From Daily Life Writing to Wordplay:
*On the Emergence of Fantasy Poetry Practices in Japan during the 1970s**

Masayuki Watanabe
Faculty of Letters & Education
Ochanomizu University

Abstract: *The purpose of this paper is to historically elucidate the process by which the methods of "wordplay" emerged in Japanese educational practices during the 1970s, and to revisit the value of "Wordplay" methods. This paper reviews the features of wordplay and Fantasy poetry practices by focusing on a primary school teacher Eiichi Murata (1935–2012), who is also a prominent theorist of New Left education in Japan. The author historically analyzes Murata's shift from Daily Life Writing to Wordplay throughout the 1960s and the 1970s. First, the author explores the background to Murata's defection from the approach of Daily Life Writing and adoption of the Surrealist poetry approach in the 1960s. Second, the author analyzes features of Murata's wordplay practices in the 1970s. Third, the author examines Murata's focus and expectations on children's individuality expressed in wordplay practices. The author found that the transition in Murata's educational practice represents the process by which a single teacher sought to reconnect with children's individuality while resisting societal change. The author concludes that Murata's wordplay practices prompt us to reconsider the rationale for education in consumer society.*

Keywords: *Wordplay, Writing Education, Fantasy poetry, Individuality, 1970s*

This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number 25K06269, 24K22758.

1. Introduction

1.1 Research backgrounds

The 1960s and 1970s in Japan marked a period of transition during the era of high economic growth, when people experienced dramatic changes in their living environment. During the high economic growth period, heavy chemical industrialization and urbanization advanced rapidly, while rural areas experienced significant depopulation. The high economic growth period was a time of profound upheaval in Japanese society, often referred to as a "Life Revolution" *(Seikatsu-Kakumei)* [1].

During the same period, education also underwent significant changes. Simultaneously, it has become common for children to attend and graduate school to secure employment. The "schooling society" that had been constructed since the 1930s was fully established during this period [2]. Children were positioned from workers to students. Furthermore, children were subjected to intense competition, often referred to as the "examination war" (*Jyuken Sensou*), leading to a stressful school life.

Amidst these societal changes, Japanese educational practices and movements also underwent a significant transformation during the high economic growth period. Postwar educational practices and movements in Japan have historically maintained an oppositional stance toward the conservative policies of the Japanese government (mainly led by the Liberal Democratic Party [LDP]) and the Ministry of Education. These educational practices and movements have undergone significant changes in their objectives and methods due to economic growth. Among these, the shift away from Daily Life Writing education (*Seikatsu Tsuzurikata Kyouiku*) that was a mainstream educational practice and movements until the 1950s, represents a significant change. Yasuteru Okudaira noted that the method of Daily Life Writing suffered a setback in the 1960s [3]. Originally, the method of Daily Life Writing was adopted as an approach to composition in Japanese language education. Drawing on experiences from their everyday lives (such as poverty under feudalism), the children wrote compositions to encourage discussion among themselves, thereby serving as a Guidance (*Seikatsu Shidou*) while developing their language skills. Daily Life Writing became obsolete due to the improvements in living conditions brought about by high economic growth and the effects of depopulation and urbanization. For these reasons, the practice of Daily Life Writing in Japanese educational practice and movements suffered a setback, and the focus shifted toward the systematic teaching of subject knowledge during the 1960s and early 1970s.

However, resisting this prevailing shift in education, some teachers have continued to recognize the potential of children's writing, seeking new educational goals and methods distinct from the systematic teaching of subject knowledge. These teachers initially struggled with their attempts at Daily Life Writing. Still, from that point, they introduced methods of fantasy poetry and steered their course toward imagination education, which children's individuality emerges in the classroom. Teachers who engaged in wordplay inspired by fantasy poetry techniques in the 1970s criticized the tendency of education to focus on imparting knowledge. They attempted to create new educational methods and meanings centered on children using their imaginations.

