

Visiting Gunma University: Some Lessons and Impressions of Visiting Prof. Nishitani

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Introduction

As part of my JICA's training during the periods of October 13th 2004 to January 8th 2005 is training at Gunma University, given by Prof. Izumi Nishitani of the Department of Mathematics Education, the Faculty of Education. This training is as a result our discussion during Prof. Nishitani's stay in Indonesia a few months ago, as a short term JICA's expert. I stayed at Maebashi city from October 26th to November 6th 2004. During this period, I have followed some activities managed by Prof. Nishitani.

This paper will report about my activities and my personal impressions about this training, including academic and personal experiences. It will cover the campus activities, school visiting and observations, and social experiences that I got during my stay at Gunma University or Maebashi city.

First Impression about Gunma University

For the first time, I arrived at Gunma University accompanied by Mrs. Mariko Takagi from the JICE office. When I entered the university complex, I found the campus is so quiet, not so many students seen around it. Only a few people that I can see then. However, I found that the campus environment is very good with many trees grow inside and around it, so make the air is so fresh.

When Mrs. Takagi asked to someone at the faculty administration office, then Prof. Nishitani come and pick us up to his office. After some talk, Prof. Nishitani introduced me to some lecturers, including Dr. Itoh, whom I already know from his visit to my university about two or three years ago. Then I was shown the room where I can use for my work. It was so impressive for me, because it is a large enough room with some facilities inside it, including air conditioner, fan, telephone, shelter, water sink and tap,



Figure 1. The Main Entrance of Faculty of Education

sofa, and of course working table and chair. The sun's shine can enter

the room during the day because the window faces to sun's direction. However, the room was looked a little bit dirty with dust above the table and on the floor. I thought this room has not been used for a while, so I tried to make to room cleaner and more comfortable to stay. Then I removed the dust above the table with tissue papers I brought, because I didn't find any brush.

Despite this situation, I was happy because Prof. Nishitani said that I could use the telephone for making a local or inter-local call but not international call. In addition, Prof. Nishitani is very kind to lend me his notebook. I was also very happy because I can access the Internet through the room using the notebook.

During the next days, my activities include attending Prof. Nishitani's classes, attending his students' seminars, giving my speech, and attending lecturer/teacher's seminar. Prof. Nishitani gave me so many respects considering me not as his trainee but his visitor. During his busy times, he always come to my room asking if there is problem with me or when we should go to the class or other place.

Some Lessons from Attending Academic Activities



Figure 2. Prof. Nishitani with his students



Figure 3. Posing with the fourth year students

Attending some Prof. Nishitani's academic activities, I get some lessons and impressions. My first impression is about Math Seminar. I thought it is a big seminar followed by many people as seminar in my university. In fact, it was students seminar followed by two master students, where one of them is a high school mathematics teacher. I was very impressed that the teacher can make so good report and clear and systematic analysis about his research on students understanding in trigonometry.

On the following week seminar there were three students, each presented a well-prepared topic. One student discussed about optional mathematics in schools. From her I learn about the role of optional mathematics as: (1) subject study, (2) work, (3) experiment, (4) search, (5) supplement, and (6) expansive study. In my perception, optional mathematics itself is actually contains 'problem solving' in Japanese's school. Another topic discussed is about arithmetic at elementary school. I was surprised that in Japan the name of mathematics lesson at elementary school is 'arithmetic' rather than 'mathematics'. I also learn the role of arithmetic activities in Japanese's school. Another discussion is about comparison between mathematics education in Japan and in Indonesia. I got surprised about the Japanese students' attitude toward mathematics. Despite the well known high achievement on international survey (by TIMSS 1999 Japanese is fifth rank), it is said that about 70 percent of Japanese high students does not understand mathematics and about 50 percent Japanese high school students dislike mathematics. This fact is surprising me.

