

Japanese School Bullying: Ijime

- A survey analysis and an intervention program in school –

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Differences between Ijime and bullying

Many literatures and discussions on bullying in the world are based on the findings by Olweus (1993). No one has doubt that he is the West's leading authority on bullying. Although there is similar situation in Japan, some scholars including me have different perspective from Olweus.¹ There are two of the most different points. First is "it is the younger and weaker students who reported being most exposed" and "a considerable part of the bullying was carried out by older students".² Second is "It is important to have an adequate number of adults outside together with the students during break periods, and that the school provide good supervision of the students' activities".³ I recognized that these points don't suit to the actual situation of Japanese bullying.

In Japan bullying study got started since Morita (1984) initiated his first survey research in the collaboration with other researchers. It was conducted at almost the same period as the survey by Olweus in Norway. While many are following Morita in Japan, they have gained similar result such as: victims in Japanese school are mostly bullied by peers in the classroom. It is surprising because the survey result was different from the findings mentioned above by Olweus.

In proceeding further research, we can gradually figure out differences in bullying style among countries. In latest comparative survey research among four countries the differences have become clearer. I am going to show one of those findings in Figure-1.⁴ We can notice a big difference between Japan and Norway. Japanese bullying mainly happens in the classroom and Norwegian bullying in the schoolyard.

It means that both older and younger students in Japan are bullied by contemporaries, and that the

¹ I have pointed it out in Taki (1996) and Taki (1997) that the results in Norway did not fit Japanese bullying and that the nature of bullying was different among countries.

² Olweus (1993), pp.15

³ Olweus (1993), pp.70

patrol in the schoolyard might not be effective in Japan. Two points mentioned above at least fit in Norway, but not in Japan. I also have to add that there are differences even among European countries.

In the opportunities to discuss with many foreign researchers for last several years, I proposed one diagram in [Figure-2](#), which indicates relation among concepts on bullying. I insist that the concept of bullying in the West is wider and more physical than that in Japan. Ijime (Japanese bullying) is similar not to bullying in the West, but to girl's bullying in the West. I want to discuss the character of Ijime in next section.

The character of Ijime

According to the survey results Japanese researcher often say “ Ijime can happen at any time, at any school and among any children”. It tells us that Ijime are not considered as specific behaviours conducted by the extraordinary children with problematic backgrounds, but as the one by ordinary children. We may say that there are a few cases done by children with specific individual backgrounds such as child abuse, dysfunctional family, aggressive temperature and so on. Rather, there exist many other cases in Japan that cannot be explained by such factors.

I have been involved in follow-up surveys of panel data twice a year since 1997. ⁵ The data provides the evidence that the notion above is true. [Figure-3](#) shows that typical Ijime such as isolating, ignoring, calling names occur constantly in spite of the number's change by one third students every year; the rate of children who bully frequently (more than once /week) keeps the percent from 7 to 9 percent. These rates may give you an impression as if the children with problem were approximately 8 percent of all children.

However, [Figure-4](#) indicates that such impression is wrong. It shows how many times children bully others at 6 survey points. We cannot identify a child who bullies others at every survey point. Only 0.6 percent of children bully others 5 times in 6 survey points. Most of them who bully others frequently do it only once in 6 survey points. We can conclude that there is not an extraordinary problematic child.

[Figure-5](#) also makes it clear that Ijime is not the problem caused by extraordinary children. It

⁴ Morita (eds.) (2001).

⁵ Samples are the approximately 5,500 children from 4th to 6th grade in 12 primary schools and from 1st to 3rd grade in 6 junior high schools in metropolitan area at every survey point.

The questionnaire is developed by NIER for the research on the relationships among Stress, Stressor and Bullying. It is called “RABBIT Test” and the part of total intervention plan called “RABBIT Plan” by NIER. (See Appendix-a.)

shows how many times children bully others at 6 survey points regardless of its frequency. Only one seventh of children have never bullied others for 3 years. Over half of children have bullied others more than 3 times at 6 survey points regardless of its frequency. It means one in two children join in bullying others at least once a year.

Here is another data that extraordinary victim with problems might be very few. There are only 0.2 percent of children who have been bullied frequently at every survey point. Only one fourth of children have never been bullied for 3 years. Over 40 percent of children have been bullied more than 3 times at 6 survey points regardless of its frequency.

