COMMENTS

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As an emerging area of focus, educational programs related to ethnic and cultural diversity are often identified by different names, and there is considerable disagreement on what the contents should be and for what purpose. Even among the panelists of this session, two different terms, "multicultural education" and "intercultural education" were used — in the present case, its seems, almost interchangeably. Debate surrounding multicultural education is influenced by ideological and political struggles, and accusations are exchanged by both sides.

In this context, it is all the more necessary to clarify the various aspects of multicultural education, and discussions such as those that took place in this session are a step in that direction.

Outlining the criteria by which intercultural education should be conceptually distinguished from multicultural education, Professor Lê Thành Khôi, through various illuminating examples, has offered us ways in which intercultural education can be developed and expanded. Following Professor Lê Thành Khôi's presentation, Professor Jennifer Farkas, after discussing general issues surrounding multicultural education, has given us an insightful glimpse of the multicultural efforts of an American school district at a micro level. Professor Keiko Seki, through her ambitious four country cross-cultural project, has reminded us of the importance of comparing the unique multicultural educational circumstances of particular societies, as well as the need to extract common themes. Together, these presentations have offered us examples of some of the theoretical issues surrounding multicultural (intercultural) education, the complexity of micro and macro educational situations faced by societies, and some common issues.

Though each of the panelists has mentioned different societies and approach the subject from a different angle, there are some common messages that seem to come across. For example, multicultural (intercultural) education is seen as benefitting and being addressed to, not only minorities, but all children (and persons) who are to live in our global, multicultural, and multiethnic world. The panelists have shown that in many societies, the era when minorities were automatically expected to conform to the dominant culture of the school has ended. Instead of the assumption that it is always the child who should change to fit the monocultural school environment, in these societies, it is now the educational context which is being asked to change.

Presentations in this session have also mentioned some of the factors which are involved in constructing a multicultural (intercultural) educational program including the following: developing and screening teaching material, institutionalizing measures which facilitate multicultural (intercultural) education programs, training and certifying teachers for multicultural (intercultural) education, developing and utilizing specific teaching tactics,

incorporating multicultural (intercultural) elements into the curriculum (including non-academic activities), utilizing influences beyond the school such as the media and parents, building a school environment in which members of various groups share in the decision-making process, and promoting an atmosphere of tolerance.

Now, the concept of multicultural (intercultural) education has emerged most conspicuously in countries which have undergone a heightening of ethnic consciousness and an influx of immigrants, among other factors. However, a multicultural situation may be present even where a multicultural awareness is lacking.

In this context, it seems especially significant that this symposium, "The World and Japan in the Age of Multiculturalism" took place in a country which is now an economic power, and seems to be striving to become a political power, and yet has been repeatedly accused of its "mono-ethnic" mentality. It is also a society where the concept of a hyphenated Japanese has yet to emerge. As Professor Seki's presentation has suggested, Japan seems to be a multicultural society which fails to admit that it is multicultural. But it is also a country which is being pushed to recognize its multicultural reality.

Japan now has within its borders, not only Koreans, but also refugees from Indochina, war-displaced China orphans, and many other culturally diverse groups. In the last decade or so, Japan has experienced an influx of an increasingly diverse foreign population, most notably foreign workers, who have entered Japan both legally and illegally.

According to the Ministry of Education, there are now over 10,000 children in Japanese public elementary and junior high schools who require instruction in the Japanese language[1]. The figures for preschoolers is larger[2]. Although these numbers may seem modest compared to other industrialized countries, some Japanese localities are being pushed to adapt. Localities have started to hire interpreters and to develop instructional material. Schools in which foreign children are concentrated often have individualized language instruction.

However, observers of Japanese schools have repeatedly noticed that the Japanese educational system is geared primarily to assimilate children to the dominant Japanese culture. Such tendencies have been observed earlier in regard to the Koreans in Japan, and in regard to the Japanese returnees from abroad. More recently, the same pattern has been observed in relation to the treatment of newcomer foreign children.

In a system which stresses treating everyone the same, teachers find it hard to address the special needs of those who deviate from the norm. Institutionalized measures targeting children from other cultures focus primarily on Japanese language acquisition (and adaptation).

In a comparative observation I did of Japanese and American elementary schools with foreign and minority children, one of the most obvious differences between educators in the two countries was the unawareness of Japanese educators of both the possibilities and difficulties of cultural diversity[3]. This is not to say that the American educators did not have their own difficulties. To give one example, though ethnic and racial considerations were high on their minds, the knowledge of specific ethnic and racial groups may be stereotyped. For

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[1] Taken from the 1993 Monbusho gakujyutsu kokusai kyoku survey, "Nihongo kyoiku ga hitsuyo na gaikokujin jido seito no ukeire jyokyo nado ni kansuru chosa" (Heisei 5 nendo ban), Tokyo.

[2] *Nihon keizai shinbun*, June 11, 1994, morning edition, p. 35.

[3] Ryoko Tsuneyoshi, "Kyoshitsu to shakai — nyukama no kodomo ga nihon no kyoiku ni teiki suru mono," in *Kyoshitsu toiu basho*, ed. by Manabu Sato (Tokyo: Kokudosha 1995), pp.186-214.

example, the teachers may believe that Asians are diligent, good at mathematics, but passive and uncreative which may limit the manner in which they interact with these children.

What characterized Japanese teachers, however, was their general unawareness of issues related to cultural diversity. For example, instruction focused on having the foreign children "catch up" to their Japanese classmates in terms of language and behavior. The possibility that everyone, including the Japanese children, might benefit from a culturally diverse class-room remained largely unacknowledged. Also, teachers tended not to be aware of the complexities of issues related to race and ethnicity, for example, the difficulties of bullying related to race-hate, the mechanisms of identity crisis, and how the child's ethnic culture might influence his/her behavior. This resulted in attitudes which might have been interpreted as "discriminatory" in the American educational context, but which Japanese teachers would exhibit without realizing that their behavior could be understood as such.

What seemed to be lacking was the experience and training which would have enabled educators to interpret and appreciate a multicultural situation. This is hardly surprising since the social environment of Japanese educators and of the public in general is different from that of their counterparts in the United States, whose immigrant society has experienced racial uprisings, a shift toward greater stress on cultural pluralism (rather than assimilation), and where corresponding social policies have emerged.

Yet, even in the countries mentioned in this session which are now actively pursuing multicultural (intercultural) education policies, there was a time not so long ago when those countries had very similar assumptions of the role of the school and education as Japan has now.

Japan is entering the multicultural (intercultural) education arena as a latecomer. What is the lesson for Japan? As a nation with a homogeneous mindframe, what are the possibilities of multicultural (intercultural) education in Japan? I would like to end my comments by soliciting remarks from the panelists on these issues.

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