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Researcher finds more to imagination than meets the eye

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Many people associate imagination with fantasizing, says Keiichi Takaya, who recently completed his PhD thesis on imagination in education. But Takaya says imagination is a combination of various mental capacities, such as curiosity and content knowledge. In his thesis, Takaya examines how educational theorists conceptualize imagination, then presents his own idea of how it should be connected with education. Teaching basic knowledge and skills are fundamental to creating imaginative students, he says, though it is equally important to engage students' curiosity.

Takaya was born and raised in Tokyo, where he studied kendo (samurai swordsmanship) from childhood. "Probably my theory of education is influenced by my experience in kendo as well as Western philosophy of education in which I specialize," he says. He noticed that people don't complain about doing repetitive drills in kendo or in other sports and the arts the way they can with school subjects. Suspecting that it's easier for students to visualize the outcome of sports and the arts, compared with more abstract subjects, he suggests that teachers and curriculum planners could stimulate students' curiosity by ensuring that they understand the relevance of what they are studying. Though Takaya expected to devote himself entirely to his thesis when he came to Canada, he ended up teaching kendo as well, starting a kendo program at SFU. He also found himself involved in helping his thesis advisor create a Japanese garden outside the faculty of education. Now that he has his PhD, Takaya's ideal job would combine research and classroom teaching in some way. "Eventually," he says, "I want to go back to Japan because Japanese education is my primary concern."