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Title	Creative Learning for the Empowerment of the Self among Ainu People: Development and Practice of "Simulation Game, Project PAL" as Problem-posing Learning [Abstract]
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Description	この資料は次の博士論文の英文要旨。北海道大学教育学院（教育学専攻）平成31年3月25日学位授与 甲第13622号 「アイヌ民族の人々の主体形成につながる創造的学習：課題提起学習としての” Simulation Game, Project PAL” の開発と実践」
Issue Date	2019-10-24
Doc URL	https://hdl.handle.net/2115/75892
Rights(URL)	https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/
Type	journal article
File Information	1015 Abstract Project PAL Nanako Iwasa.pdf



Creative Learning for the Empowerment of the Self among Ainu People: Development and Practice of “Simulation Game, Project PAL” as Problem-posing Learning

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Abstract

This study aims to: 1) focus on the social and psychological dualities of the Ainu in the present; 2) develop a new way of learning in accordance with the trends of indigenous education in overseas, which helps to liberate Ainu people from their psychological duality; and 3) examine the significance of the learning. For attaining these purposes, this study used an educational frame called “problem-posing education,” which is based on the concepts of “conscientization” and “dialogue” advanced by Freire. Using this frame, the study developed a simulation game that has a future-oriented tendency and enables Ainu people to envision their future well-being themselves. Through the practice of the game, the study also examined the concept and function of conscientization in the liberation of Ainu people from psychological duality.

Currently, most of indigenous people are members of an indigenous society, and at the same time, members of a nation-state. Therefore, indigenous people have lived under “duality,” overlapped with two societies, and been historically, politically, and socially influenced by the mainstream society to which they belong. Like other indigenous people in the world, assimilation of the Ainu into mainstream society has continued from the past. Under such inclusive conditions, “the Law for the Promotion of the Ainu Culture” was promulgated and “the Hokkaido Former Aborigines Protection Law” was simultaneously abolished in 1997. However, the long-term negation of existence or forced invisibility of Ainu people, as the term “former aborigine” implies, has made Ainu people internalize the negation of the Ainu; a view that originated from “other-recognition” of non-Ainu people. This reversed self-recognition created a psychological duality for Ainu people. Because of this inner psychological duality, Ainu people still struggle with the self-contradiction and self-acceptance in their self-identification. Since the Diet unanimously passed “a resolution that recognizes the Ainu as indigenous people of Japan” in 2008, Ainu people have been able to regain their new self-recognition as “the Ainu, indigenous people of Japan” and their self-dignity. However, even after ten years since the resolution, both Japanese and Ainu societies have not yet clarified the social status of the indigenous people and its significance in Japanese society. The recognition/definition of “indigenous people” is also unclear to the Ainu. In Japan, the discipline or educational field of “indigenous education,” which many other countries already have, has not been established, and the educational programs leading to conscientization for Ainu people to liberate themselves from their psychological duality have not been developed yet.

The first chapter of this study elucidates the social and psychological duality in the Ainu, the relations of the dualities, and the factors of self-contradiction of Ainu people that emerged from the dual relations. Above all, it shows the meaning of the new experiences of Ainu people who overcome their psychological duality.

In the second chapter, the study analyzes the meanings of the new experience using Freire’s perspective of liberation from oppression. It mentions the necessities of conscientization thorough dialogue in a problem-posing learning and of new learning activities that make the invisible “indigenous knowledge and systems” visible by “codification.” The analysis indicated the following two necessities of: 1) a new learning activity in which Ainu people can use their “Glocal-viewpoints,” which enable them to stand with other indigenous people and reflect their current situation and problems from a global viewpoints, and 2) new local learning activities with the process of “indigenization” for conscientization that enables the invisible Ainu “indigenous knowledge and systems” to be visualized on their own and a new problem-posing learning with dialogue by Freire.

In the third chapter, in order to carry out the new problem-posing learning developed in the second chapter, the study developed a simulation game to create an educational simulated place for Ainu people to feel safe and secure preventing historical and social influence on the place. The game was based on the “SECI Model,” which deals with the knowledge conversion between tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge, and used Simulation & Gaming as one of the game learning methods. This game also consisted of a collaborative learning method using dialogue. The study first created “Simulation Game, Project PAL” as a frame game, and then made “Project PAL: Hawaii” (hereinafter “PAL: Hawaii”) as a version game with Native Hawaiian collaborators in Hawaii.

In the fourth chapter, the study shows the practice of “PAL: Hawaii” by Ainu students of Urespa Club. From their experiences of playing the game, the Ainu students and the author made the Ainu version game renamed “PAL: Ainumosir” (hereinafter “PAL: Ainu”). While customizing the Ainu version of the game, the students made “Codification 1,” which posed their own Ainu indigenous knowledge and systems and their current problems on their own. After the Ainu students practiced the “PAL: Ainu,” they had the opportunity for “decoding” of “PAL: Hawaii” and “PAL: Ainu” through a mutual exchange learning via Skype with other indigenous people. The study discussed the experiences of the Ainu students, who were the players of “PAL: Hawaii” and the developers of “PAL: Ainu,” and confirmed their evaluations on them.

In the fifth chapter, “PAL learnings” as the new problem-posing learning had the five results mentioned below through two learnings, that is, “PAL learning” and the mutual exchange learning: 1) In “PAL: Hawaii,” the Ainu perspectives of the Ainu students of recognitions moved from local to global ones. They learned about another indigenous culture, the Native Hawaiians, and their problems, and experienced a method of the problem-solving through the simulation game; 2) While customizing for “PAL: Ainu,” the Ainu students objectified their own Ainu culture and current problems that reflected from their experiences of the practice of “PAL: Hawaii” and made the game materials for the Ainu version game, “PAL: Ainu”; 3) During the mutual exchange learning via Skype, other indigenous people in a foreign land, in this case Hawaii, had the “decoding” of the results of “PAL: Hawaii” through the dialogue; 4) When the Ainu students practiced “PAL: Ainu,” their learning experiences provided a new perspective of their Ainu culture and a new solution of their current issues through a “travel” (moving) of perspective; 5) From the two PAL learnings, conscientization, which objectified “self” and “other” through dialogue, developed among the Ainu students. The learnings also provided the opportunity for the Ainu students to reflect on their “selves” as indigenous people by recognizing other indigenous people as the new “other” through dialogue.

In conclusion, the results of this study indicated that, “PAL learning” as a new type of problem-posing learning provided the Ainu people with “Glocal-viewpoints,” a simulated change in perspective which recognized the Ainu self. The Ainu people’s new learning experience “de-framing” led to the liberation from existing relations of “self and society” in Japanese society. They also indicated that “Codification 1” used for customizing “PAL: Ainu” provided the Ainu people conscientization that enabled their internal dialogue, which makes their own indigenous knowledge and systems visible, and a new learning experience of “re-framing” that led to a new awareness through the learning process of “indigenization.” In addition, by analyzing the results of the games, which tried to solve the current issues of Ainu people by using their own cultural values as indigenous knowledge and systems, a new “code” was created: The “Codification 2” was formed from knowledge systems of both mainstream and indigenous societies that were unified in a transformative development.

From the above analysis, it can be concluded that “PAL learning” enabled the Ainu learners to practice codification through their internal reflections and to practice decoding through dialogue with other indigenous people overseas. Through these dialogues, this study gained a new insight: as the Ainu learners simultaneously experience the “re-framing” by the conscientization of their own culture and the “de-framing” of the perspectives that recognizes the self, they could encounter a new conscientization that will liberate them from their psychological duality.