

論 文

# Multicultural Education through Cosmopolitanism in Japanese Classrooms

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## 要 旨

本論文は、ほとんどの日本の学校で見られる文化的に同質性の高いクラスにおいて、学生の多文化的能力を効果的に発達させる方法を考察する。文化的同質性という問題に言及し、その主流となっている理解と一致し、かつ重要ないくつかの点においては異なった見解を発展させていく。またその見解を前提とし、コスモポリタニズム（世界市民主義）が問題解決のための枠組みを与えるという事に触れるとともに、その枠組を授業に取り入れうる方法として、内省的学習実践 (Reflective learning practices) を論じる。

Keywords: multiculturalism (多文化主義), diversity (多様性), cosmopolitanism (コスモポリタニズム/世界市民主義), reflective learning (内省的学習)

## I. Introduction

At this point, the growing importance multicultural and cross cultural competencies has been well-established (Gardner & Mansilla, 2007). This fact has not been lost on Japan's officialdom and, doubtless, has contributed to its growing concern over the inward facing nature of the nation's younger generations (Furuichi, 2014). But, the argument often goes, implementing effective multicultural education protocols in Japan is no easy task. It is, after all, a uniquely homogenous country with regard to ethnicity

and culture.

The purpose of this paper will be threefold. First, it will seek to address the question of Japan's cultural homogeneity. Once accomplished, this will serve as a foundation for the paper's second main point: establishing the viability of a cosmopolitan approach to multicultural education. Finally, the paper will provide an example of how such a cosmopolitan approach might be employed in Japanese classrooms.

## II. Multicultural Japan

Being a country that is famous for its ability to change and adapt (Pilling, 2014), it is no surprise that Japan is also a country that is searching for its identity. The popularity of *Nihonjinron* books and the theories they espouse has few, if any, non-Japanese corollaries (Befu, 2001). The country's ability and willingness to react to the world around it has both preserved it and prevented it from developing a clear sense of what it means to be Japanese. *Nihonjinron* is a result of this as is the common sentiment that the nation is culturally homogeneous (Befu, 2001). The less secure one is in his or her identity, the more appealing a singular, overly-simplified identity becomes. But any truth about identity will always be complex. And so it is with Japan.

A person from Osaka and one from Nagoya speak and interact differently; people from Hokkaido and Okinawa have different customs and eat different foods. Those inhabiting the super high-tech, neon festooned cities and those in the mountains and rice paddies live very different lives.

It would be foolish to suggest that Japan's people do not, by and large, share some cultural characteristics. But, to admit this to be the case is only to affirm the obvious. The same is true of any definable group. The development of such similarities is, in fact, part of the evolutionary process of self-identifying groups in general. Schein makes the argument that for a group to survive it must formulate strategies that will help it to overcome the challenges it faces as a group (2010). If these strategies prove successful, they begin to make their way into the identity of the group as a whole. Different nations, acting as definable groups, have developed different strategies that have become part of their identity as a larger unit. All new members are indoctrinated with these strategies (Schein, 2010). Japan is not alone or unique in possessing a national culture. Having such a culture is, in many ways, a prerequisite for the existence of a nation. It is, thus, correct

to claim that Japan is culturally unique for no other country shares its particular cultural concoction. The incorrect claim is that Japan is unique because it has a national culture shared in common by the individuals that comprise it. Just like any other country, Japan is simultaneously homogeneous and heterogeneous.

The study of organizational culture has revealed that, while branch organizations tend to share many cultural elements with the main or original organization, they also inevitably display differences (Schein, 2010). These differences are accounted for, regardless of how strict the central control, by the branch organization's environment, by its unique mixture of constituents, by the context in which it operates, and by the particular challenges it faces. It is impossible for any branch to perfectly emulate the culture of the organization that spawned it. The same thing must be said of individual people. In an isomorphic manner, the individuals who make up a society can each be thought of as branch versions of that society. They will embody the pertinent cultural elements, but they will do so in a way reflective of their own experiences and operational context. So, while there will inevitably be cultural similarities shared by the constituents of a classroom, there will just as inevitably be entirely unique cultural formulas.