1.2 Purpose of this research

This study aimed to historically elucidate the process by which the methods of "wordplay" emerged in Japanese educational practice during the 1970s. By analyzing the emergence of wordplay methods, we can clarify how imagination education has emerged in Japanese educational practices.

Therefore, this study focuses on Eiichi Murata (1935–2012), a prominent theorist of New Left education in Japan, who was also a primary school teacher in Kawasaki City, Kanagawa Prefecture, located in a major coastal industrial zone in East Japan. Initially, Murata engaged in educational practices based on Daily Life Writing. Having overcome the limitations of Daily Life Writing, he began to incorporate Surrealist poetic methods into his fantasy poetry practice. In the 1970s, Murata begun to refer to his approach in fantasy poetry as "Wordplay" (*Kotoba Asobi*) and emphasized the meaning of "play" (*Asobi*) in schools. By analyzing the emergence of "wordplay" in his educational practice, we can reveal one possible trajectory within the history of Japanese education that diverged from the mainstream educational movement focused on subject knowledge instruction.

Murata was born in Yokohama City, Kanagawa Prefecture, and took up his post at Kawasaki Municipal Fujisaki Primary School, situated in the coastal industrial zone, in 1958. In 1971, he was transferred to the Kawasaki Municipal Mukogaoka Primary School, situated in a newly developed residential area. After retiring in 1980, he became an educational commentator with a keen interest in Freinet education and the children's circus in Benposta, Spain. Murata was involved in the New Left movement in the late 1950s as a teacher and theorist. From the 1970s onwards, as a teacher, he proposed his own unique educational practices and theories. Murata passed away at the age of 76 in 2012. Murata is also considered to be a representative teacher of postwar education in Japan [4].

Previous studies highlighted the importance of writing in Japanese educational practice, focusing on the role of Daily Life Writing. In particular, the Japanese method of writing about daily life has been debated as being unique to Japan [5]. It has also been introduced within the lineage of child-centered education, which dates back to the Second World War [6]. However, as Okudaira noted earlier, the economic growth of the 1960s led to frustration among many teachers who had been engaged in various approaches to Daily Life Writing. Following the 1970s, except for organized efforts in certain areas, such as Ena in Gifu Prefecture, the practice of Daily Life Writing in Japan gradually declined.

In contrast, teaching poetry and composition using children's imaginations, akin to wordplay, has been addressed in the context of Japanese language education since the 1980s. Tadahiko Inagaki and Manabu Sato, who were prominent educational researchers, collaborated with poets such as Tanikawa Shuntaro, to conduct classroom research on poetry education [7]. Beyond this, during the 1980s, educational journals featured special sections on wordplay, indicating that it had attracted some attention in Japanese language education.

Murata pioneered the wordplay long before it attracted attention in the 1980s. In 1978, Tanikawa and his colleagues visited Murata's classroom and engaged with his students to practically examine their text "Japanese" (*Nihongo*), which they had structured around

"wordplay", as previously mentioned. Murata conducted trial lessons using this text. Before being noted by educational researchers and magazines, Murata was actively engaged in wordplay. Furthermore, Masafumi Nishiguchi analyzed Murata's wordplay [8]. In this study, Nishiguchi noted that Murata's wordplay and Gianni Rodari's "The Grammar of Fantasy", which greatly influenced early childhood education in Reggio Emilia, share common ground in terms of their underlying philosophy. However, Nishiguchi did not analyze the process by which wordplay emerged in Murata's educational practice.

For these reasons, Murata's wordplay practice occupied a significant position in demonstrating the emergence of imagination education within Japanese language education. Furthermore, examining Murata's shift from Daily Life Writing to wordplay during the 1960s and the 1970s elucidates the "missing link" in postwar Japanese writing education.

