

Who Teaches Young Children in “*Tabunka Kyosei Shakai*”?:

The Case of an Early Childhood Education Teacher Training Course at a College in Japan

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I . Introduction

II . Education in *Tabunka Kyosei Shakai*

III . The reality of a teacher training course and its students

IV . Implications for better training courses

I . Introduction

Multicultural education has garnered a great deal of attention as a tool for young people to survive in global society and as a source of social capital in many nations. There are a wide range of studies and discussions on multicultural education. In this regard, Japanese society is no exception. In particular, since 1990, immigration laws were revised in order to allow Japanese-Brazilians to enter Japan with special visa status as blue-collar workers. In the past twenty years since the arrival of these “newcomers” in Japan, most of them have chosen to stay in this society to raise their families, which creates new issues including education for young newcomers (Kajita 2005, Miyajima 2005). To offer a better living environment for both these newcomers and Japanese, the Japanese government has been working to create a new social policy of *Tabunka kyosei shakai* where everyone is respected and able to have his/her own unique life regardless of his/her cultural background. *Tabunka kyosei shakai* also aims to provide an effective educational environment for those who do not speak Japanese and also for Japanese who have classmates from different cultural backgrounds. At the same time, bilingual education for young Japanese children is so strongly pushed by the Ministry of Education that English education has also become a big business industry in Japan.

However, there are significant contradictions in the discussion of multicultural education for young children such as the issue of lacking well-trained child care providers for both immigrant children and Japanese children. Although the idea of *Tabunka Kyosei* has pushed to offer multicultural educational environments within schools, it has failed to provide adequate teacher training programs to train care

providers who are able to provide effective classes for both newcomers and Japanese children. The reason behind this failure is that the teacher training courses for early childhood education have been studied less than teacher training courses for compulsory education in terms of multicultural education, which is often linked to discussions on its role in social welfare, not education. As a social welfare issue, teacher training courses for early childhood education focus on how to provide “better” care to young children regardless of their cultural backgrounds. And yet, according to Derman-Sparks (1989), children start to have “pre-prejudice” as early as two years old. It is believed that prejudice developed at an early age is often constructed based on the attitudes of adults, parents, and teachers toward minorities (Sato 2002, Wright 1998, Brown 1995.) Thus, having well-trained childcare providers is critical for both newcomers and Japanese children. In addition to that, the strong demand for bilingual education cannot be ignored. According to many cognitive studies on young children and bilingual education, learning directly from teachers is much more effective than learning only by using DVDs and CDs. In fact, learning a second language by watching DVDs or listening to CDs is not as effective as doing nothing at all. Considering the high demands for bilingual education for young children, teacher training for language education needs more attention.

With that being said, this paper addresses two questions: (1) What is the reality of multicultural education in early childhood education in *Tabunka kyosei shakai*? (2) Can we elevate early childhood education training courses to meet the demands of globalization? In order to discuss these two questions, this paper first presents a brief history of Japanese society in terms of immigrants and the current situation of its society including the notion of *Tabunka kyosei shakai*. This is followed by an analysis of a student survey to gauge what future care providers understand and to determine what they need to learn for their future as care providers. Finally, in section four, suggestions for better training courses will be provided.

II. Education in *Tabunka Kyosei Shakai*

The history of ethnic minorities in Japan is rather complex. Japanese society has been known as a homogeneous nation for a long time despite the reality that numbers of ethnic minorities such as Ainu and Ryukyu have long existed. Attention to ethnic minorities had not been raised until *Zainichi* issues attracted interest in the 1970s. *Zainichi* are people who have their origin in North and South Korea and China. They came to Japan during World War II as laborers with their families. These people have

been struggling for equal rights such as educational and occupational opportunities, and the right to vote, none of which are guaranteed for them yet. To meet their educational needs, they have established their own ethnic schools in their communities.

The second wave for minority issues was raised in 1990 when Japanese immigrant laws were revised. Because of the change, people who have roots in Japan are allowed to come to Japan to work without a visa. Because of that, the number of immigrants has doubled since 1990. When the Japanese government opened the door for Japanese-Brazilians, it was at the time the Japanese economy was at its peak and labor shortage was a serious issue. These Japanese-Brazilians were expected to compensate for this labor shortage as blue-color workers at car factories and electronic factories. They came to Japan as *Dekasegi*. Many of them stayed in Japan for several years to save enough money and went back home to their families in Brazil (Fujiwara 1995). However, after 20 years of *Dekasegi* culture, many of these *Dekasegi* people gradually came to stay and bring their families to Japan to live with them. They started building their lives in Japan, buying their own homes and settling down in the communities close to where they worked. Some got married in Japan and started their own families in the communities. As these Japanese-Brazilians become a part of Japanese communities, many issues have been raised such as social security, community responsibilities and education for their children. Especially educational issues have been serious obstacles including the challenge of the language barrier, school bullying, high drop out rates and poverty among these young Japanese -Brazilians (Kojima 2001, Morita 2007).