### **III. Cosmopolitanism**

This is exactly the recognition that underpins the cosmopolitan approach. The individual always already exists at the intersection between the global and the local (Saito, 2010) or, in the case at hand, between that of socially prescribed culture and individualized cultural instantiation. This aspect of human existence is what cosmopolitanism seeks to leverage in order to develop multicultural capacities. It prescribes that the individual first pursue personal authenticity and a realization of what being a human actor means in its entirety. This includes the recognition that each person exists within, and is a member of, a much larger systemic community. Due to its magnitude and the degree to which this perception is divorced from daily experience, it can be elusive. Yet, its being elusive does not temper its veracity or importance. Particularly for Japanese students who have been raised in a national cultural historically marked by a sense of separateness from the world (Zielenziger, 2006), this main tenet of cosmopolitanism can seem abstract and unfounded.

The key to overcoming this barrier is the dialogic interplay between what is shared

and what is unique. As previously established, Japanese classrooms are simultaneously loci of profound similarity and of radically individual instantiation. A cosmopolitan approach to multiculturalism must start with each of those involved plunging into their own experience, context, and understanding in order to develop a sense of how these have contributed to their own individual emergence. Such self-reflection provides grounding and the assurance that, while who a person is culturally may not be entirely controllable, it is at least coherent and sensible.

The investigation of one's own cultural complexity serves as the background against which the culture of another person, a *thou* (Buber, 1971), can be appreciated. Cross-cultural conflict and human conflict in general is often permitted by the sense of 'otherness' (Zimbardo, 2007). To 'other' someone is essentially to reduce them to a narrower than actual range of defining characteristics. It is to regard him or her as the thing that did a given action or that is responsible for a particular outcome. It is to see a person as a simplified collection of phenomena rather than as a process emerging from inexpressible complexity. The realization that one is characterized, even from the perspective of oneself, by such complexity illuminates the possibility that other people operate similarly. In this way, cosmopolitanism encourages the development of empathic capacities through self-exploration (Snauwaert, 2006). It allows the individual to more vividly imagine what it is like to be someone else and to stand in that person's shoes by encouraging the individual to more deeply experience and investigate standing in his or her own shoes.

Such an approach avoids two common pitfalls that plague multicultural education efforts. The first is that it honors, rather than summarizes, diversity. Particularly in Japan where many teachers who are tasked with teaching lessons on multiculturalism may have very little authentic cross cultural experience upon which to draw (Kerr, 2001), there is an understandable tendency to reduce foreign cultures and their people into easy to digest stereotypes. The result is not humane understanding, but the sort of distorted appreciation reserved for oddities. As previously stated, the reduction of a person or people to a set of characteristics is, rather than method for encouraging multicultural capacities, a way to increase the feeling of otherness. The cosmopolitan approach works by developing a sense of individual authenticity that leads to the appreciation of both authentic difference and similarity among those whom one knows best. It starts, not from the position that other people are different which, by extension, means that the people in one's own group

are the same, but from the realization that you are different. By developing a sense of difference among the most similar of people, it instills the lesson that difference is something that every person has in common. People from another country may, on aggregate, share certain beliefs and practices, but individually they are no more the same than any two students present in the classroom. By starting with individual difference, the commonalities shared by groups ranging from the class to the country to the world become sought after discoveries in the multicultural exploration.

The other pitfall avoided by the cosmopolitan approach is that, rather than being an abstract, what-if driven field of study, multiculturalism is made present, concrete, and salient. It is immediately applicable, not only in the classroom, but even when the student is alone. The function of cosmopolitan multiculturalism is not contingent upon having an ethnically mixed classroom or exchange students present. It is, for this as well as the other reasons that have been detailed, ideal for use in Japanese classrooms.

#### **IV. Reflective Learning**

In application, the suggested approach might manifest itself in a number of ways. This paper will explore one such way and will seek to show how simple it would be to incorporate into pre-existing classroom environments. The practice to be detailed is that of reflective learning.

While the practice of reflective learning can change and grow as the learner develops and explores, it must begin with two practices. These two practices are known by many names, but for the purposes of clarity will be referred to as the check-in and the wrap-up. Facilitating either effectively means drawing on a few principles. Both the check-in and wrap-up should be characterized by openness, inclusivity, and equality (Goff, 2001).