On other days, I attended Prof. Nishitani's lectures on third and fourth year classes. I was very impressed with the fourth year students. They are able to develop some computer programs for school mathematics using Visual Basic. Some programs are very interesting. Each student has a laptop for developing his/her program. This situation is very advanced compared to my students, where they are not so skilled in programming although they have facilitated with

computer labs and given some lectures on computer programming. Here, I found that the students are looked seriously learn and always do assignment though they are seemed relax. This fact is also found when I attend other lectures, "Teaching Methodology", where each student gave his/her ideas orally on each time as assigned by Prof. Nishitani. In the class they looked very relax attending the lecture but they are seemed very seriously preparing and doing their assignments. I was told by Prof. Nishitani, that by giving such assignments he learns much from the students' ideas. I would like to implement this experience to my class when I go back to Indonesia.

I am very lucky that Prof. Nishitani gave me a chance to give my speech on his classes and on the research meeting. Although I did not have good preparation, just talk about Indonesian mathematics education, this was an invaluable chance where I could introduce about Indonesian education system and mathematics education in my department. Unfortunately, there was no discussion time due to limited time and I could not speak Japanese so Prof. Nishitani always translated what I talked.



Figure 4. Discussion forum on Research Meeting

I learn much more about academic life from the discussion forum. As seen on Figure 4, although this (weekly?) meeting is conducted in informal way, all participants attend and

participate actively. The presenters also prepared their problem well, in written paper so all members can read and give their comments. This academic atmosphere is, to may opinion, very good and very conducive to develop constructive ideas and scientific communication among all researchers, staff, teachers, and students. I hope this model can be adopted to my institution.

Some Lessons from Visiting Schools



Figure 5. Observing class activity



Figure 6. A teacher is explaining a math topic

Prof. Nishitani has managed and arranged my schedule to visit schools. Thanks to him for his sincere and kindness to drive me to everywhere, including visited schools and visited very interesting places at Mount/Lake Haruna and Mount Akagi with very nice scenes along the way to get there. During my stay with him, we visited two schools; once visited a Junior High School at Kiryu to attend teachers meeting and twice observed classes at the Kiryu Junior High School and Shibukawa Senior High School.

Among some lessons that I found during school visits are:

1. Japanese teachers always make lesson plans before they teach and they discuss the lesson preparation with their colleagues and a supervisor from university. This is a good practice to have well-prepared lesson and it reflect the teacher's professional as educator.
2. Schools students use uniform during their school time.
3. Some schools, like Shibukawa Senior High School, are only for male students.
4. Some schools, like the Junior High School at Kiryu, separate a class during certain subject, such mathematics, into two groups and they are taught by different teachers. These groups are based on student's ability on the subject taught.
5. The Shibukawa Senior High School has a very modern computer lab where teacher can monitor what students do during the lesson or examination using the teacher's monitor.
6. School atmosphere is very quiet and there is no student play outside class during lesson time.
7. Schools have very appropriate facilities to support discipline; there are lockers for keeping students, teachers, and visitors shoes when they want to enter the school's rooms; there are students' locker for keeping their bags or books.
8. Students do not hesitate to ask questions when they do not understand about what teacher explain or assign to them.

Closing

Although this visit is not long, only two weeks or ten effective days, it has provided me with some meaningful academic, educational, and social experiences that are very useful to me as a way to improve my professional. I hope that these experiences can be shared with my colleagues, including teachers in Indonesia. Ultimately, this should be useful to improve Indonesian education, or particularly mathematics education.

Regarding the relationship between teacher/lecturer and student, here I find that students are very respectful to their teachers/lecturers. I was very impressed how students always help to bring teaching tools such as computer or projector, without to be asked. I also find that students always say hello when they meet their teacher/lecturer.

Finally, I would like to thank Prof. Nishitani for his kindness accepting me and giving me such invaluable experiences. I would also like to thank all Prof. Nishitani's students and their friends, especially Hayashi-san, Shinmasu-san, Hagimaru-san, and Inagaki-san. They have accompanied me very kindly to see the University Festival.

I hope that this relationship will not end here, but will continue in the form of partnership between Gunma University and my university. At least in the form of student exchange to provide our students other experiences to enrich their sight as candidate of educators to make better education on each country.



Figure 7. At University Festival



Figure 8. At mount Akagi