Global Citizenship Education from Across the Pacific: A Narrative Inquiry of Transcultural Teacher Education in Japan

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Abstract

Teachers and teacher educators play increasingly important roles in creating successful futures for both individuals and society in light of globalization, increasing diversity, and growing interdependency. Within the dialectic of global and local, opportunities now for transformational learning, fostering social justice and global citizenship are unprecedented. However, global citizenship education (GCE) that explores different conceptual, theoretical, and methodological considerations of decolonizing citizenship education in practice remains a challenge for teachers. Thus, this paper describes pedagogies of GCE within pre-service teacher education classes and high schools in Japan. Furthermore, transcultural stories of several teachers are shared. The research reported here is based on over two decades of experience as a teacher educator in Canada and Japan. There is a paucity of long-term research on teachers' reflections and experiences as they attempt to integrate GCE into their teaching, captured through personal narrative and story. Furthermore, due to a Western hegemony of knowledge, Eurocentric education, neo-colonialism, and neoliberal/conservative agendas in higher education, the voices of others outside North America are rarely heard. The research presented here attempts to fill this gap. This paper investigates these issues and teachers' personal practical and professional knowledge through narratives of transcultural journeys.

Introduction: **Marathons and High-Stakes Testing in Japan**[1]

It is not whether you win or lose but how you play the game… but not within Japanese schooling, rife with high-stakes testing and marathon races from an early age…

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[1] A previous version of this section was published in the Japan Times, January 27, 2009 (p.12).

Children run an 800 m "marathon" in kindergarten

Every year my children have participated in a marathon at our local elementary school in Saitama, Japan. While my daughter was one of the top runners, my eldest son consistently placed close to last every year, as he was overweight during his elementary school years. My son received a congratulatory "certificate of achievement" noting his participation and 79th place. He came to dread this annual ritual. It was damaging his fragile self-esteem and emerging identity by blatantly focusing on his physical condition. While students cheered him on at the finish line, inside he was hurting.

Many of my pre-service teacher education students have shared in this humiliation—one indicated the marathon was her worst memory of kindergarten! While proponents argue it builds character and is a motivator for improving physical fitness, most educators agree such methods are questionable in their efficacy and effectiveness. Thus, I hope my students, many who plan to become teachers, will lobby to abandon this practice. Nevertheless, school marathons continue throughout Japan and are a long-standing tradition. They will not disappear without controversy. Like undokai (sports day), it takes on Olympic proportions, involving the entire school and is widely attended by parents wielding their video cameras, cheering their children on to "victory". However, unlike undokai, the focus appears to be on winning, rather than participation and physical fitness.

On the other hand, the Japanese school system places so much emphasis on "equality" and uniformity there is little room for individuality. Athletic students must have some source of pride and accomplishment. Moreover, all children must eventually confront and overcome their weaknesses by finding their self-esteem in something they can excel in. It is up to teachers and parents to provide love and support to give children the strength to get them through the tough times, and instill a sense of pride, self-confidence and self-worth by recognizing and acknowledging what they are good at.

What is the purpose of the marathon? According to the Ministry of Education, policy goals of physical education include "achieving a society that is active in sports throughout life by giving everybody the opportunity to engage in sport anywhere, anytime and forever, regardless of physical strength, age, capability, interest and purpose" (Japanese Ministry of Education, 2000). But the marathon doesn't achieve these goals. Rather, it further alienates the physically challenged or below-average students, while glorifying the few winners. Why rank students? Wouldn't it be much better to have students run in heats with others of similar qualifying times? Then individuals could compete against themselves and aim to improve their personal best.