2. From Daily Life Writing to Surrealism Poetry: Writing as social reformism

2.1 Murata's Daily Life Writing approach

In April 1958, Murata took up his post as a newly appointed teacher at the Kawasaki Municipal Fujisaki Primary School, located in the coastal industrial zone. When Murata first assumed his post, he employed the Daily Life Writing method, having children compose essays about life in a nearby factory district. Murata titled his first classroom newsletter "The Child of Factory Smoke" (*Kemuri no Ko*). This indicates that Murata was aware of daily life in the factory district. In the first issue of this classroom newsletter, Murata likened energetic children to factory smoke that stretched into the vast sky.

Murata worked with children living in a factory district by employing a Daily Life Writing method. For example, Murata had children interview their working fathers and write essays about them. Gaining an understanding of the specific forms of labor serves an important function in the practice of Daily Life Writing. For instance, one girl wrote about her father's work in a steelwork factory, the atmosphere at his workplace, and how he became irritable after night shifts. At her father's workplace, mechanization had advanced, and staffing levels had been reduced, making it difficult for workers to take time off. In the scene in which the father scolds his daughter after a night shift, the writing captures the depth of his fatigue; despite being worn out, he often manages only two hours of daytime sleep. Using her father's factory labor as a writing theme, Murata aimed to understand the nature of working conditions through the factory's working and staffing arrangements. Through this, Murata is attempting to help children understand the concrete reality of "labor" in the factory district.

However, by the early 1960s, Murata abandoned writing about daily life. He found himself increasingly constrained by the approach of Daily Life Writing. The reasons for this included the transformation of the children's lives in the factory district and the gradual disappearance of "labor" from their lives. Parents gradually steered their children toward white-collar careers rather than following their fathers' footsteps into factory labor. Murata critically viewed this tendency among parents as "home ownership" (*Mai-home Shugi*). Children ceased aspiring for life and labor in industrial estates outside school. The depiction of life in industrial districts through writing about daily life had become less welcome.

2.2 Background of adopting the Surrealist poetry approach

Thereafter, he progressively shifted toward encouraging children to write poetry by actively incorporating Surrealist poetic methods. The first classroom poetry anthology, compiled in his sixth-year class in 1964, was titled "Heaven" (*Tengoku*). The class anthology published immediately before this was titled "The Chimney" (*Entotsu*). This symbolizes Murata's shift toward prioritizing fantasy poetry. In fact, the poetry anthology "Heaven" contains poems by children that expand upon unrealistic fantasies and imagery. New children's poetry reveals a shift in emphasis from realistically depicting daily life to expanding the imagination.

What brought about Murata's transformation? Murata acknowledged that the quality of the essays the children had written had changed. Murata emphasized the importance of children developing their imagination through writing compositions. Murata believed that having children write Surrealist poetry offers the advantage of freeing their consciousness from the constraints of everyday life. Murata outlined his intentions in the afterword of the classroom poetry anthology "Heaven":

> Furthermore, I wish to nurture an awareness that we are free from both time and space, not bound forever and ever to the "reality" of being in Year 6, at Fujisaki Primary School. In other words, it is about cultivating an awareness that is not bound by the "daily life that has become habit," and at the same time, it is about freeing oneself from "language" as habit. [Omitted] In that case, I believe it means constructing fresh imagery by considering new ways of using and combining everyday language. [9]

Murata understood that employing surrealist poetic methods to encourage children to expand their imagination created opportunities for them to become "free" from their daily lives. Imagination is expected to liberate children from the constraints of real life and transform their perspectives on reality.

Murata was concerned that the children's imaginations would weaken. Therefore, he hoped that children would greatly expand their imagination through poetry. However, nurturing imagination has the potential to reshape society, extending beyond the framework of language education. Murata assessed that Surrealist poetry could reshape real society:

> In the complex mechanisms of contemporary society, does keen intuition, reasoning, or imagination not be required to probe the invisible causes behind a surface phenomenon or grasp its connections to other phenomena?
> Those who lack such power are dominated by "daily life" and, I would argue, lack the "capacity" to transform it. [10]

Murata pointed out the importance of using imagination to perceive the unseen matter that lies behind visible phenomena. Murata stated that unless we understand the invisible world (the unconscious world referred to by surrealism), we cannot transform the world of conscious awareness. He expected that the "unseen world" accessible through the ex-

ercise of imagination via surrealist poetry would enrich and redefine the meaning of everyday life. Indeed, the Surrealist movement that emerged in Europe also harbored expectations of social revolution. Murata, as a New Left teacher, introduced surrealism's socially transformative perspective into his classroom.

