TOWARDS RESEARCH ON A CURRICULUM

FOR MULTICULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

KEIKO SEKI

I. *A Multicultural Society and Education*[1]

Reforms undertaken by various educational systems around the world are characterized by a common agenda of imposing a standardized curriculum and raising the quality of education, while at the same time implementing a policy of diversity in education. The issue raised here is the extent to which the right of each child and young person to learn can be guaranteed. In connection with the rise of a multicultural society, newfound inequalities in education are surfacing. The problem brings into relief the following questions: Are ethnic groups guaranteed the opportunity for personal growth and the development of a self-identity? Is the right to learn and opportunities for development guaranteed on an equal basis?

A multicultural society is considered here to be one in which people of different cultures, lifestyles, ways of thinking and feeling, and modes of behavior live and work together[2], one in which people of different styles of human relations and the relationship between man/woman and nature live together.

In this paper, I have chosen four aspects or features which form a multicultural society and by which its contours can be read: ethnic group, social strata, region and gender. They are present and exert influence in a particular country or region in varying combinations, degree and order of significance. It is through these aspects that people seek to establish their identity. The agenda of the educational reforms in the fields of curriculum and teaching methods can be partially understood in light of how they assist in resolving the above issues in a multicultural society.

These four aspects that form the topology of a multicultural society were selected for the following reasons. A multicultural society can be seen as made up of various ethnic groups with cross-cultural contact arising from population shifts. But it is not only ethnic minorities who are affected by the problems of inequality in education due to cultural difference, such as disparity in the percentage of school attendance and in the ratio of students continuing on to higher education, or who are afflicted by tension and discord brought about by different at-

---

[2] Lê Thành Khôi, *Comparative Education*, Korosha, 1991, p. 204.

titudes regarding independence and development. Cultural difference can also be seen in terms of gender and regionality, factors that are closely linked to these educational questions. Urban culture and that of farming communities are also marked by difference. Moreover, even when ethnic identity and gender are held in common, cultural difference due to social strata is reflected in both the content and end result of education. People orient themselves to a particular culture and its prevailing social values and attempt to move between social areas or strata in search of a better life.

Ethnic minorities, women and rural residents share many similarities in terms of their position within the cultural hierarchy of a society. When the values of one culture are placed in a dominant position, those outside the particular culture are faced with the choice of attempting to assume these values as their own, adhering steadfastly to their culture, or forming a personal identity based on themselves as an individual.

In Japan, research on intercultural and multicultural education is now underway. Tetsuya Kobayashi, Kazuhiro Ebuchi and Yasuko Minoura have done pioneering works in these fields. In addition to the issues of multicultural education that have confronted the Japanese educational system heretofore, promoting intercultural understanding has become all the more essential with the increasing influx of foreign workers. There have been notable achievements, in particular, with regard to the problems of children who return to Japan after living and studying abroad. An increasing amount of research is focused on the psychological complications and identifying typologies of intercultural adaptation. The superiority of psychological methods in research methodology has also been indicated[3]. In his summary of research trends, Ebuchi pointed to the concentration of research on compilation of data and a dearth of research that would establish a theoretical basis for intercultural education[4]. He also suggested that constructing such a theoretical framework should be an important aim of future research.

Furthermore, there is insufficient educational research on ways to promote and aid the independence of minorities. The need for research on curricula and teaching methods as well as ways of ameliorating the inequalities inherent in the educational system is indeed pressing.

Ebuchi raises the urgency of thoroughly grasping the disparities of the socioeconomic conditions of ethnic minorities and neighborhood groups and calls attention to the danger of lapsing into a moralism should these disparities be ignored[5]. Above all, understanding multiculturalism within the context of each country and region is of utmost importance.

Although there were ethnic and other minorities in Japan long before the problems of children returning from abroad came to the fore, the study of their socioeconomic conditions was for the most part all but ignored. This is a problem in itself and, in a sense, can be considered one distinguishing feature of Japanese culture[6].

In light of the above, we undertook a joint international field research. Four countries in which the research team had already conducted field research - Japan, China, Russia and

---

[3] Kazuhiro Ebuchi, *An Anthoropological Study of Intercultural Education*, Kyushu University Press, 1994, p. 14.

