Japanese education within the local community as a form of citizenship education

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1. Introduction

Some foreign people living in Japan go to Tohoku, the disaster area affected by a huge earthquake, to support the victims as volunteers. They strongly hope to do so, because they were always helped by volunteers at a Japanese language class in their local community. As the fact that some Japanese call foreign people as '*gaijin*' which literally means 'outside people' indicates, some people do not welcome foreign people in Japan. However, foreign people are members of Japanese society and, moreover, most of them seem to want to participate in the society.

It appears that Japanese language education helps foreign people take part in the society, and that language education might take the role of citizenship education. This study explores the roles of Japanese education in local community as citizenship education.

There are papers focusing on Japanese education in terms of citizenship education and language education policy in Europe Union (Fukushima: 2009; Fukushima: 2011). In addition, some researches emphasise the role of Japanese education for the formulation of civil society (Yamada 2002; Okazaki 2008). However, there are few papers addressing Japanese education activities in terms of citizenship education. Therefore, this study takes up two activities to explore the roles of Japanese education for citizenship education.

2. Immigration in Japan

Since the beginning of the 1990s the number of registered foreign residents has rapidly increased. The Japanese government accepted immigrants engaged in "unskilled labour" by amendment of Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act. Many people from South America whose ancestors moved there from Japan came to Japan to work (table 1 and 2). At the end of 2011, there were approximately 2 million registered foreign residents in Japan, which is 1.63％ of total population.

Table 1. the Number of Foreign Registrants 1990- 2011

Source: **the Ministry of Justice, "Number of Foreign Registrants in Japan"**

Table 2. Nationality of Foreign Registrants in Japan
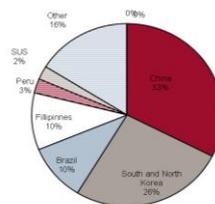
Source: **the Ministry of Justice**
http://www.moj.go.jp/nyuukokukanri/kouhou/nyuukokukanri04_00015.html

3. Japanese education in the local community

Since the mid-2000s, Japanese Government has set a goal of achievement of "*Tabunka Kyosei*" (multicultural coexistence) and promoted policies related to it. Japanese education for foreign residents in local community is seen as one of the most important policies (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications: 2006). Yet the policy seems to be not enough to help them to solve problems related to their life.

Before the government started the *tabunka kyosei* policy, activities called *Chiiki Nihongo Kyoiku* (Community Japanese Education) were started mainly by volunteers in local communities. Ikegami defined it as an 'activity in which local people voluntarily help "foreign people" in a local community, teaching Japanese and giving information relating to life in Japan'(2007: 105) and indicates the form of Community Japanese Education as follows:

1. location: not 'school' but informal,
2. person: the person who teaches is not a 'teacher' and the person who is taught is not a 'student,'

3. contents and approaches: aims toward activities to promote mutual understanding
4. goal: participants' self-realization eventually, the formation of multicultural coexistence society. (ibid.)

Theoretically, the aim of Japanese education in local community, the formation of a multicultural coexistence society through promotion of mutual understanding .

4. Two groups' activities

Many groups hold Japanese education activities in the local community. Although the aim is theoretically to accomplish a Multicultural society in which different people coexist, since most of the groups are voluntarily held, the aims and approaches are various. Here two groups are taken up to explore the roles of Japanese education in the local community as citizenship education in Japan. The reasons I focus on these two is that they aim to accomplish a multicultural society, and that they manage many activities as well as Japanese education, which appears to contribute to citizenship education.

Japanese courses of Musashino International Association (MIA)

Musashino International Association (MIA) in Tokyo is a group of the city council, which holds Japanese classes for foreign residents. One feature of the group is that foreign people actively create many activities such as speech contests, foreign language class for Japanese people, etc., which stem from their Japanese education classes. For example, one Japanese volunteer knew a learner from China whose Japanese competence was very low because of her age, but had much skill in drawing and recommended that she teach it, which helped her to participate in the community (Sugisawa: 2008)

Activities

- Japanese education classes (three types) and one-to-one Japanese learning
- Projects by foreign people (Speech contest, 'Let's learn about the world,' foreign language class, Chinese drawing class, cooking class and so on)

Thus, many activities are planned and managed along with learners' and volunteers' needs.

Noshiro Japanese Learning Group

Noshiro Japanese Learning Group is located in Noshiro City, Akita Prefecture (in the north east part of Japan). The feature of the activities is that the group organises many events in which local people are involved.

Activities

- Japanese education (twice a week)
- Excursions and short trips
- Cultural events (*Ohanami* [cherry-blossom viewing], *Kimono* [Japanese traditional clothes] lecture, *Bonorodi* [Japanese traditional dance] festival, cooking class and so on) (Fujita 2003)

Akita is the prefecture in Japan in which fewest foreign people live. As prejudice toward foreign people tends to be strong, the group tries to promote intercultural understanding, by holding numerous events.

Picture 1. Japanese class with children

(Picture taken by Shoko Miyano)

5. The roles of Japanese education in local community as citizenship education

A citizen can be defined as 'a person co-existing in a society' (O'Shea 2003: 4). On the other hand, Osler and Starkey suggest models of 'citizenship as status,' 'citizenship as feeling' and 'citizenship as practice' (Osler and Starkey: 2005). It appears that Japanese education in the local community promotes particularly the model of 'citizenship as practice' through the activities which emphasise 'co-existing.' This may be because of the fact that the local community is a locale where certain problems arise. Japanese language learners and Japanese volunteers tackle these problems together. The process of problems solving is as follows:

Knowing the problems which prevent 'co-existing'
Learning about the problems foreign people have, both foreign and local people recognise why the problems are caused. A problem may be caused by community structure. To reflect on the cause of problem is crucial to solve the problem and to accomplish a 'co-existing' society.

Finding the resources to solve the problems
Although the problems occur in the local community, the place where the resources to solve the problems can be found is also the local community. There are abundant human resources and cultural resources. For instance, a local festival can be a resource to solve the conflicts between local people and foreign people. Thus there are resources which

can be applied to solve these problems, contributing to the accomplishment of a 'co-existing' community.

Creating better culture through solving problems
Verhelst defines culture as 'all solutions *imparted*, *chosen* or *created* to various problems surrounding human beings' (Verhelst 1997: 54). If culture is created by solutions to problems, the activities might contribute to formation of a new culture through solving problems by the use of the resources in local community.

Japanese education can contribute to the promotion of 'citizenship as practice' by solving the problems which prevent people's 'co-existing.' Moreover, as they are aimed to promote mutual understanding, the activities can be citizenship education to the Japanese people teaching language as well as to the learners.

6. Conclusion

Japanese education in the local community can assume the role of citizenship education by solving problems with the aid of local resources, which might contribute to the formation of a new culture. As foreign and Japanese people co-operate in order to solve the problems, the activities can become citizenship education for both of them.

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