Are public displays of ranking of students done in other subjects? Not exactly, but in a manner of speaking, this is accomplished indirectly. Imagine an English essay competition where all students are ranked and those ranks clearly posted. My bilingual and highly literate son would easily come first—others would not stand a chance… That is unethical and unfair you say! Well, it is analogous to the marathon race. Interestingly, in junior high school, my son, as a native speaker of English, was barred from entering Saitama's English speech contest but was allowed to enter the recitation contest—and won! Furthermore, he has distinguished himself as one of the top students in his age cohort in academic subjects through numerous rigorous, competitive, comprehensive tests in preparation for high school entrance exams. These tests are not all mandatory but most students feel obligated to take them if they are serious about their studies. The results of these tests show one's ranking relative to others. Students are pitted against one another for coveted positions in the most prestigious public high schools and elite private schools. The pressure on students is considerable. In the final year of junior high, most students quit all extra-curricular activities and devote all their energy only to test preparation with the help of juku (cram schools), only focusing on a narrow range of cognitive skills. Thus, the ranking of students continues in junior high school with this infamous exam hell and

pervasive juku phenomena. Students are painfully aware of how they rank relative to their peers as the tests determine who enters the best high schools, leading to the best universities and ultimately the best jobs. Upon graduation from junior high (grade 9), students take various entrance exams to determine which high school they will attend. High school entrance exams then sort each age cohort into what amounts to an eight-to-ten tier high school ranking system (Rohlen, 1983, p. 308). Future occupational and status levels (elite, managerial, blue-collar, and so forth) are closely equated to this ranking. Further, at the point of high school entrance the entire age cohort is divided into three largely immutable classificatory distinctions: those leaving school, those entering vocational ranks, and those going on to academic high schools. Unfortunately, little has changed in the past 30 years since Rohlen's (1983) seminal study of Japan's high schools. Furthermore, in light of significant increases in the income gap since the 1970s, only wealthy parents can afford to send their children to the best juku from an early age, thus giving their children an unprecedented edge. The super elites literally buy a spot for their children into the best universities, bypassing university entrance exams. The Japanese education system is in effect helping to reproduce socioeconomic inequities. But is Japan not supposedly a meritocratic country built on social mobility and principles of equality? Unfortunately, high-stakes testing perpetuates the class discrepancies and systemic inequalities within Japanese society (Dateline Productions, 1985; Goodman & Phillips, 2003; Gordon, Fujita, Kariya, & LeTendre, 2009).

Throughout the world, there is a perceived crisis of "falling behind" as international achievement tests become standardized measures of success (Akiba & LeTendre, 2009; Baker & LeTendre, 2005). Teachers are increasingly under pressure to cover "core" content at the expense of arts, humanities, global citizenship education and social justice issues (Howe, 2013; Mundy & Farrell, 2008). Teaching to the test is becoming more common at all grade levels. But teachers should look beyond the official curriculum to gain a broader international perspective and to achieve a deeper cross-cultural understanding of our niche within the global village (Abdi & Shultz, 2008; Apple, 2011; Banks, 2001; Bates, 2006; Chan, 2008; Evans, Davies, Dean, & Waghid, 2008; Evans & Reynolds, 2004; Howe, 2003; Mundy & Manion, 2008; Nakamura, 2004; Noddings, 2005; Pike, 2008; Schwille, Dembele, & Schubert, 2007; Stromquist, 2009).

In my view, the marathon is analogous to the race to enter the best universities, the ranking of institutions and applicants, and the posting of entrance exam results. These are all things we

could do without. If all the money spent on private tutoring, juku, and other special lessons were funneled into public schooling, a great deal of meaningful learning could be fostered. It's time to focus on GCE and social justice issues rather than marathons and high-stakes tests. Who is up to the challenge of educational reform? I believe there is a small but growing cohort of progressive-minded transcultural teachers in Japan (Howe & Xu, 2013). For three such examples, please read Marina, Ken and Ishimori-sensei's stories following a brief description of my own classes.

