	7. Passionate	12. Poised
3. of special talent	8. Steady	13. Delicate
4. Logical thinking	9. composed	14. Patient
5. Insightful	10. Sensitive	15. Positive
D. Appearance	*E.* Greed/beliefs	*F. Attitudes toward self*
16. Tall	21. Having own firm ideals	26. Optimistic
17. Robust	22. A person of faith	27. Strict with self
18. Good shape	23. Having things to engage	28. Endeavoring
19. Handsome/beautiful	24. Having a strong sense of justice	29. Humble
20. Awesome	25. Perceptive with the world	30. Not self-depreciating
G. Attitudes toward others	*H. Teaching techniques*	*I. Personal impression*
31. Providing chances	36. Use humors	41. Degnified
32. Listen faithfuly	37. Not scold unreasonably	42. With a kind of dreadfulness
33. Give constructive criticisms	38. Eager to teach	43. Charismatic
34. Impose unresistable demands if necessary.	39. Praising	44. Well-known
35. Not blame other person's failure or fault	40. Having lots of topics	45. Somehow mysterious
J. Sociableness	*K. (Buffer items)*	
46. Kind	51. Love animals	
47. Considerate	52. of high visual acuity	
48. Sociable	53. Run fast	
49. Impartial	54. Good at swimming	
50. Cooperative	55. Love blue color	

2) Data collection tool (Mentor Rating). Based on a pilot survey, 50 items were chosen for making the rating scales of characteristic attributes (personality traits or abilities) of 'Mentor' or 'Excellent Teacher'. The items can be clustered into 10 categories. (See Table 1). In order to eliminate unreliable responses, 5 buffer items were added. This is a version of the semantic differential method.

3) Procedure. As in the case of VIP Questinnaire in Study 1, Menter Rating was administered during a regular classroom teaching hour. After a brief explanation on the study, each item (rearranged in a random order) was read twice rather slowly and the subjects were asked to put down their judgment about the degree how the statement of each item is applicable or relevant as a characteristic trait or an ability of a mentor or an excellent teacher.

4. Results and Discussion.

A. Study 1.

1) The basic attributes of the VIPs named by the subjects are summarized in Fig. 1~Fig. 4. Fig. 1 shows a distinctive sex difference in the proportion of subjects who named opposite sex associates in that female subjects named more male associates. The real reason for this finding is not clear from the present study, but it might be explained, at least to some extent, by the fact that the proportion for secondary school teachers to be named is rather high as Fig. 4 shows, and that male/female ratio of teachers in Japanese secondary schools is unproportinally in favor for male. From Fig. 2, 3, & 4, it is evident that friends at secondary school levels occupy highest percentage. This result supports the findings reported at the ISSBD's 10th Meetings at Jÿvaskÿla (Wakai, 1989).