[4] *Ibid.*, p.10.

[5] *Ibid.*, p.366.

[6] Roger Goodman's *Japan's International Youth - The Emergence of a New Class of Schoolchildren* is an insightful look at the characteristics of the Japanese educational system and culture through its handling of the problem of children returning from abroad.

Britain-were chosen for the different types and conditions of multiculturalism that they represent. The peculiar composition of each multicultural society was hypothesized in terms of ethnic group, social strata, regionality and gender. This theoretical framework was employed to analyze the state of multiculturalism in each area of study. In doing so, we were able to investigate the specific circumstances under which multiculturalism took place in each society and analyze the problems that each set of circumstances presents for the independence and development of children and youth. We were able to elucidate the ways in which the nation, education administration, teachers and parents were attempting to deal with these problems, what sort of institutional or policy solutions were offered, what kind of curriculum and teaching methods were devised, whether consideration of these problems was applied to situations outside the school, and what new action and institutional reforms were surfacing in response to multiculturalism.

The above-mentioned four aspects that define cultural disparities and difference are present in varying combinations according to the particular nation or region. Each nation or region has its particular set of multicultural circumstances. In this respect, the curriculum and teaching method that fosters an understanding of multiculturalism can be unique in that it reflects the peculiar multiculturalism of the society. By positing the four aspects and by employing the method of comparison, it is possible to more clearly visualize invisible elements of multiculturalism within a society and define their movement. Comparative studies reveal solutions to the problems of education (independence and development) arising from an increasingly multicultural society and uncover experiments in multicultural understanding. Moreover, it becomes possible to posit a form of multicultural understanding with universal significance, one that transcends the particularities of each set of multicultural experiences. Namely, it allows one to identify the principles of educational reform in the area of a general curriculum and teaching methods that serve to promote coexistence among different cultures.

. Surveys targeting parents and teachers are based on interviews. In order to assess the level of multiculturalism in the daily lives of students, questionnaires were completed by students in secondary education. Five hundred and seventy-four high school students (236 boys and 338 girls) from a total of fifteen schools in four countries participated in the study.

II. Education in a Multicultural Society-Voices of Teachers,

Parents and Students

(1) *Sheffield, England-typical model of a multicultural society*

England represents a typical model of multiculturalism in that the cultural disparities seen in each of the four aspects are interrelated and form a multi-layered pattern of difference. According to the Sheffield study, regional divisions were prescribed by social stratum. Social stratifications were linked to ethnicity. These factors were also related to student achievement levels at school. A look at the nation as a whole shows that achievement levels of students in their last year of secondary school were clearly divided along lines of social class and ethnicity and that these divisions were highly likely to reflect clear-cut geographical

distribution as well (T. Ando).

Two schools in Sheffield participated in the study: K school, a traditional institution located in a quiet residential neighborhood, and H school, an institution affected by an environment of working class residents suffering from the recession in the coal industry. Students at both schools studied amid multicultural conditions; even K school had a student body of which one fifth belonged to ethnic minorities. Parents of K school students were for the most part engaged in specialized trades and professions. Many parents of students at H school were blue-collar workers. Interrelation of the above-mentioned four aspects of a multicultural society is apparent in the choice of students to continue their education. A large number of students at K school attempt the sixth form or having achieved the sixth form aspire to university study, while H school students choose to study at further education colleges or work after graduation. (T. Ando)

The disparity between men and women in their consciousness of the choices available to them for higher education can be attributed to several factors. Regardless of their wishes, men are slightly more immersed in the class culture. In contrast, women desire an academic background definitely and, in search of opportunity, seek to acquire specialized skills and a work-oriented education. In general, they consciously attempt to overcome the social obstacles to achieving independence or, realizing that these obstacles represent more serious hurdles than for men, actively meet the difficulties head on.