The background to Murata's adoption of surrealist poetic methods lay in his engagement with a contemporary movement known as "Subjective Children's Poetry Movement" (*Shutaiteki Jidoushi Undo*), a series of fantasy poetry initiatives. This movement highlighted the limitations of conventional, realism-focused Daily Life Writing. This movement sought to penetrate children's unconscious and subconscious worlds using the surrealist approach.

Thus, Murata's inclination toward Surrealist poetry, while valuing imagination, carried a distinct social reformist connotation. Murata interpreted the concept of "unconscious" in Surrealism as a form of social reformation originating from the classroom. In this respect, for Murata, Daily Life Writing and Surrealist poetry were similar in that they aimed for social reform. At this stage, the expansion of imagination stemming from children's own delight and enjoyment, as seen in the wordplay practices of the 1970s, was not particularly foregrounded.

3. Development into "Wordplay" (*Kotoba Asobi*)

In the 1970s, Murata continued to employ the methods of Surrealist poetry that he had been developing since the 1960s; however, he gradually distanced himself from his social reform aspirations. By the 1970s, Murata had deliberately begun to refer to his approach in fantasy poetry as "Wordplay" (*Kotoba Asobi*). By playing with words in lessons, Murata endeavored to inspire children's imaginations. Murata's emphasis on "play" stemmed from his approach to language: rather than viewing it as something to be taught unilaterally, he sought to frame it as something children could actively enjoy.

3.1 The expression of children's individuality through imagination

What did Murata prioritize in working on wordplay? Murata was endeavoring to harness children's linguistic experiences through "playing" with words. By emphasizing spoken language as a precursor to written language, Murata sought to highlight children's lived and linguistic experiences, drawing on their individuality.

Murata defined literacy as the ability to read and write characters. He acknowledged the importance of acquiring literacy in school education. However, he emphasizes that before children begin writing, attention must be given to cultivating the richness of the world of "spoken language" (*Hanashi Kotoba*), as follows:

> I believe that there is a need to provide children with a richer world of language during the transitional period before they enter the realm of literacy, the world of written language. Put plainly, I believe it is necessary to play with words. [11]

Murata stated that, during the transitional period from spoken to written language, it is necessary to engage with a rich world of language distinct from literacy. Murata argued

that it is necessary to "play" with words to experience the richness of language. During the transitional period from spoken to written language, Murata positioned "play" as the optimal method for children to engage with the world of living language.

This emphasis on Murata's "wordplay" stems from a fundamental critique of contemporary Japanese language education and textbooks. He criticized the fact that the first lesson in Japanese for first-year primary school students begins not with letters and words, but abruptly with written sentences [12]. He criticized the practice of teaching first-year primary school students to write sentences from the outset, arguing that it treats Japanese solely as a "useful tool". "Wordplay" meant emphasizing the spoken aspect rather than the written language. It was intended to help pupils become more familiar with the language at the earliest stages of Japanese language education in primary schools.

Language lessons reveal children's experiences with life and language outside schools. This also indicates that the children's differences tend to become apparent. However, in Japanese language education, which is centered on written language, such differences among children tend to be judged along an ability-versus-inability axis. Murata sought to create a space where children's differences could be reinterpreted as their "individuality" through "wordplay"—an activity that finds active meaning in spoken language.

3.2 Creating stories from names

Murata adopted two main approaches as "wordplay." One approach involves creating poems and stories from children's names, while another is the approach of "Dépaysement," which combines two disparate words. Murata stated that these approaches were influenced by Surrealism and Lewis Carroll's "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland."