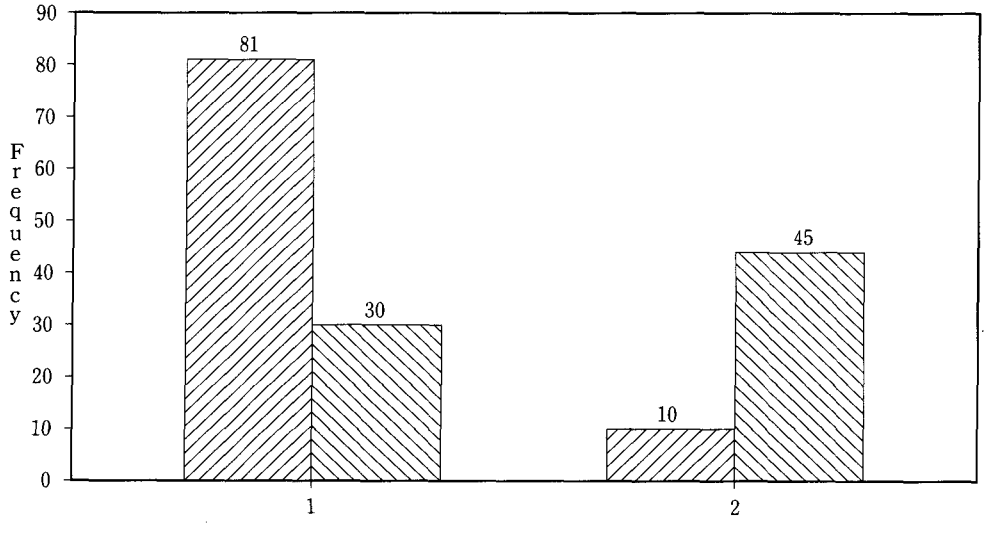

FIGURE 1 Associate's Sex

2) Reasons for VIPs. Fig. 5 shows a summarized pecture of the reasons the subjects gave for naming a particular parcular person as a VIP. The overall tendency is very alike for both sexes of subjects, and it is notable that the reasons represented in

