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An Unwitting Basis for Elementary School Science Education in Japan

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Abstract

As a rule, science teachers' outlook on education is firm enough not to be changed easily mainly because they are inclined to assume their cultural tradition to be their outlook. In Japan, for example, in student teaching, which is a hidden teacher training system, student teachers are introduced to such Japanese traditional ideas as, “俱学俱進 (Teachers should continue their study together with their students).” At the same time “科学する心 (Mind and heart for Science)” is also emphasized. Although this may appear strange, it is not difficult to find a similarity with Japanized Buddhism. We trace the similarity back to the philosophy of Dr. Kunihiro HASHIDA (1882-1945). He was the pioneer of physiology in Japan and left some writings on Buddhism. He developed his own idea for training science teachers on the basis of his deep understanding of Buddhism. Hashida regarded the method for training science teachers in the same light as that for training Japanized Buddhist disciples. Even in the present time, science teachers, in particular, elementary science teachers, are under the considerable influence of Buddhism. This presentation begins by introducing you to a legendary elementary science instruction scene which focuses on “electromagnetics” instructed by an expert teacher, Fujio HIRAMATSU, at the Attached Elementary School of Tsukuba University, regarded as a mecca of practical elementary school education in Japan. The video analysis illustrates how the social learning environment of Hiramatsu's science classroom is shaped strongly by his Buddhist perspective.