There were several types of poems. For example, one method placed the first character of one's name or a friend's name at the beginning (e.g., mu/ra/ta/e/i/chi), and wrote a sentence starting with those characters. In addition, there were examples in which words were found within names and then linked together (e.g., mura/ei/itachi).

Numerous poems based on the children's names or those of their friends can be found in Murata's classroom newsletters and anthologies. For example, in the class newsletter "Kono Yubi Tomare", which was composed by Murata in 1978, the following girl's poem titled "*Raion*" [Lion] was included:

Raion [Lion]
Mura no mori niha [In the village forest]
Raion ga ite [There is a lion]
Tai wo itsumo tabete ite [And he always eats sea breams]
Ebi mo tabete ite [Also he eats shrimps]
Itachi mo tabe [He also also eats weasels]
Itsumo onaka wo ippaini shite [He is always well-fed]
Chiitaato asonde imashita [And playing with a cheetah] [13]

Each sentence begins with Murata's name (mu/ra/ta/e/i/i/chi). The girl composed this poem by using teacher's name for whom she felt affection for. Murata observed that first-

year students developed an affection for each character of their own or a friend's name. He expected that connecting images evoked by words that held particular significance for children would stimulate their imaginations. Using children's names and those of friends as starting points, the aim was to generate imagery from words and then elevate that imagery into poetry.

3.3 Connecting words to see the invisible world

Murata frequently employed the approach of "Dépaysement," which involves combining two words. This approach begins with the children listing several words. Then connecting them as "A is B." This approach involves linking two unrelated words, allowing children to expand their imaginations from sentences and compose poems. Murata stated that the "A is B" type of riddle (which he called metaphors) provides children with the enjoyment of solving puzzles. As Murata stated, "To connect two words or things that appear unrelated at first glance, you must use your imagination to forge a new relationship between them" [14]. Murata hoped that children would acquire new imagery through the imaginative act of linking two unrelated words. He was inspired by the method of "Dépaysement" produced by André Breton, a French poet who founded Surrealism.

Murata sometimes interpreted the children's poems, combining two words as containing a critique of daily life, reading into them a sense of "black humour." For example, Murata discerned a satire of modern life, where people are enslaved by time, in a poem written by a fourth-grade student entitled "Birds are clocks" [15]. Murata emphasized allowing children's imaginations to flourish, unbound by the meanings of words or contexts.

3.4 Sharing poems through classroom newsletters

In Murata's wordplay, it is important to understand not only the the poem's content, but also how it was shared. Classroom-newsletters (*Gakkyuu-Tuushin*) played an important role in Murata's educational practices. He filled his classroom newsletters with students' poems and writings, as well as the views and opinions that he wished to share with the students. He sometimes printed parents' views and opinions in his classroom newsletters to share their reactions with the students' writings. In Murata's educational practices, parents also participated in the learning community.

The following is an example of parents' reactions to their children's poems [16]. In November 1978, Murata's wordplay lessons were broadcast on NHK television. Famous poet Tanikawa and his colleagues visited this lesson because Murata conducted trial lessons using the text "Japanese" (*Nihongo*), which they composed. After their visit, Murata filled his classroom newsletters with children's poems composed during the lesson. The parents responded to these poems after watching a TV program featuring Murata's lessons on wordplay lesson. Murata shared parents' impressions of the poems and lessons in his classroom newsletters. After sharing children's poems and their parents' impressions, Murata sharpened his thoughts on children's imagination by writing poems during language lessons. He emphasized the importance of unleashing children's imaginations and enjoying fantasy stories in language learning.

Wordplay poems were shared not only by the children but also by their parents. The

poems featured in classroom newsletters also broadened the circle of wordplay among parents. In this respect, classroom newsletters played an important role in extending the community of imagination constructed through wordplay to parents. By sharing wordplay poems, he cultivated dialogues with children, parents, and Murata himself.