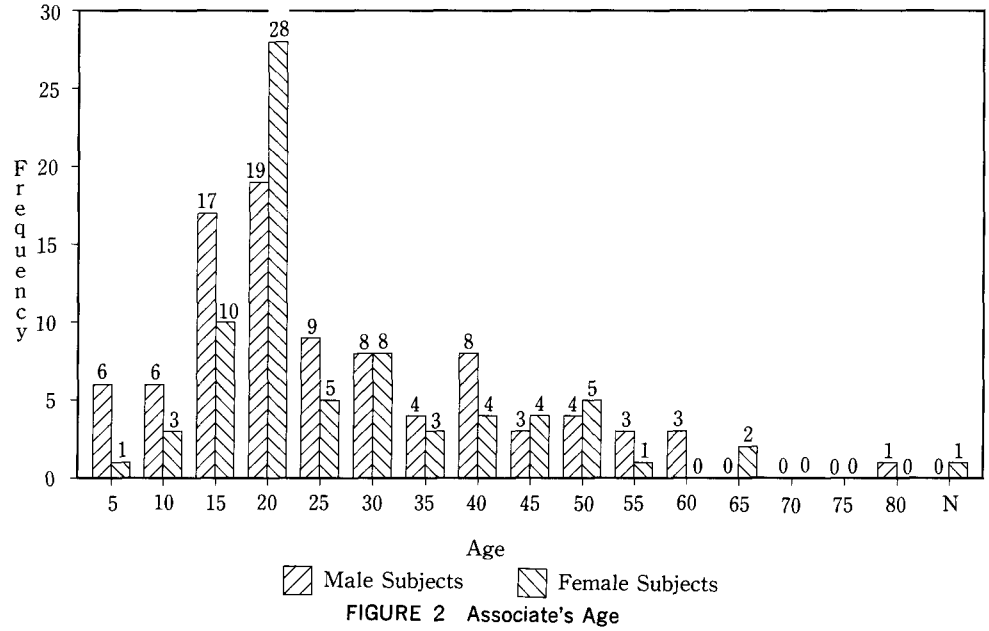

FIGURE 2 Associate's Age

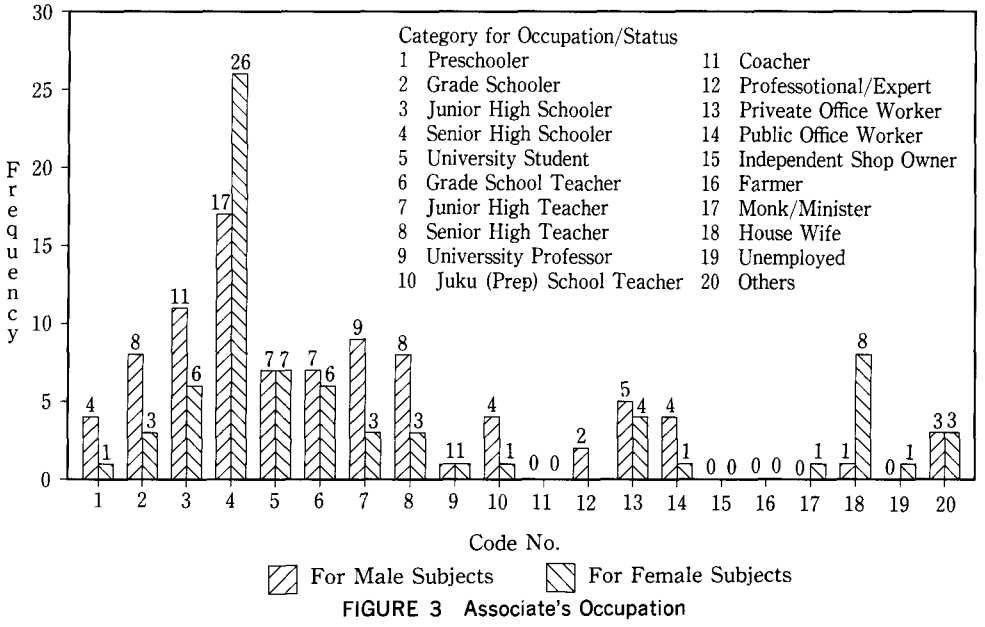

FIGURE 3 Associate's Occupation

the category Code No. 3~7 occupy relatively high percentage. The fact that Code No. 3 (Specific Instruction) shows the highest percentage indicates that teachers are often named as VIPs, and that because the subject's responses are based on specific experience with the teachers in daily teaching/learning situation, thus making it much easier