I emphasize again that “ Ijime can happen at any time, at any school and among any children” and that “Girl’s bullying in the West can also happen at any time, at any school and among any children”.

The explanatory model including stress as an intermediary

Although many researchers tend to investigate causes of Ijime or bullying, it is hard to associate them with extraordinary children’s problem as shown above. Using a case study method, I can find many possible factors to explain the causes by relevant cases. Some are derived from conflicts among peers or against teachers. At the same time, others are from their frustration in family or school life.

It is too difficult to identify only one factor as a cause of bullying. Yet, it is very easy to find such factors as the cause of bullying even among ordinary children with no experience of bullying. Even if we can identify only one factor as a cause of a case, we can hardly conclude it as a common cause to cover other cases. It seems as if we were in a labyrinth.

I recognize that the difficulty to find the let-out is due to using a single causal model. Causes of incidents are sometimes complex or synergic with several factors. My hypothesis is that plural factors including stresses lead to bullying.

Taki (1992) and Taki (1996) focus on stress as the direct factor to explain Ijime (experience bullying others) by follow-up surveys of panel data. Taki (1998) points out a correlation among stressor, stress as an intermediary and bullying in another survey.

NIER (2001) also discovers the correlation among stressor, stress and bullying in a recent comparative study between Japan and Australia.⁶ Figure-6 shows the relation between four phases

⁶ The Japanese figures were used from the data in June 2000 of the survey mentioned above. The Australian survey was administered in June and December 2000 in the collaboration with Phillip Slee at Flinders University in Australia, using same questionnaire as RABBIT Test translated in English.

Samples were the approximately 2,500 children from 5th year to 10th in 4 primary schools, 7 secondary

of stress and the experiences of isolating, ignoring and calling names as a typical bullying behaviour. Four stress-scales such as physical, apathy, aggression and depression, are composed of the scores of the questionnaire items on twelve stress feelings shown in Table-1.

The figures indicate that stress is an important factor of Ijime and Australian bullying. I strongly emphasize that Japanese children who bully others suffer all phases of stress, not only aggressive but also physical, apathy and depression. There is a difference compared with Australian data. In Japan, Ijime cannot be explained only by aggression stress.

In Europe, bullying used to be considered as one of the aggressive behaviours conducted by the special children with aggressive temperature or culture and so on.⁷ Such hypothesis might be suitable to Australian bullying but not to Ijime. Strictly speaking, all phases of stress are the most important factors to explain Ijime.

Table-2 shows the correlation between four types of stressor and four phases of stress. Those stressor scales such as teacher, peer, study and family, are made up of the score of the questionnaire items on stressful experiences shown in Table-3. It indicates that "study" is the highest stressor in both Japan and Australia and that Japanese children feel higher stress from peer than Australian.⁸

How can we reduce Ijime in recent Japan?

As we saw above, the level of stressor affects the level of stress. Accordingly, the level of stress causes the frequency of Ijime. However, there is room for further discussion. Stress feeling might be influenced not only by stressful experiences, but also by the coping factors: opinions, tolerance and so on. If children are tolerant enough, they feel less stress against high stressful incidents. If children are able to manage their stress, they can reduce bullying others in spite of high stress.

Japanese children feel much stress by personal interactions with others, especially with peers. If children can develop their interactive ability with peers, Ijime and also other problematic behaviours can be reduced. NIER suggests the program in whole school involvement called *Japanese Peer Support Program (JPSP)*,⁹ to help children to develop those abilities.

JPSP consists of two parts. The first part is basic social skill training for children to encourage their motivation to interact with others. The second is the school activities for older children to help others. The activities in the second part are the main process to develop social ability for the children. The training in the first part is the preparation or warming up for the second part.

schools and 4 primary-secondary schools in Adelaide metropolitan area and the rural.

⁷ For example, Olweus (1993) shows this hypothesis.

⁸ These results imply that Ijime and violence in Japanese school should be conceived as not antisocial behaviour but as asocial behaviour.