4. Envisioning new education through Wordplay: Exploring children's individuality

As indicated above, Murata's approach, which prioritizes children's imagination, is evident in his wordplay. However, Murata does not situate wordplay within the context of Japanese language education. Wordplay was expected not only to help children acquire language skills but also to rediscover and nurture their individuality. Through wordplay, Murata seeks to create a new educational space in which children's individuality can flourish.

4.1 Overcoming management and training in education through play

Murata sought to shift from socially reformist surrealist poetry toward "wordplay", emphasizing the expression of children's individuality through imagination. A direct factor in this shift was Murata's departure from the New Left movement, which became more radical and violent in the early 1970s. Moving away from political activities, Murata focused on examining children and education within the classroom microcosm.

When Murata introduced wordplay in the 1970s, it was not about reforming macro-level politics and society but rather about introducing a perspective that sought to overcome power relations at the micro-level, such as in classrooms and schools. Murata aimed to transcend educational management by deliberately incorporating "play" into classrooms and lessons. By transcending the power dynamics within the classroom microcosm through "play," Murata sought to create a new educational space where children could learn freely and express their individuality.

The National Course of Study was simultaneously revised in the late 1950s and the late 1960s. In particular, the 1960s revision reflected the "modernization of educational content," placing greater emphasis on teaching subject knowledge in science and mathematics. Teachers were forced to confront the necessity of imparting vast amounts of subject knowledge to children (later referred to as "dropouts" (*Ochikobore*), which became a social problem in the late 1960s and the early 1970s). Competitive entrance examinations escalated during the 1960s, and throughout the 1970s, competition within education remained a significant social problem.

Under these circumstances, Murata consistently criticized the classroom as a space in which children were managed, trained, and compelled to study by teachers. Murata believed that it was problematic for teachers to determine teaching content and methods unilaterally, resulting in a managed space in which children merely had to comply. Murata stated the need to transform educational spaces as follows:

> Therefore, I now wish to pursue the starting point for challenging the "official pricing" that shackles education by conceiving a "black market" (*Yami Ichi*) directly linked to children's "lives" and "needs". [17]

Murata criticizes the fact that textbooks and mainstream educational movements were structured solely around "what teachers wish to teach", and that managing and training children for the sake of teaching was taken for granted. Murata sought to transform the space of management into a "black market" −an underground space−by taking children's interests and concerns as the starting point. The emphasis on everyday spoken language that children were accustomed to using in wordplay stemmed from the expectation that it would transcend the world of textbook-style written language —that is, the world of educational management. In other words, Murata aimed to bring out children's individuality by countering teacher-centered educational content and management through children's "play."

4.2 The quest for individuality within a consumer society

Murata also felt a crisis arising from the loss of children's individuality in consumer society. In the consumer society devoid of individuality, it was also hoped that "wordplay" would bring children's individuality to the fore.

For Murata, the early 1970s marked a significant turning point. At this time, not only did he leave the New Left movement, but Murata's transfer also overlapped as well. In 1971, Murata moved from Fujisaki Primary School, located in the coastal industrial zone, to Mukougaoka Primary School in a newly developed residential area along the Odakyu railway, a leading private railway in Japan. Children in areas where factories still cast a heavy shadow over their daily life, on children in housing estates (*Danchi*) along private railway lines, whose parents were office workers. The changes Murata observed in children symbolized the transformation of Japanese society and economy, marked by the end of high economic growth led by secondary industries and the development of a consumer society.