In England, where ethnic minorities make up 5.5 percent of the total population, it is impossible to ignore the issue of minorities in educational reform. In a report by Lord Swann, chairperson of the Committee of Inquiry into the Education of Children from Ethnic Minority Groups founded in 1979, he stressed the need to guarantee the personal development of all school children including minority children and emphasized the necessity to approach equal access and opportunity. The National Curriculum Council in its "The Whole Curriculum" (Guidance No.3, 1990) released in 1990 indicated that education concerning the environment, citizenship and multicultural understanding was included in "cross-curricular elements." However, in the past one to two years, these "cross-curricular elements" have been given low priority and the present situation in which subsidies for the English education for ethnic minorities have been cut continues to exist.

In light of present circumstances, various organizations are working to foster literacy and promote a basic level of knowledge. One of these organizations, Sheffield United Multicultural Education Service, is taking stock of issues regarding education and development of minorities and undertaking research on a multicultural curriculum. Action centers on issues such as maintaining language education for minorities in school, adult literacy programs, identifying inequality and discrimination in the school, and conferring on solutions. These efforts seek to support the independence and development of minorities both inside and outside the school environment.

(2) *Moscow-apparent and inapparent problems of minorities*

Depending on the specific historical process of becoming a multicultural society, there are problems regarding minorities that are apparent and inapparent. Moscow and its multicultural society is one such example.

In general, education in Moscow has strongly upheld the principle of equality by

establishing schools for ethnic groups, allowing a choice of the language of instruction and, in principle, supporting gender equality. As a result of this, the majority population does not recognize a total lack of understanding regarding the problems faced by ethnic minorities. Moreover, in light of current economic hardships, the majority have come to see themselves as victims. There is also an apparent trend to justify discriminatory attitudes. International attention has been focused on the ethnic problems which have proved so volatile in the independence of former Soviet republics. However, the problems of a multicultural society lie hidden within the shadow of these long-standing ethnic problems of society. Non-Russian people safeguard and observe their own cultures in their private lives and value communication among their own. Without clear-cut segregation, members of the same ethnic group gather together, but when they do so it is a cause for concern and suspicion among Russians. This was apparent in interviews with adults.

Also studied was the extent to which children experience multiculturalism in their daily lives. Among the four classes (different schools) that participated in the questionnaire, twenty percent of one class and fifteen percent of another were made up of non-Russians. Students paid almost no attention to the fact that there were non-Russians in their class. When making friendships with non-Russians, most students were unconcerned with ethnicity. Non-Russian friends were for the most part from the Ukraine and Belarus and other republics that made up the former Soviet Union. It was not uncommon for them to have Jewish friends. They had many friends from European countries, but few of Asian descent.

Practical reasons ranked among the main reasons for studying a foreign language over the need to pass an examination or to continue on to higher education. They young people, in particular, expressed a strong desire to use their knowledge of foreign languages in international work or in a job requiring contact with foreign countries.

A number of respondents stated that understanding different cultures is only a means of economic development, that all one has to do is to study a foreign language at most, or that it is necessary to focus on one culture and language for the purpose of national unification. These responses reveal the necessity of incorporating multicultural understanding in the educational curriculum. However, the most common responses indicated a desire to learn about the history of one's own people as well as other ethnic groups and the belief that one's own culture could be enriched by an understanding of other cultures.

Teachers and principals uniformly answer that ethnic problems are nonexistent at school. Since the ethnic problems of the former Soviet Union were deemed traditional ones that could be resolved by establishing independent republics based on ethnicity, it can be said that the issue of promoting and establishing the identity of ethnic minorities was given little consideration. The Russian Federation Education Act underlines the importance of recognition of Russia as a multi-ethnic republic and of mutual understanding. However, at present, as a matter of top educational policy priority, parents and schools are preoccupied not with issues of multicultural understanding but with diversification of education itself. Private schools have been established since 1991 and public schools include new types of institutions such as the lycee and gymnasium. Parents are concerned with assessing school and teaching quality and select schools on that basis.

However, the enthusiasm of parents does not necessarily translate into the improvement of academic credentials or competition for entrance into institutions of higher education. Parents seek to develop the character and individuality of each child and hope that their

children will be cultivated through various opportunities.