As the number of permanent Japanese -Brazilian residents increases, the demand for child care for these people is rising higher. In fact the number of Japanese-Brazilians under the age of six has been increasing. Because of the demands, in 2008 the guideline for center-based day care was revised to meet the social demographic changes. In the chapter on the aims and contents of early childhood education, it states that having familiarity with different cultures and an understanding of people who have different cultural backgrounds is a desirable goal. It also mentions that the role of care providers should include creating an atmosphere where all children, regardless of their nationalities and cultural backgrounds, can respect each other and understand cultural differences (the guideline for center-based daycare 2008). To create such classrooms and facilitate a multicultural educational environment is obviously an important role for child care providers. According to a study on the quality of care providers in *Tabunka kyosei shakai* done by Hotta (2009), the knowledge and

skills child care providers should have are as follows: (1) communication skills with the children's first languages, (2) knowledge of non-verbal communication (3) understanding other cultures and its values on child care, (4) understanding religious customs. These findings are consistent with other studies. Needless to say, not only the manual of Early Childhood Education but also the policy of *Tabunka kyosei shakai* also suggest the importance of these ideas about what knowledge and skills are important for care providers. And yet, the penetration of these ideas and obtaining these abilities are on a totally different level. Care providers who take care of children in a multicultural environment must not only understand the importance of these ideas, but also have ability to facilitate these ideas in daily care. In the next section, the reality of a teacher training course and its students will be discussed, which will reveal the urgent necessity of teacher training programs for early childhood education in terms of multicultural education.

III. The reality of a teacher training course and its students

16 sophomores and juniors participated in this study. All of them were taking a course called "Multicultural Education in Early Childhood Education" at the time of this study. Each student was asked to take a survey on the subject. The college is in Aichi prefecture which has *Gaikokujin Shuju Chiki* which means areas where ethnic communities are concentrated. In fact, according to the Japanese Ministry of Justice, the prefecture has the second largest number of foreigners after Tokyo. In the case of Brazilians, Aichi prefecture has the largest population in Japan (Ministry of Justice 2010). Because of the geographic location of the college, many of the students are conducting their teacher training in the areas of *Gaikokujin Shuju Chiiki* and will be expected to get jobs within such areas. This study was done to indicate how important it is for them to have some knowledge of multicultural education and its teaching methods.

According to the survey, half of the students have had experiences with non-Japanese students at some point in their school lives, mainly in high school before entering college. These non-Japanese students came from various countries such as China, New Zealand, Australia, Swaziland and the Philippines. All of these non-Japanese students were exchange students who went back to their home countries after finishing exchange programs lasting six months to one year.

Table1: Students experiences with foreign students before entering college

		Pre-school	Elementary	Junior High	High	Nationalities
Yes	9	0	0	4	5	New Zealand, Australia, China, Swaziland, the Philippines
No	7	0	0	0	0	N/A

In other words, none of these college students had experiences studying with immigrant children. In addition, there are no international students or exchange students in the department where they study, although there are a number of international students in other departments. Also, none of these students have experienced studying abroad except one student who spent one week in Hungary on a school program. Although some of them have taken trips outside of Japan, such as to Korea, China and some of the Micronesian islands, it is obvious that their multicultural experiences are very limited.

As for their experiences of studying foreign languages, they had studied English for at least six years before entering the college. One English course is a requirement for freshman at the college. However, none of them have even basic English conversation proficiency and some of them think they are not sure about remembering the English alphabet correctly. Although the college offers advanced English, Chinese and Portuguese courses, few students take these courses.

Looking at these basic survey results, it is very obvious that none of students have enough experiences in terms of multicultural education to become eligible care providers, nor are they able to care for immigrant children or provide bilingual education for Japanese children. So what kind of college training courses should be offered for these students? This question will be discussed with some suggestions for the future.

IV. Implications for better training courses

This study was an attempt to examine the importance of adequate teacher training for childcare providers at college level institutions. Especially developing a training program for those students who do not have multicultural experiences or strong foreign language proficiency is discussed. As explained in the preceding sections, providing a safe and secure environment of early childhood education for young children regardless of their nationalities and cultural backgrounds will be unavoidable in Japan. For that, training adequate teachers is an urgent issue which needs to be

addressed. Therefore, providing a variety of multicultural education and second language courses for students is strongly recommended. Although participating in study abroad programs would be an effective way to gain multicultural experiences, it is not always financially possible or even an option for some students due to a lack of even basic foreign language proficiency. Providing internship and volunteer activities as a part of the course curriculum could be one alternative option. Also inviting people who have been involved with multicultural education such as members of NPOs, government officials, grass-root activists and parents of different nationalities as guest speakers would be effective opportunities to gain insights into the fields of multicultural education.

In conclusion, one of the weakness of this study is that the findings, which are based on merely one class with only 16 students, yielded limited information which can be lead to only the most tentative of generalizations. However the analyzed data can also be employed to examine further research on Multicultural Education in Early childhood education. Further research with a larger number of students must be conducted to understand these issues.

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