The first principle of openness implies a willingness to treat everyone's contribution as valuable. It means allowing people to say what they need to say without interruption and that those listening give their attention wholly to the current contributor. Reflective learning cannot operate properly in a judgmental atmosphere or when certain ideas or feelings are dismissed based on their nature or source before having ever been honestly considered. In order to promote openness, the participants should remain silent when someone is speaking, the speaker should be given as much time as he or she needs, and there should be a clear signal used to indicate when he or she has finished (Peppers &

Briskin, 2000).

Inclusivity amounts to everyone feeling like an involved, contributing element. It means that the reflective experience must be one that arises communally from all those present. If even one person who is present is not also included, it is equivalent to a circle that is missing a connecting piece. As a structure it is weak--as an interaction pattern, it discourages free and honest exchange. In order to promote inclusivity, the participants should sit such that each one has a clear view of every other one. Desks and anything that might act as a physical and, thus, symbolic or figurative barrier should be removed. And, to begin (as with a check-in) or end (as with a wrap-up) everyone should be required to say something. Contributions need not be long, but the act of everyone saying something creates the communality required; it ensures that each person has a stake in and connection to what emerges from the interaction (Goff, 2001).

Equality must be pervasive. It cannot exist within boundaries but must be the *modus operandi* of the group. This means that the teacher/lecturer/professor cannot stand exempt from the equality. In a reflective environment, learning happens as the relationship between the learner and the learned increases in complexity (Palmer, 1993). The process is based on self-awareness and meta-cognition. The lessons cannot be taught. In fact, the intention to teach someone something betrays an ignorance of the reality that learning outcomes are always personal. The more a ‘teacher’ insists on imparting a specific lesson, the more divorced the learner becomes from his or her own authentic learning practice. It is not possible to force someone to learn something. It is only possible, and preferable, to facilitate (cultivate, curate, etc.) the process whereby they learn. Thus, in a reflective learning environment, there are no teachers—there are only facilitators.

This is an important reframe that will shift the dynamic of the classroom. As far as the reflective practices of checking in and wrapping up are concerned, the facilitator approach helps to reinforce the equality required by the process. Equality among learners cannot be achieved if there is clearly inequality among participants. The implicit and enforced inequality of the teacher-student relationship seeps into every aspect of the classroom and its proceedings.

This is not to suggest, however, that the facilitator should not be able to guide the process. That is his or her role. It is merely a reminder that for a hierarchy to be healthy and functional it must arise from the lower levels rather than be imposed by the higher (Meadows, 2008). The purpose of the elements in the upper levels is to organize

the efforts of those in the lower, but only insofar as they demand it. The learners in a classroom are not there to be controlled. Granted, they are each part of a larger whole but, at the individual level, they are each irreducible and self-contained—not parts of a whole, but wholes comprising a larger whole. Each level of this structure must be respected in all of its multiplicity.

The content of the check-in/wrap-up discussions can be determined by the facilitator, though room should always be left for emergence to occur. If the group is pushing in a certain direction, it should not be unnecessarily constrained. The most common topics of focus during dedicated periods of reflection are what the learners will take away from the experience, what their expectations were, what surprised them, how they plan to proceed, and what questions they had or still have. Through the exploration of these topics, the diversity of the group is made manifest as a resource capable of revealing new and previously unconsidered perspectives. It is a simple and powerful practice that has a place in all group-based learning environments.

## **V. Conclusion**

The theoretical framework and approach detailed here should provide educational facilitators with an entry point useful in all classes, but particularly suited to those lacking in readily apparent racial or ethnic diversity. The cosmopolitan, reflection-based approach is not a didactic means of instruction concerned with delivering discrete ‘truths’ to receptive learners. It is the learning of a process and of the values implicit in that process. It seeks to develop multicultural sensibilities, not through instruction concerned with ‘facts’ about other cultures, but through the exploration of principles that can be employed to simultaneously reduce the alienness of the foreign and increasingly value its uniqueness. The universal applicability of the principles imparted by this approach is what allows students to pass beyond the shallow knowledge of many multiculturalist pedagogies into deeper understanding and, eventually, wisdom. Ultimately, this is what is required if we hope to appreciate the complexities inherent in the human side of culture.

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