The cultural disparities found in the above-mentioned four aspects of a multicultural so-ciety were not clearly apparent in the results of the questionnaire. Perhaps the reason lies in the fact that the former Soviet Union as a socialist society upheld equality as a fundamental social principle. In view of its fundamental objectives to eradicate class disparities and gaps between urban and rural areas, to reconcile ethnic groups, and establish equality between men and women, Soviet society sought to ensure equal opportunity in education and provide an in-stitutional guarantee of the right of each child to learn. These objectives, however, were quite different in reality. Nevertheless, it cannot be said that they had no influence at all. These social principles promoted the awareness of equality as a social value. The principle of equal-ity filtered into the lives of citizens as a preferred mode of social existence and exerted an even more permeating influence through the increasing uniformity and standardization of life-styles. In this manner, it can be said that the disparities found in features of a society under-going multiculturalization have been gradually lessened. This can be seen in the fact that there is little class difference among parents regarding their hopes for education and little gen-der difference in the student questionnaire. On the other hand, the social principles work to conceal the cultural disparities present in the four aspects of a multicultural society and make it difficult for minorities to express their discontent.

Disparities, however, do exist. At present, with the ongoing shift to capitalism, eco-nomic disparities are becoming pronounced. As a result, inequality in education due to wid-ening class distinctions is highly likely as economic power becomes a factor in the parent's choice of a school amid the diversity of education offered and the availability of private insti-tutions that charge tuition fees.

Because principals, teachers, and parents, particularly Russians, feel that problems be-tween ethnic groups have had little adverse effect on schools and education, there are no no-table efforts to creatively implement programs for multiethnic understanding in schools. Nevertheless, there are schools that include the culture of other ethnic groups as part of their curriculum. School No. 825 pursues a curriculum in which students are instructed in the cul-tures of all ethnic groups. This school is not known for its excellent academic standing, nor are the parents of the students members of an elite class; it is a typical school in Russia. The atmosphere at the school is lively and cheerful. The students are very candid and unreserved with the principal and the parents and the principal freely exchange opinions.

The school places particular importance on character development and aims to cultivate better interpersonal relations through character development. The principal seeks to teach the basis of human relations by having his students treat others as they wish to be treated. In fact, problems posed by multiculturalism were a factor in his espousing this education poli-cy. School No. 825 is located in a dormitory town of Moscow populated by those of farming origins, Muscovites, and immigrants to the Moscow area from other regions. In his duties as administrator of the school, it became clear to the principal that the parents of his students were from a wide range of social strata and backgrounds. Those of farming families maintain a culture based on their agricultural origins and observed festivities and ceremonial occasions in accordance with the traditions of their farming village. Their agricultural origins are also reflected in their use of living space. In addition, the population includes older Muscovites living with their grandchildren and people of other regions and of various ethnic backgrounds who have moved to Moscow and become laborers. Because of the diverse make-up of the

community, the school endeavors to familiarize the students with both rural and urban cultures and to inculcate multicultural understanding and a tolerance for other cultures. Against this background, interpersonal relations based on mutual respect have become a rallying point with importance given to cultural exchange and community activities. There are also events in which parents participate in learning and enjoying aspects of other cultures.

(3) *Beijing and Tianjin-interregional difference an all-determining factor*

At times, one of the four aspects by which we can study multiculturalism assumes an extraordinary significance. The study conducted in Beijing and Tianjin is a case in point. A comparison of the inner city area of both cities and the surrounding farming villages indicates that students of the former have extensive intercultural contact, while students of the latter have little such contact and yearn for city life. This desire to move and experience urban living also reveals elements of minority consciousness and an inclination to class elitism.

In agricultural communities, school has more of a prescriptive influence on the consciousness of students than in other areas. In fact, the more agricultural the area is, the more pronounced this tendency is. School education is seen as one opportunity by which migration to the city is possible. In fact, school teachers and students approve of the trend and the path to urban migration is laid through the conscientious execution of a centralized educational agenda. Nevertheless, school education in farming villages in effect aids the social mobility of a limited number and serves to foster only some elite members of ethnic minority backgrounds. Urban students are knowledgeable about regional issues including those concerning farming communities. Students in farming communities are imbued with a strong sense of social mission imparted at school, but display little interest in regional issues (Y. Nakata). In urban areas, the more elite the school is, the more the students view education in relative terms. Students of the top schools in the city center tend to display this tendency the most. However, students acquire academic ability in an objective and efficient manner and school education consequently serves to make a wider range of opportunities in life available.