Interestingly, whilst encountering children in the city's emerging residential areas, Murata began to use the term "a foundation of life" (*Seikatsudai*)—a concept he had once abandoned in the Daily Life Writing methods. For example, Murata criticized the mainstream educational movement since the 1960s, which shifted its focus to subject knowledge instruction, for having forgotten the perspective of "inquiring into the entirety of children's and teacher's own 'foundation of life'". [18]

The term "a foundation of life" was originally employed by children to re-examine their own lives by analyzing not only the visible poverty and work of their daily life but also the "invisible" aspects encompassing the local feudal system and socio-economic structure. Amidst rapid economic growth from the late 1950s onwards, many teachers engaged in Daily Life Writing found it increasingly difficult to identify shared experiences of poverty or local issues among their students. They abandoned inquiries into "a foundation of life" and shifted their focus to systematic teaching that prioritized subject knowledge.

With no common themes in children's lives and an anonymous existence within a consumer society, Murata believed that children's individuality would emerge through wordplay. Murata stated the following:

> Unlike Daily Life Writing once born from the serious conditions of rural life, children's lives have now become abstract entities akin to artificial gardens of the "urban" type. Through the efforts teachers undertook in response to the common practical or linguistic challenges raised at each juncture, the nature of children today was perhaps brought into sharp relief. [19]

The traditional concept of "a foundation of life" in Daily Life Writing, which explores socio-economic issues such as poverty, cannot be understood by children living in the city within a consumer society. Murata sought to uncover children's individuality within the anonymized lives of the consumer society using "practical or linguistic" challenges arising within the classroom as a starting point. Murata reinterpreted "the foundation of life" in consumer society as children's imagination and individuality expressed and exchanged in classrooms and language lessons. Murata did not follow the mainstream educational movements which focused on imparting knowledge; instead, he sought to revisit and develop children's individuality within consumer society through wordplay.

Wordplay is not intended merely as a place for children to learn words while enjoying them. By exchanging imaginations, the children were idealized as discovering each other's individuality and forming relationships, through which they learned from one another. Murata desired an educational space in which individuality could emerge through play.

5. Conclusion

This essay outlines the emergence of wordplay in Murata's Japanese language lessons during the1970s. It also examines the background and meaning of the adoption of wordplay in his educational practice. After abandoning the Daily Life Writing approach centered on the lives and labor of factory districts, Murata introduced the methods of Surrealist poetry. Subsequently, as the micro-power dynamics within the classroom were problematized, the approach shifted to exploring children's individuality through wordplay. As outlined above, the shift in Murata's educational practices represents the process by which a single teacher, amid rapid economic growth, sought to reconnect with children's individuality while resisting societal change.

Murata's challenges analyzed in this study offer several insights into today's educational frameworks. Murata's wordplay prompted us to reconsider the rationale behind education in consumer society. Education is often perceived in terms of a timeline. For example, the image of progressing in a straight line toward a certain goal, as exemplified by "Development" (*Hattatsu*). However, "play" is immediate, purposeless, and not described in terms of a straight timeline. In traditional schools, where a straight and irreversible timeline prevails, "play" was merely a minor role.

Under these circumstances, Murata saw potential in play and sought to transplant it into the center of education. Within the consumer society, Murata believed that the image of education should not be straight and linear but rather understood as encompassing "play". Murata deliberately employed "play" to conceptualize education not through the logic of time, but through the logic of space and relationships. A perspective closely resembling that of early childhood education in the Reggio Emilia, which was later introduced and

has become widespread in Japan, is already present here. In a consumer society where education cannot be perceived as a straight-line, “play” is indispensable for constructing an education that respects children's individuality. Murata's challenges have significant implications for modern education [20].

Educational practices that emphasized imagination began to emerge as an alternative to mainstream educational movements. Except for Minoru Satomi, educational researchers at the time failed to recognize the importance of such challenges. Murata's educational practice descriptions have been published and have gained considerable readership. Given the significance of Murata's educational practices, it is necessary to rewrite the history of imagination in education across postwar Japan.

Notes

*Part of this paper is based on my unpublished Master’s thesis submitted to the University of Tokyo in 2018, a presentation given to the History of Educational Thought Society conference in 2019 and a poster presentation given to the WALS conference in 2025.

