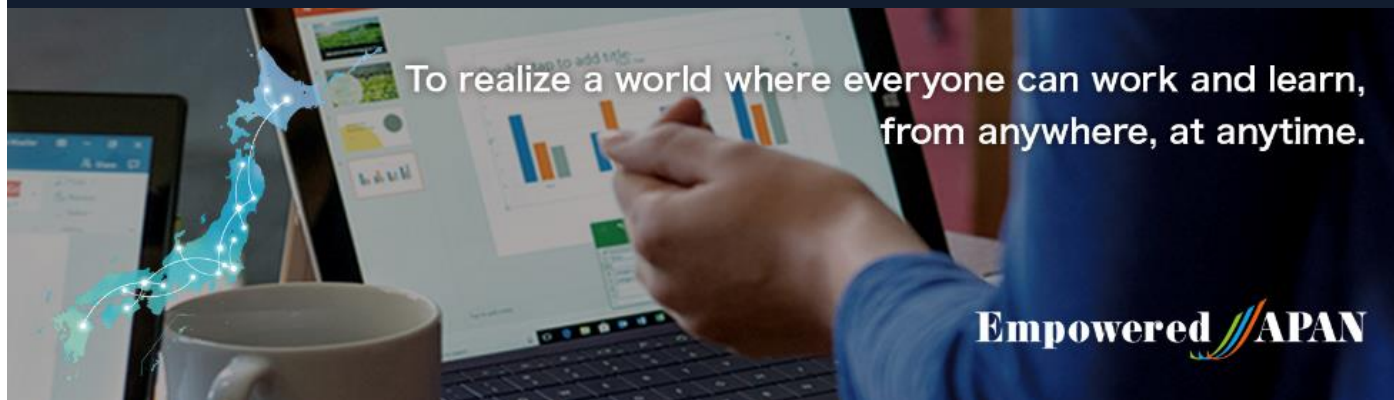


Empowered JAPAN Webinar Report



Empowered JAPAN Executive Steering Committee was established in 2018, "To realize a world where everyone can work and learn, from anywhere, at anytime." To promote the true value of workstyle innovation including telework, the committee has been coordinating symposiums in both Tokyo and regional cities. And in collaboration with various local governments, Microsoft, and partners, the committee has been serving as an advisor to provide telework training for both corporate and individuals. In response to the spread of infection of corona virus (COVID-19) and the government announcement on February 25, 2020, which included the request to citizens to telework, the steering committee made the decision to launch a series of free webinars starting from March 17, 2020, to provide practical information for individuals and organizations across the nation, to telework and/or practice online education.

Category : Contents for government, healthcare, and educational institutions.

Date : April, 4, 2020

Speaker : Shota Koike

Teacher, Elementary School Attached to Faculty of Education, Chiba University
Director, Committee for ICT Utilization Education and School ICT Implementation



Currently enrolled in the Doctoral Program at the Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Chiba University. Holds a Master's Degree in Education. Assumed his current position after working as a Full-Time Instructor at Ritsumeikan Primary School. In the 2019 academic year, is promoting information education in the school from the perspective of a "quasi-specialized teacher in 'Living Environment Studies' and 'Integrated Studies.'" Microsoft Teams was implemented for all school children due to the temporary closure. Held repeated practice trials to enable children to learn by connecting with each other online.

Learning Lifeline Made Possible by Teams - During the Mass School Closures -

Many educational institutions in Japan have decided to shut down from the beginning of April until the end of the holiday week in early May. With the focus now shifting to Internet-based remote learning, a variety of new issues have come to light. Not all homes have Internet access, and there are significant gaps among households in terms of ownership of devices like personal computers, iPads, and so on. This poses a challenge for applying IT in public education settings, where fairness is a top priority. However, the measures taken at the Elementary School Attached to Faculty of Education, Chiba University are one example of how such issues can be addressed.

On Thursday, February 27, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe issued a request for schools across Japan to close. In response, the Elementary School Attached to Faculty of Education, Chiba University closed on Monday, March 2. Students instead studied from home for two to three weeks: sixth graders, until the Graduation Ceremony on March 19; and first to fifth graders, until the Closing Ceremony on March 24. During this period, students were able to communicate with teachers and each other by using the groupware called Teams.

Part of the rationale behind using Teams is the idea that "the school's role is not only providing classes and facilitating learning, but also ensuring communication between students and teachers, and among students themselves" (Koike). Let's look at an example of using Teams as a "lifeline for interpersonal relationships," which are an essential part of learning environments.