In contrast to the ill-defined and vague academic purposes and futures of students in agricultural communities, the aims and avenues of urban students are diverse and well-defined and their aspirations realistic. As a result, disparities between regions tend to promote the continued production of an elite class and are linked to class divisions as well. Due perhaps to the principle of sexual equality, gender disparity is not easily apparent. However, it is not completely nonexistent and the degree to which gender disparity exists appears greater in farming villages (Y. Nakata).

Government policy makers, schools and students are aware of and concerned by problems arising from regional disparities. A multicultural society is one in which people encounter these problems in differing degrees of severity and with varying ability to overcome them. At present, however, a common direction in resolving these disparities can be discerned through modernization, urban migration, and securing greater opportunities.

(4) *Inapparent multiculturalism-a comparison of three schools in Japan*

A study of Japanese schools indicates that interest in international understanding and other cultures is marked by uniformity and follows a pattern. Foreign languages are studied

in order to continue higher education, to secure employment or for obligatory reasons, not for better and more meaningful communication. While this seems to indicate Japan is a mono-cultural society, in fact, order and ranking in Japanese society are based on differences that are finely modulated and different from each other to a minute degree. Japanese society thus only appears to be mono-cultural. The appearance of mono-culturalism suggests the potential to exclude other cultures. For those of other cultures, it contains the imperative to cast off the "foreign" culture or creates anxiety of possible exclusion. Society tightens its guard in the face of a different culture which represents possible disruption of the social order. However, modulated differences among people are the foundation of social order and are even necessary to the maintenance of this order. Academic education espouses the cultivation of individuality and the reason most people approve it is that it represents the key to securing a good or superior position within the social order. Deviation values (T-scores) are capable of assigning empirical and modulated differentials to a large number of people and function as a stabilizer of the apparent mono-culture.

T-scores appear to be an objective yardstick and represent disparities sanctioned by modern society. They serve to both order and rank as well as maintain social order. On account of their scientific justification, T-scores can suppress objection to the present social order. However, in the background that the ranking establishes the social order, pre-modern systems of segregation and communication styles that give rise to segregation can be seen at work. Ranking and ordering with apparent scientific justification is a mechanism that induces people to exclude those who reject assimilation with certain culture and social order. With being maintained in this mechanism, to reinforce a culture and social order through such a mechanism is the pre-modern form of segregation to those who are not familiar with or adapted to it.

There are two responses: either to exclude those who reject assimilation or to reduce the level of otherness to a degree which enables it to be incorporated into the cultural order, for example, by promoting the taking of a Japanese name. Slight cultural disparities are incorporated into the structure of the apparent mono-culture and employed to shore up the process of ranking and ordering. Since for all intents and purposes, Japan is supposed to be a mono-culture, it becomes the fault or responsibility of those who don't have a dominant culture in Japan if they suffer a disadvantage. A protest against discrimination, based on cultural disparities, for example, will be labeled as grounded in a bias or inferiority complex. In this manner, an apparent mono-culture uses its resources to preserve social order.

Although a survey was conducted at three schools (a major municipal school in Tokyo, a school with a large number of university-bound students in a provincial city, and a high school known for its internationally-oriented education), the four aspects by which a multicultural society can be characterized were not noted. "If the entrance examination system exerts such pressure on school education that it functions as a prescriptive factor that exceeds the effect of any of the above-mentioned four aspects, Japan is a society that is skillfully designed to appear mono-cultural. And there are many obstacles to getting out of such society" (M. Kakiuchi).

There was little difference among schools in the degree of multicultural experience in daily life. Overall, foreign language instruction was undertaken for the purpose of passing entrance examinations or attaining the next level of education. Students made no connection between the language studied and the culture of the linguistic sphere. In contrast, however,

only students attending schools with an emphasis on international understanding replied that their cultural awareness had changed through foreign language study. This corroborates the efficacy of curriculum reform in promoting multicultural understanding.