JPSP is not aimed to change children by skill training only. We make it sure that the combination of a basic social skill training and activities in helping others are crucial for the children to gain “a sense of effectiveness: Jiko Yuyou Kan”. Although there are many styles of PEER SUPPORT in the world, we name our program as “Japanese program” because we focus on the Japanese style school activities in the second part.¹⁰

Japanese school have many traditional activities in helping others. Children used to get the sense of effectiveness through the activities. However, the recent problem is that teachers are not likely to manage and maintain such activities well. One of the reasons is that children have changed into less concerned with others.

I assume that lack of peer groups in communities leads to the change. Children cannot learn interactive way, nor develop their social skills through playing with peers. As a result, most of the children are reluctant to join the traditional activities voluntarily. Those activities are not working to develop social ability recently, so we find problematic behaviours more often than before.

To reduce recent problematic behaviours, JPSP developed to (1) patch the missing experience with peer group by so called social skill training as the first part, and (2) reconstruct Japanese traditional activities for children to get a sense of effectiveness well as the second part. Through two parts in complete, children can develop their motivation and ability to catch up with interactive relationships with others and step aside from problematic behaviours.

Conclusion

All developed countries have similar problems such as bullying. It is often mentioned that such problems have similar causes, and similar intervention can be effective in whole countries. However, Japanese Ijime is less physically violent than bullying in other countries like Australia, because of different culture and tradition.

Although the stress model in my study can be applied to Australian children, the most affective phase of stress differs. The correlations between phases of stress and types of stressor are also different. It means that the effective intervention should be different. I am sure that the idea of JPSP is more available in Asian countries with collectivism tradition than with individualism tradition in European countries. I need to make it clear what I intend by this expression “a sense of

⁹ JPSP is also a part of RABBIT plan by NIER.as “RABBIT Program”. (See Appendix-a)

¹⁰ Though JPSP is inspired by Peer Support (Counselling) in Canada and Australia, we do not develop it as Peer Supporter (Counsellor) system against bullying like in Great Britain We develop it for the children to gain “the sense of effectiveness” because JPSP is also inspired by Japanese tradition of group work activity. Taki (2000) and Taki (2001) show the details.

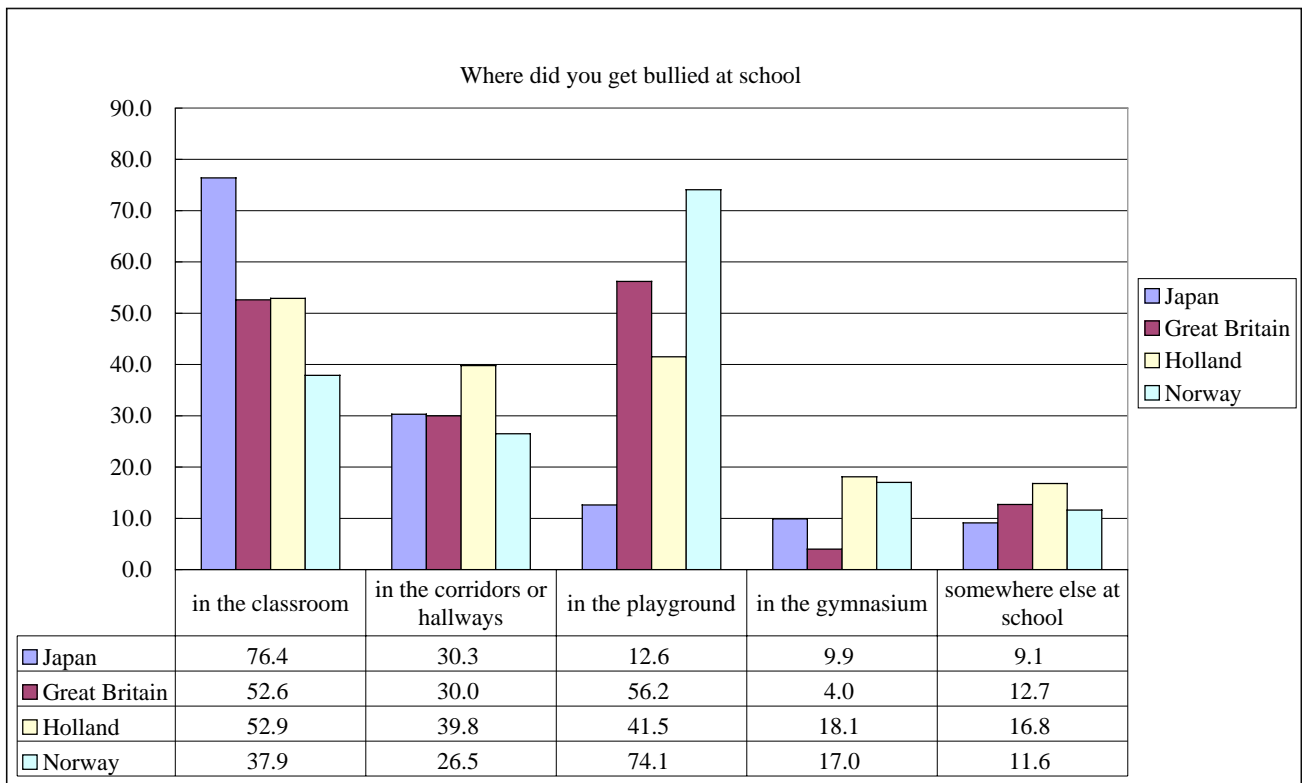
effectiveness that children gain reflects on the way how society acquire its peace”.