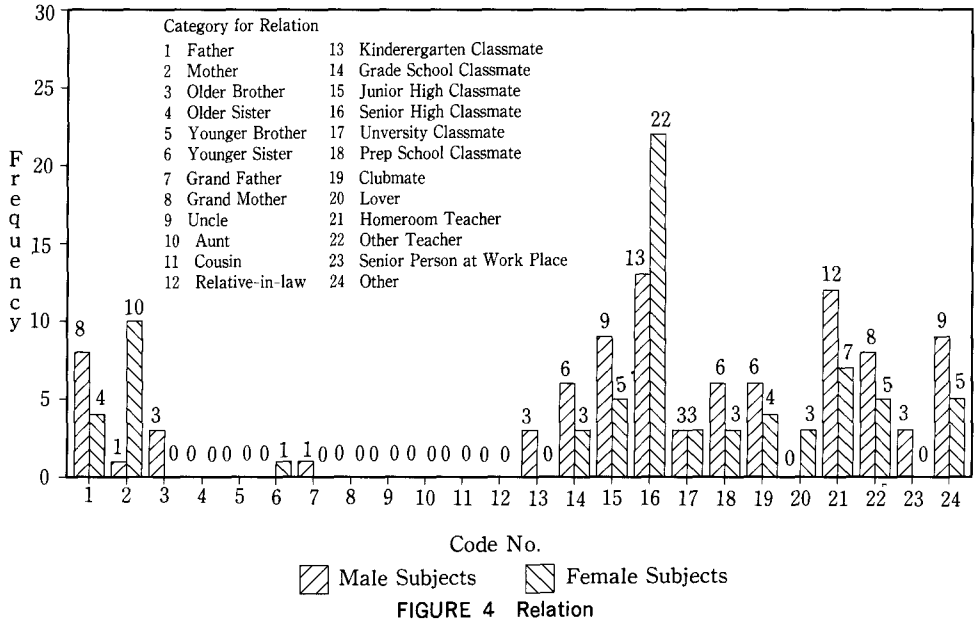

FIGURE 4 Relation

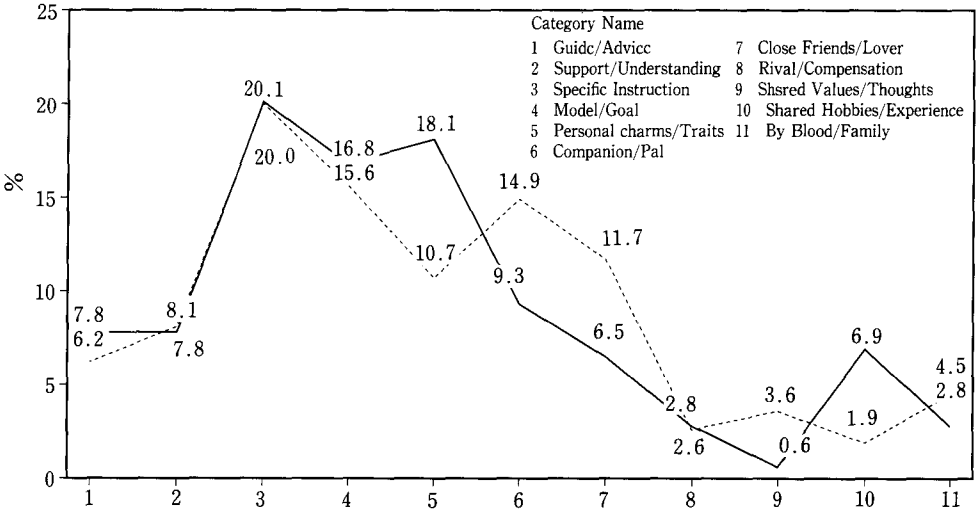

FIGURE 5 Reasons For Naming People As Important

to bring the reasons into awareness. High percentages for Code No. 6.(Companion/ Pal), 7 (Close Friends/Lover), and 10 (Shared Hobbies/Experience) may imply that the subjects 'treasure' their friends.

Item No.
—— Male (N=50) ····· Female (N=50)
FIGURE 6 Mentor Traits: Item 1-15

Item No.
—— Male (N=50) ····· Female (N=50)
FIGURE 7 Mentor Traits: Item 16-30

B. Study 2. For the convenience of data analysis. 50 male and 50 female subjects were selected by eliminating the incomplete and/or widely biased responses of the VIP ratings. Fig. 6~9 shows the results of calculation of mean on each item for both sexes of the subjects. From the figures it appears that attitudes towards other people