(5) *Youth and multiculture*

An analysis of the educational issues that are inseparably linked to the process of multiculturalism highlights the framework of awareness that is related to the economic conditions of a society and the majority's sense of values. As such, the educational problems of ethnic groups reveal the true nature of the majority or host society and peculiarities of its culture.

In the four countries studied, the survey confirmed that conditions of multiculturalism were not uniform. Nevertheless, the consciousness of youth toward cultures other than their own displayed many elements in common. When students were asked what country they would like a friend from, what country they were interested in, and what language they wanted to study in the future, the United States uniformly rated the most replies. Advanced countries of Europe followed with France at the top, followed by Japan. There was little interest in the Third World such as Asia and Africa.

The phenomenon of multiculturalism is becoming globalized; in spite of this or because of it, the United States holds great appeal for a large number of young people. At the very least, this was corroborated by the results of comparative surveys on the attitudes of young people in various regions in four countries. (The above analysis is based on a report by T. Ando, Y. Nakata, and M. Kakiuchi.)

III. *The key to Multicultural Understanding*

We were able to identify educational practices that point to several various key elements that are critical to multicultural understanding. Some of these attempts include a comprehensive course on man/woman and the environment in the People's Republic of China, extracurricular activities taking into consideration local conditions in School No. 100 in the city of Tianjin, an educational program that emphasizes interpersonal relations in Russia, regional survey activities conducted by Hind House School in England, the activities of the Afro-Caribbean Center and the Sheffield United Multicultural Education Service, and in Japan, the theme-based study of environmental issues in the social studies curriculum and educational activities such as field trips.

In studying and comparing these practices, it is clear that several factors are essential to a teaching method and curriculum for multicultural understanding. A look at these factors will point to general principles of multicultural education.

(a) Within the educational system, a guarantee to human development that minimizes disadvantage based on disparity. Bilingual and bicultural education on a reciprocal basis. Textbooks, materials, and teacher training.

(b) An atmosphere tolerant of difference.

Recognizing differences, a transformation of relationships between people and between people and nature based on discrimination and ranking to relationships based on cooperation and

equality.

(c) An integrated curriculum that promotes original synthesis of knowledge and enables a shift in the frame of awareness.

(d) Expressing of one's own culture and participating in the creation of a universal culture, including events. Participation of parents in local events.

(e) Collaboration in uncovering and defining knowledge (collaborative study, surveys, etc.).

(f) Planning and implementation of cross-cultural experience (field trips, excursion, etc.).

(g) Creation of a course focusing on global issues that precludes viewing one's own culture in absolute terms. (ex. environmental education)

(h) Creative extracurricular and non-school related activities for students.

In addition, this entails formulating an interdisciplinary curriculum from several relevant subjects and from subjects where course matter tends to overlap or be less clearly delineated. Taking B. Bernstein's explanation, this implies not reproduction of the existing culture, but organizing a curriculum that allows and encourages a rethinking of the culture itself. Human relationships that are the basis of teaching and teaching methods should be cooperative. Clearly it is possible to enrich cross-cultural experience and contribute to multicultural understanding not only through the transmission of knowledge in an academic setting but also through extracurricular and no-school related activities.

Understanding a different culture leads to a recognition that one's own culture stands to be further enriched by that understanding. It is at this point that one's culture can be put into a relative perspective and one is capable of respect for another culture as an internalized reaction. Success of multicultural education depends on whether it is capable of assisting this process. The stance that "intercultural or cross-cultural education will even come to mutually enrich both parties"[7] is of utmost importance. The issue is whether multicultural education will be able to promote the process of creative effort as students express their understanding of other cultures.

Furthermore, in order to plot the process of multiculturalism, it will be essential to conduct careful and thorough research on comparative social histories of education. An inquiry employing an historical perspective and one of comparative culture is necessary to analyze the disparities as indicated by children regarding the important aspects of intercultural exchange. Other critical themes are defining the movement of multiculturalism by plotting the four aspects that mark it, clarifying the dynamics at work in the curriculum, and shedding some light on the mechanisms under the ongoing multiculturalism of society by which the curriculum can be reformed in a flexible manner in order to guarantee the personal and scholastic development of all children and youth.

HITOTSUBASHI UNIVERSITY

---

[7] Lê Thành Khôi, p. 205.