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Figures & Tables

Figure-1: The rate of places where students got bullied at school.



Where did you get bullied at school in the second term? (For this question, circle ONE OR MORE letters)

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 I was not bullied at school in the second term | 2 in the classroom |
| 3 in the corridors or hallways | 4 in the playground |
| 5 in the gymnasium | 6 in the locker room |
| 7 in an out-of-lesson time club (this maybe CORE 2) | 8 behind the school building |
| 9 in the toilet | 10 somewhere else at school, please write below |

[from Morita eds.(2001)]

Figure- 2 : The relation among many different concepts on bullying.

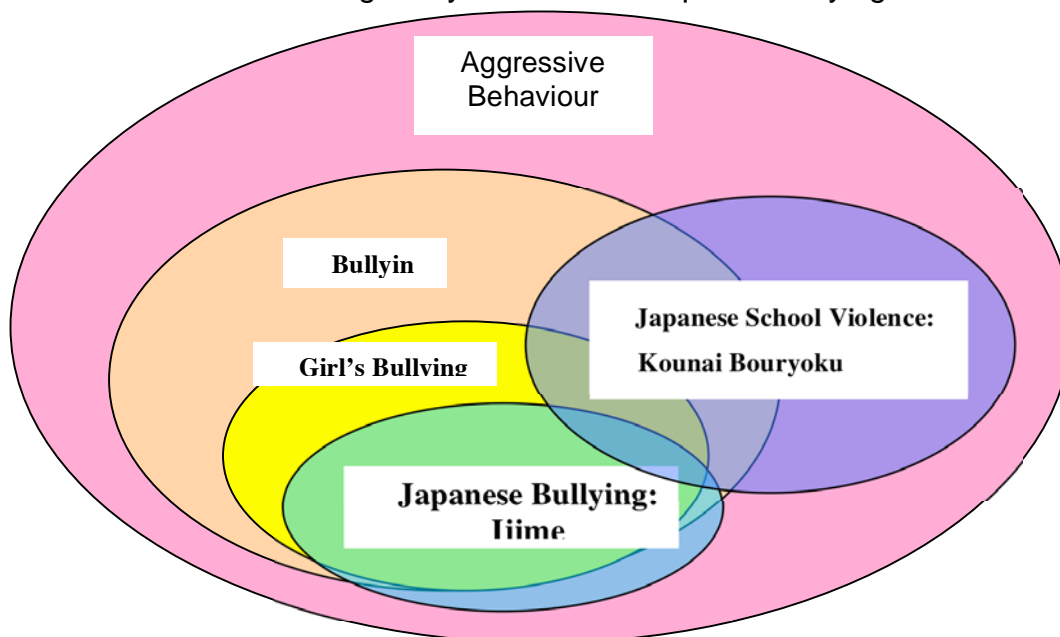
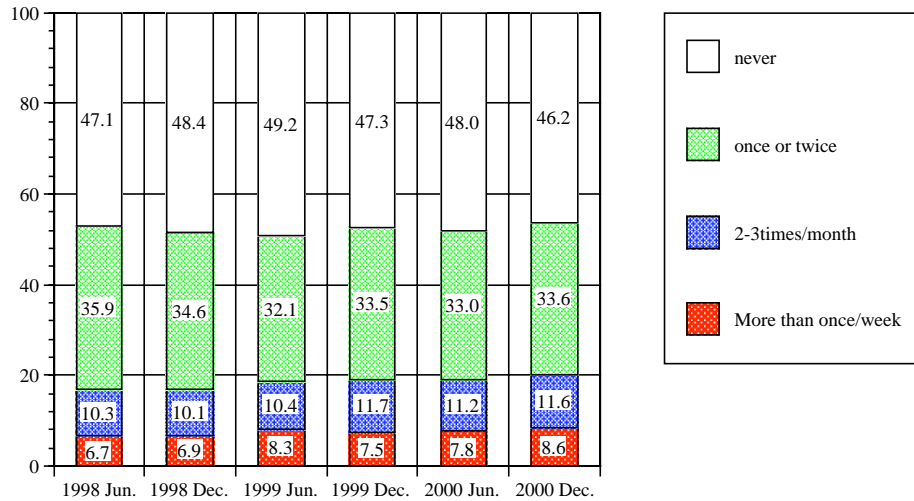
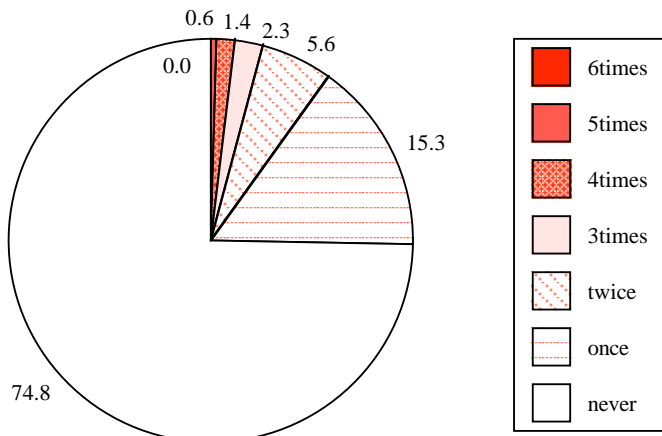