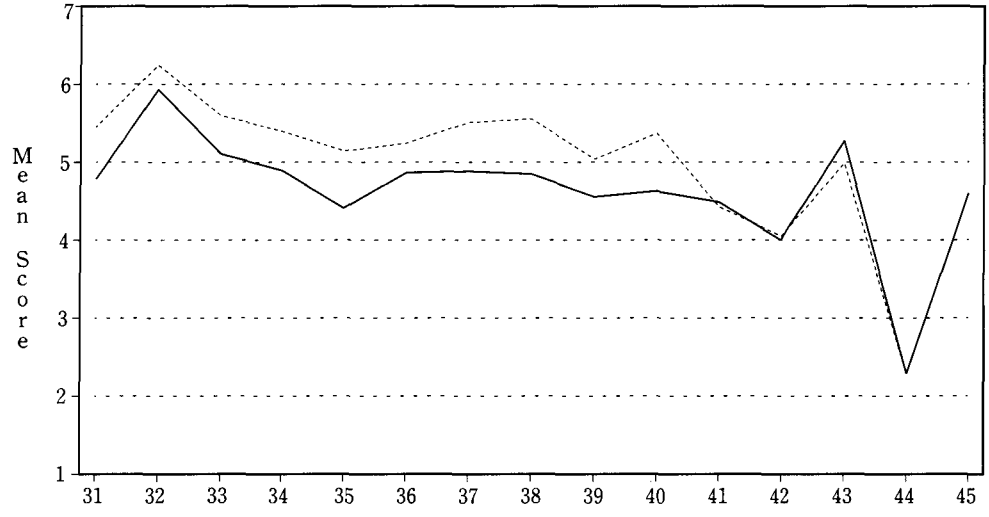

FIGURE 8 Mentor Traits: Item 31-45

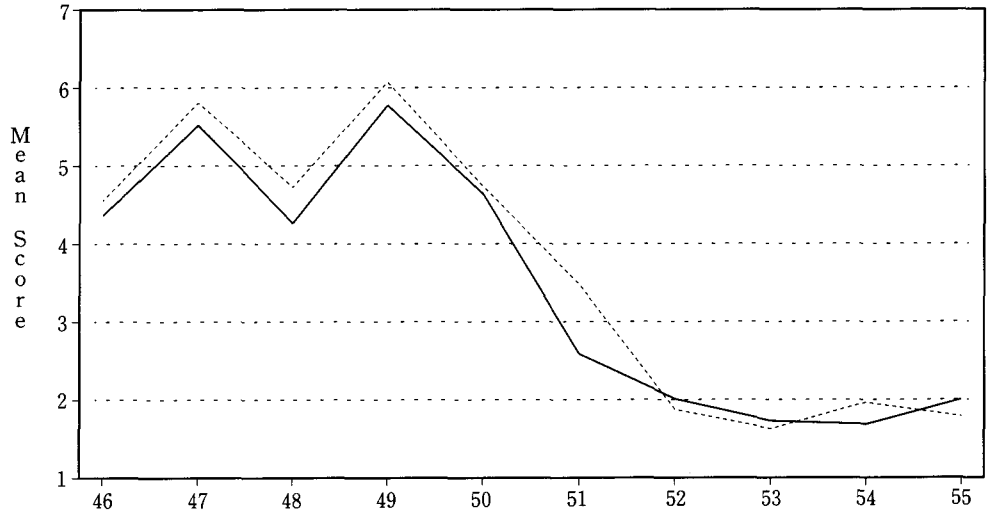

FIGURE 9 Mentor Traits: Item 46-55

reflected in the items such as 'Impartial' (Item No. 49), 'Considerate' (No. 47). 'Listen to faithfully' (No. 32) are important attributes of mentors or excellent teachers (hereafter, 'mentor' will be used for representing both). Personal traits such as 'Having own firm ideals' and 'Having things to engage in' are also regarded as essential attributes of mentors. These results may be taken as a reflection of what the subjects wish for or idealize as basic aspects of mentors. The results may also be based on their real experience they have come into contact with mentor type of the teachers.

The results on Item No. 41~45 are rather discrepant from what we anticiated. In particular, the mean scale score on Item 44 ('Well-known') was unexpectedly low. On Items 33 to 40, female subjects gave higher scores, which may imply that they expect more 'closeness' of mentors than the male subjects.

For years in the past, the present author has collected short reports on 'Classroom Activity in Memory and Unforgettable Teachers' from college students. The total number of the report is well over 500 hundreds. Statistical analysis has not done yet, but what the students describe in the report is really intriguing and suggestive for examining the role of mentors. As an example of teachers who stay vivid for long in heart of students, a report brought by a female student will be introduced below.

> My elementary school was a small one in a rural village and the number of children in our grade was only seven in all. Our music teacher would greet us at the door of the music room before every class. And it was a kind of his habit to say something briefly to each of us, shaking hands. It was one of our pleasures at the time and I used to wash my hands before the music lesson or I thought over what the teacher would say to me this time.
>
> When we were second graders, we learned the song, 'Yuyake Koyake' (which may be translated into 'Evening Glow, Sunset Blaze'). After we somehow learned, the teacher said to us, "There are various sounds in this song, you know. Tell me how many." We talked each other and identified the sounds of a 'Temple Bell', 'Craw Cry', 'Footsteps of Children Coming Home' in the first piece. From the second, we took out the sounds of 'Children's Footsteps', 'Shines of Bright Moon', 'Dreams of Birds', and 'Twinkles of Stars'.
>
> Then the teacher said to us, "Let's try to make these sounds using the music instruments and record it on a tape with the song you sing." What a wonderful thing it is to record a song we sing! This made us so pleased and excited. And it was a real joy to play the instruments-particularly the percussion instruments. Then we started to examine all the sounds, one by one, talking each other, "What shall we do for making this sound."
>
> Because there was a temple nearby our school and many craws were around us, the sounds of 'Temple Bell' and 'Craw Cry' were to be recorded on a tape by the teacher. The sounds of 'Footsteps of Children', 'Shines of Bright Moon', 'Dreams of Birds', and 'Twinkles of Stars' were decided to be made by the instruments, and the task of choosing the instruments was left to our care.
>
> We proposed ideas each other and got excited with the discussion on which instrument we should use to make each of the sounds. We discussed over and over, and being accompanied by the piano our teacher played we tested how the sounds on

the instruments we chose match with the sounds we wanted. And finally, all the sounds came to be in tune with the instruments.