At the Affiliated Elementary School, Koike took the lead in promoting the use of Teams during the closure. By 10:00 AM on February 28, he had created Teams accounts for all of the approximately 650 students; and at 1:00 PM on the same day, he explained how to use the platform with a 15-minute video workshop given to the entire school. As of one week after the school closed, 80 percent of students had signed into the Teams account. The remaining 20 percent were able to sign into their accounts with help from their homeroom teachers over the phone.

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During the closure, the original assignments teachers posted on the school's website served as the foundation of the home-based learning. The school's affiliation with the University's Faculty of Education means it is a research school as well, so stakeholders are accustomed to new efforts and ideas. The school was able to use that to its advantage in the current emergency situation.

In each household, students engaged with their studies by displaying schoolwork posted to the school's website on their computers or smartphones, printing the work out, and so on. Students then took photos of the printouts they studied and shared the images on Teams, and wrote reflections on the content they had learned. Proceeding with methods that were easier for each grade to work with facilitated a new kind of communication between the students and teachers, and among the students themselves.

"First and second graders shared photos of themselves holding up their printouts, while third and fourth graders tended to share videos of themselves, in the style of popular young Youtubers. Students in grade four and up also exchanged many more text messages. Fifth and sixth graders shared pictures of themselves helping cook meals, videos of themselves playing the piano, and things like that as well" (Koike).

Rather than taking a top-down approach to instruction, teachers acted more as facilitators, helping students learn from their failures to draw out ideas and create new forms of learning.

"One thing we learned from using Teams for our morning class is that when we sing songs together, things quickly descend into chaos. But that failure changed to success as the students learned how to effectively use the 'mute' button for their microphones. We also discussed whether it would be a good idea to record the sixth graders' graduation ceremony and show it to the other grades, or livestream the ceremony" (Koike).

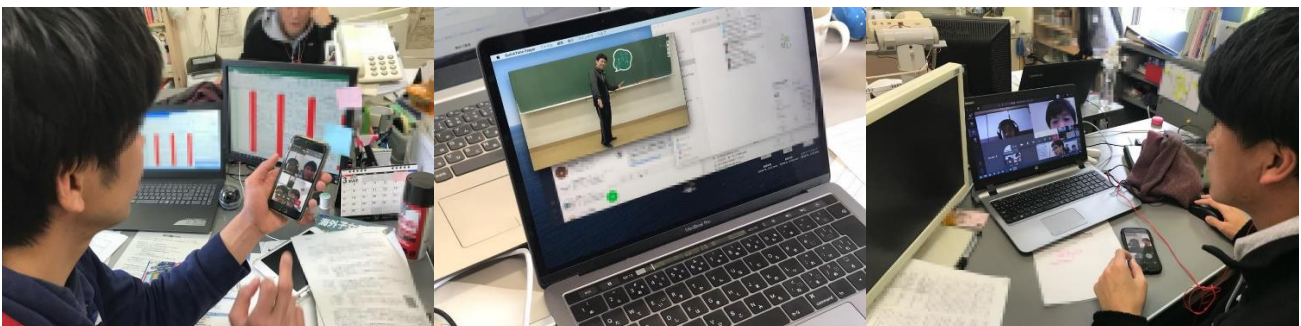
Learning which takes advantage of online tools seems to foster independence in children, where if they make a mistake, they work together with teachers to think of solutions. Apparently, some students started a "tele-lunch," where they used Teams to share photos they took of the lunches they were eating at home.

Of his school, Koike says that "we're not necessarily highly advanced in implementing ICT," explaining that it was only a few years ago that the school "started adopting technology little by little." First, in March of 2016, the school introduced 45 iPads, with a single access point provided for each grade. In July of 2018, 45 Windows 10 computers were added. One year later, the school purchased an additional 35 iPads, and also installed ceiling-hung projectors in each classroom.

Despite lacking advanced equipment and infrastructure, in 2019, the school started using computers in one lesson each week for students in the second and higher grades. Meanwhile, teachers began experimenting with Teams for writing business trip reports. QR codes were added to printouts sent to parents, which were published on the web as well. Thus starting from what could be done at that time, rather than aiming for perfection from the outset, was a useful way to introduce Teams—and other online tools as well—in a classroom setting.

From Koike's report, the children's home-based studies using Teams could be called a recreation of the kind of work environment they will experience when they enter society as adults. For students, engaging in remote learning side-by-side with their parents—many of whom are themselves taking their first shot at telecommuting—is good practice for the future.

Koike says that "the understanding and support of parents" was essential. The school hopes to cooperate with stakeholders and parents to continue to support these efforts so that the children, who will be joining the workforce in another ten or twenty years, will already be accustomed to "an era where learning is integrated with daily life," says Koike.



※From the official Facebook page of Elementary School Attached to Elementary School Attached to Faculty of Education, Chiba University

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