Figure-3 : The experience rate of isolating, ignoring, calling names (junior high school)



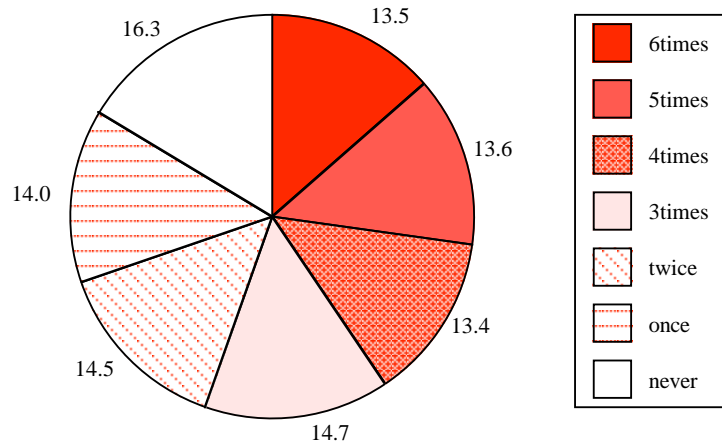
[from NIER(2001)]

Figure-4 : The repeat times of isolating, ignoring, calling names (more than once /week) at 6 survey points (the cohort of Junior high school grade 1 in 1998)