Teacher Education in Japan Nurturing Collegial Relationships

The significant bonds or kizuna formed between teachers and students and amongst peers in Japan are noteworthy (Howe, 2013, Sakamoto, 2011). I have experienced this phenomenon of kizuna with my teacher education students through their four years of study together in small cohorts of about ten per year. For the past 8 years I have had the pleasure of learning side-by-side with my students at Utsunomiya University, a mid-sized national university just 100 km north of Tokyo in the capital city of Utsunomiya, Tochigi Prefecture. When I started back in the fall of 2005, I could not understand why my predecessor was in tears as she described to me her close relationship with her students. Now, I can understand her feelings as I have developed close ties with each cohort. I have witnessed the growth of these students from wide-eyed high school graduates to accomplished novice teachers. Every year the English Department and other departments within Utsunomiya University admit small groups of only about 10 students. A professor is assigned as a supervisor for each group. This cohort takes many classes together, developing significant bonds over four years of study. I have managed to keep in touch with many of my former students, including two featured here. Ken and Marina came to my office in May 2012 to have teacher-to-teacher conversations with me. It was nice catching up with them. Both are now married and have several years of teaching under their belts. They are no longer struggling novice teachers but are well on their way to becoming confident, experienced professionals. Nevertheless, as younger teachers they still face challenges.

Marina's Transcultural Journey

Marina first studied math in university. She graduated in 2004. Then she taught high school math in Chiba before joining the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in order to volunteer as an overseas teacher in Africa. In a bold move, she quit her job as a high school

math teacher to teach in Uganda as a volunteer with JICA. Marina spent nearly 2 ½ years in Uganda. Upon returning to Japan, Marina wondered how she could build on her teaching background and extensive cross-cultural experience. She wanted to find a way to incorporate her experiences with her teaching. This prompted her to go back to university to become an English teacher. After spending time abroad, Marina decided to go back to school, specifically to become an English teacher. One of the main reasons, Marina returned to school to study English was to enable her to integrate her life-changing experiences in her teaching. While living in Uganda, Marina gained a sense of all the things Japanese people take for granted—things such as clean drinking water, adequate supplies of basic necessities like food and shelter. Moreover, Marina came to better understand Japanese culture and her own self. Finally, she came to critically question gender differences prevalent in both African societies and Japanese society. Marina also came to appreciate the importance of early childhood education, literacy and education for all. She felt teaching English was the best way she could integrate her cross-cultural experiences with teaching for global citizenship in a curriculum that is strictly adhered to.

Marina was one of the most interesting students in my composition class and oral communication classes of 2008. In these classes she had the opportunity to reflect on her various transcultural experiences and to share them with her classmates. In the oral communication class she gave a moving presentation of her experience living abroad and teaching children in Uganda. In the writing class she wrote in a journal, and she wrote a paper entitled, "The challenges of students: The case of Uganda". In her essay she writes:

> Uganda is known as one of the developing countries in Africa. Life expectancy is
> [only] 46 years old. The literacy rate is 72.6 % – that is 147 among 192 countries. I
> stayed there for 2 years and 5 months. During my days, I asked many questions to
> my colleagues and my students. I also joined programs, which enhance teaching
> schools and exchanged opinions with teachers from other schools… It is important
> for readers to know the education problems for developing countries…. Education
> is very important to people. School is not the only place where people study but
> also get wisdom or knowledge for survival. (Marina, research paper abstract,
> submitted January 2008)

Marina was given the chance to reflect on her transborder experience in Uganda in various classroom settings and ways. In the composition class, she wrote in her journal and it became a

catalyst for her research paper. I also invited her to share her experiences through multi-media presentations to her classmates in other classes. Marina shared a JICA video and prepared a moving Power Point presentation with her own photos and text. She was happy to be able to teach others about the struggles of people in Uganda and about significant lessons in gender equity that are just as applicable to women in Japan as they are in Uganda.

Students' transborder experiences have the potential to change the curriculum, teaching and learning of others (Howe & Xu, 2013; Nakamura, 2004). Travel abroad for personal and professional growth is becoming an integral part of experience and education for an increasing number of students in our program. However, it is not yet an official policy, and the spaces for exchange students are rather limited. It is left up to students to make their own arrangements. This could be improved with reforms to teacher education programs to include a component of comparative and international education. As the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture (MEXT) has proposed changing the teacher education programs to a post-degree 2-year master's, there could be the provision for more transcultural education (Howe, 2013). I look forward to that prospect but it is many years if and when it becomes a reality.