During the long course for us to reach to the end, our teacher never tried to intervene in our discussion and kept watching queitly the process

Consequently, we decided to use a 'mokugyo' (a wood block) for the sound of 'Footsteps of Children' (beating softer as the footsteps gradually get away), a triangle for the sounds of 'Dreams of Birds', a big drum for 'Shines of Bright Moon' (keeping beating it all long while we sing the song, because the moon is supposed to be shining all at night). The sounds of the 'Twinkles of Stars' were decided to be made by small bells in that several children use them in order to give the impression that many stars are twinkling.

In the next class, the teacher brought the tape on which he recorded the sounds of the 'Temple Bell' and 'Craw Cry', and at last we came to play all the things.

As for the allocation of the instruments, one child took the part of the 'mokugyo' ('Footsteps of Children'), the other one was for a triangle, and the third child was for a big drum. The remaining four took the role of playing small bells. While we sang the song all together, each of us made the sound by the given instruments on each turn. I was assigned for the sounds of twinkling stars, so I shaked my bell when we sang the part, "In the sky, twinkle, twinkle, silver stars." And after we had rehearsals twice, we recorded our play on a tape.

Upon completing the recording, we listened again to it all together. When it came to the end, our teacher clapped hands. Being allurred, we clapped hands too, with vociferous cheers in unison. The joy at the time is never forgettable. And the teacher said to us, "This is your own 'Yuyake Koyake', which is never found in other place in the would."

Later the teacher made cpies of the tape and gave one to each of us. Still now, when I hear the song, I feel myself very excited, feeling as if I am hearing the sounds in the class, and the excitment when we listened to the tape wells up in my heart.

we, seven in number,,,eight with our teacher, do have our own 'Evening Glow, Sunset Blaze', only one in the world, which no one else

Reading this short report for the first time, it was almost hard to believe for the present author that there is (was) really such a wonderful teacher who can make the students so engaged in their learning. From the story, the readers may easily imagine that the students are enjoying discussion friendly and serious as well. And behind the scene, we could see the teacher's kind eyes looking at them warmly. Children try to exercise their wisdom in order to find the ways for appropriate musical instruments to represent 'Twinking Stars', 'Shining Moom' and 'Dreams of Birds'.

Initially this report was brought woth no title. If one wants to give it a title, 'Sounds of Dreams of Birds' might be appropriate. This brief story tells us much about the basic characteristics of mentors such as 'warmth', 'dedicatedness', 'respectfulness', 'psychological closeness', etc. By conducting systematic content analysis of all the reports collected, a more comprehensive picture will be obtained on mentors.

5. Summary and Conclusion

In order to apply more direct probes into 'significant others' (VIPs) and conce-

ptual framework on 'mentors' for comtemporary Japanese college students, two questinnaire surveys were conducted. It was found that peers at secondary school levels are most frequently named as VIPs, and that one of the most frequent reason for the naming is the associates' 'Supportive and Understanding' attitude towards the subject. Secondary school teachers are also often referred to as VIPs because they taught many things and played the roles of 'Models or Goals in Life' for the students.

By using a semantic differential type of analysis on mentors, it was revealed that 'Impartial', 'Considerate', and 'Listen to faithfully' are mentioned as the most important and relevant characteristics of the mentors. These results provide facts, but it is important to note that the results are not necessarily the true objective picture of 'Mentors'. Two studies reported here left us several interesting findings and lessons. Among the tasks for our future study is to continue our pursuit by paying more careful attention to the key words under consideration and by employing multiphasic and intensive approach.

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