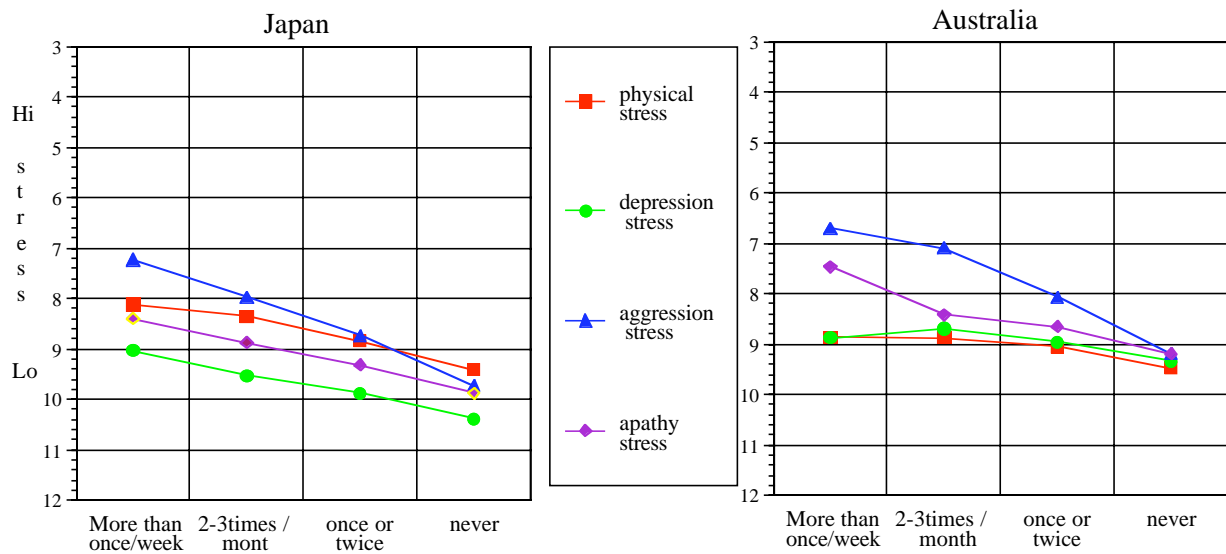
[from NIER(2001)]

Figure- 5 : The repeat times of isolating, ignoring, calling names (more than once or twice in each term) at 6 survey points (the cohort of Junior high school grade 1 in 1998)



[from NIER(2001)]

Figure-6: The level of stress by the frequencies of isolating, ignoring and calling names



[from NIER(2001)]

Table-1: Four stress-scales and the questionnaire items

Phase of stress	Items (each is scored from 1 to 4)
physical stress	I feel sick and tired
	I get sick a lot
	I get headaches
depression stress	I get depressed
	I worry about things
	I feel very lonely
aggression stress	I get irritated easily
	I get angry easily
	I feel like shouting at others
apathy stress	I don't have much energy
	I don't feel interested in things
	I can't concentrate on studying

[from NIER(2001)]

Table-2: The correlation coefficients between stress and stressor

Japan	stressor teacher	stressor peer	stressor study	stressor family
physical stress	2742 p=0.000	0.3259 p=0.000	0.4042 p=0.000	0.3458 p=0.000
depression stress	0.2994 p=0.000	0.4214 p=0.000	0.3969 p=0.000	0.3678 p=0.000
aggression stress	0.3239 p=0.000	0.4358 p=0.000	0.4000 p=0.000	0.3962 p=0.000
apathy stress	0.3238 p=0.000	0.3751 p=0.000	0.5639 p=0.000	0.4198 p=0.000
Australia	stressor teacher	stressor peer	stressor study	stressor family
physical stress	0.1619 p=0.000	0.1914 p=0.000	0.3074 p=0.000	0.2607 p=0.000
depression stress	0.0667 p=0.000	0.3630 p=0.000	0.3196 p=0.000	0.3131 p=0.000
aggression stress	0.2474 p=0.000	0.3329 p=0.000	0.3433 p=0.000	0.2920 p=0.000
apathy stress	0.2485 p=0.000	0.1990 p=0.000	0.4569 p=0.000	0.2391 p=0.000

[from NIER(2001)]

Table-3: Four stressor-scales and the questionnaire items

Type of stressor	Items (each is scored from 1 to 4)
stressor teacher	Teachers tell me off without listening to me
	Teachers don't treat me fairly
	Teachers take a personal interest in me
stressor peer	Classmates put me down because of the way I look
	Classmates put me down because of my school marks
	Classmates call me names
stressor family	I can't understand my lessons
	I get low test results
	Teachers ask me questions I can't answer
stressor study	I get nagged in my family
	In my family too much importance is put on doing well at school
	My family expects too much of me

[from NIER(2001)]

Appendix

Appendix-a : The profile of “RABBIT Plan” by NIER of Japan

The Plan for RABBIT: Rational Active Breakthrough against Bullying and Interpersonal Troubles

*The Test for RABBIT: Research and Analysis of Behaviours in school for Both Intervention and Tackling

*The Method for RABBIT: Resolution and Action for Building Best Interactive Triangle

*The Program for RABBIT: Relationship Activities based on a Basic Interaction Training

