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How Can We Create a Culture to Help Investigate and Prevent Recurrence of Serious Accidents to Children? A Threefold Approach from the Citizen’s, Specialist’s, and Academic Perspectives

SUMITOMO  Tsuyoshi

This paper examines how to create a culture that supports the investigation of serious accidents involving children and the prevention of recurrences, in light of my personal experience with responses to such accidents or incidents at schools, especially fact-finding investigations, formulation of preventive measures, and support for the victims’ families. It is particularly concerned with three aspects: the citizen’s, specialist’s, and academic perspectives.

First, I introduce several case studies of citizens seeking to have a serious accident investigated and to ensure that the memory of the tragedy is passed on. These include the study group initiative after the Toga River flood disaster in Kobe in 2008, issues affecting investigative work by bereaved families and others after school accidents and incidents, and recommendations for positive action made to education authorities, including the Ministry of Education.

The Toga River disaster has been investigated from the standpoints of civil engineering, geology, and disaster prevention. Here, however, I point out the possibility of doing further investigative work from the viewpoints of accident prevention and the usual practices of the After school care program whose pupils drowned on an outing and I note the need to study cases in which children die in natural disasters in terms of both the natural phenomenon itself and actuality of our daily lives.

Further, I discuss four points: (1) the unseen issues that can be present in investigative work by specialists, depending on the viewpoint they adopt; (2) the fact that such issues can often be identified by citizens; (3) the fact that in past cases of school accidents and incidents, the victims’ families have consistently raised issues in the investigations by specialists and administrators; (4) the recent ongoing debate as to how investigative work should be conducted collaboratively by citizens, specialists, and administrators.

Two points are raised for further study: (1) in discussing how these three should collaborate, there is a need to examine how communication by dialogue and important concepts such as accountability can be made to work; (2) in studying such issues, we need to think about ensuring that the memory of
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serious accidents is passed on not merely in terms of administrative measures and school practice, but in terms of creating the necessary culture, including a reexamination of our priorities in organizing everyday life and issues involving our value systems.