References

[1] National Museum of Japanese History. (2010). *Koudo Keizai Seichou to Seikatsu Kakumei* [High Economic Growth and Life Revolution in Japan]. Yoshikawa Koubunkan (Japanese).

[2] Kimura defines “Schooling Society” as a society in which people accept schooling, and a society in which such schooling plays an essential role. This paper also draws upon Kimura’s concept. Kimura, H. (2017). Launch of the schooling society 1930s to 1950s. In Tsujimoto, M. & Yamasaki, Y. (eds.). *The history of Education in Japan (1600-2000)*. Routledge.

[3] Okudaira, Y. (2016). *Yamabiko Gakkou no Yukue* [Destination of Mountain-Echo School]. Gakujyutsu Shuppankai (Japanese).

[4] Sengo kyouiku-Jissen seminar Henshu Iinkai [Editorial Board of the seminar of educational practices in postwar] (eds.). (2019). *Sengo no Kyouiku-Jissenn, Kyoushi-tachi no Koe wo kiku* [Educational practices in postwar, Listening to the voice of pioneer]. Gakubunsha(Japanese).

[5] Patrick, N, S. (2020). The Significance of “Seikatsu Tsuzurikata” in a Global Age: Contextualizing an Educational Discourse of Liberation, “Intent Observations” and De-centering. *Educational Studies in Japan: International Yearbook*, 14.

[6] Kawaji, A. (2017). “Daily life writing in school: creating alternative textbooks and culture.” In Yamasaki, Y. & Kuno, H. (eds.). *Educational Progressivism, Cultural Encounters and Reform in Japan*. Routledge.

[7] Tanikawa, S. et al. (eds.). (1988). *Kodomo ga ikiru Kotoba ga ikiru Shi no Jyugyo* [Poetry Lessons of lively children and Words come to life]. Kokudo Sha (Japanese).; Tanikawa, S. et al. (eds.). (1989). *“Nihongo” no Jyugyo* [Lessons utilizing “Nihongo”]. Kokudo Sha (Japanese).

[8] Nishiguchi, M. (2004). Teachers’ Work as Spinning Meaning (4): Reality, Fantasy, and Playing Words. *Sugiyama Jyogakuen Daigaku Kenkyu Ronshu Shakai-kagaku hen* [The bulletin of the department of social science, Sugiyama Jyogakuen University], 35. (Japanese).

[9] Murata, E. (1964). Entotsu kara Tengoku he [From Chimney to Heaven]. In Fujisaki primary school Grade6 Class1 (eds.). *Tengoku* [Heaven]. [Unpublished] (Japanese), pp. 26-27.

[10] Ibid, p.26.

[11] Murata, E. (1980). *Zoku Kono Yubi Tomare* [Part.2 Gather in this finger], Shakaihyouronsha (Japanese), pp.55-57.
[12] Murata, E. (1977). *Tobenai Kyoushitu* [The non-flying classroom]. Tabata Shoten (Japanese), pp.118-119.
[13] Murata, E. (1979). *Kono Yubi Tomare* [Gather in this finger], Shakaihyouronsha (Japanese), p.267.
[14] Murata, *Zoku Kono Yubi Tomare,* p.113.
[15] Murata, E. (1980). *Kotoba no Bikkuri Bako* [A surprise box of words]. Sa E Ra Shobo. (Japanese).
[16] Murata, *Kono Yubi Tomare.*
[17] Murata, E. (1973). *Yami heno Ekkyou* [Cross-border to the underground]. Tabata Shoten (Japanese), p.437.
[18] Murata, E. (1974). <Seikatsudai> heno manazashi [Perspectives to <the foundation of life>]. Murata, E. (eds.). *Kyouiku Roudou Kenkyu* [Research in educational labor], 4, p.272.
[19] Murata, *Zoku Kono Yubi Tomare,* p.326.
[20] Moreover, in the critique of modern education since the 1990s, as seen in the work of Satoshi Yano, “play” has also come to be emphasized.