Unfortunately, Marina was unable to obtain a job teaching English as she had hoped. Marina is now a math teacher at a private high school in Tochigi. She would like to use her extensive transcultural experiences in her teaching. However, she indicated it would be difficult to integrate her experiences into the math curriculum but possible in homeroom class. It is her first year to have a homeroom class. She's excited about this new teaching responsibility and opportunity.

Marina is happy teaching math, however she indicated she'd still like to teach English. After all, that was why she went back to school in the first place. In addition to Uganda, she has traveled to Tanzania, Rwanda and Vietnam. Marina indicated these international cross-cultural experiences are by far the most significant critical events, shaping her personal, practical and professional knowledge. Marina's experience in Uganda has had a profound affect on her teaching philosophy. One interesting point is that Marina indicated that there is a problem with English teachers who have a fear of talking to the foreigners including the Assistant Language Teacher (ALT). It appears that many of the senior English teachers at this prestigious private high school continue to do things the old way. This became evident in my conversation with Ken, another former student who happens to be teaching with Marina.

Ken's Struggle Against the Status Quo

Ken was born in Chicago and lived there for 2 years before returning to Japan as a youngster. This brief period during his formative years gave Ken an ear for English. He was among the most promising students of his cohort. I taught him from 2006 ~ 2010 and thus became very familiar with him. Ken had excellent English pronunciation and communication skills. He was a natural. Ken scored nearly 100% on my listening tests in first year… almost unheard of! Ken took a number of courses with me including communication courses in first year, a writing course in second year and a seminar in third year. The seminar allows students to reflect on social issues and to give a presentation on a topic relating to global citizenship education. I recall one striking incident where Ken made a profound comment during a seminar. After one of Ken's peers made a presentation on street children in the Philippines, the students were asked, "Has your impression of street kids changed as a result of my presentation?" Ken's response was something like "Thank you for your presentation. Yes, my attitude and opinion has radically changed. I used to think street kids were someone else's problem, but now I see that we as a society need to care for our children. We need to help others who are in need. These children are on the streets for various reasons and not because they are delinquents or misfits." The general consensus among this group of students was they agreed with Ken's reflection.

How the presentation changed my way of thinking

Before listening to the presentation about street children, I "knew" there are street children in the world. I "knew" their hardships, I "knew" we need to help them. However, after the presentation, I found myself confused because I thought I didn't know anything about street children.

My first encounter with the word 'street children' was a charity drive somewhere in Japan. They were telling that street children are living hard lives, and that we should help them. I raised a small amount of money, and I felt I did the right thing.

Did I learn further about street children after raising money? No. Did I learn anything about their countries? No. Did I tell this sad story in the real world to others? No. But I felt I knew about street children.

From this experience, I thought the presentation would give me little information about street children. However, my expectation was totally wrong. When the presentation started, the first impact on me was to see the pictures of street children. Look at their neighborhood, look at their food, and look at their clothing. But the most impressive thing was their eyes. They seemed to live positively even in such a hardship. What about children in Japan? We live in a comfortable situation. However, 300 junior high school and high school students commit suicide every year in Japan (announced by the National Police Agency). Other research shows that around 10% of the high school students in Japan experienced Para suicide (announced by PTA joint association)

I thought about what I should do when I became a teacher. I should tell students the reality in the world. **Studying is not the priority, but knowing about the world, and if possible, doing something for the world is the top priority. My determination to be a teacher became stronger**. [Email October 9, 2013]

Since graduation in 2010, Ken has been teaching English to junior and senior high school students at the same private high school as Marina. He enjoys his job and has survived the critical period of the first 3 years. But his first few years were not easy. Ken recalls that there was a huge difference between the carefree life of a student and the responsibilities of teaching. In addition, he is now married. So, it is no exaggeration to say that Ken's life has changed significantly since I knew him as a student.

Ken laments that all his senior colleagues still use grammar translation methods of teaching English. These teachers still teach English without using it in any practical way. Most of the English teachers at this elite private school are still embarrassed to talk with foreigners! Ken prefers a more communicative approach but he has to be careful about what he says and does in order not to upset his senior colleagues. Ken is among the youngest of the teachers at his school. He is keenly aware of his place in the teaching hierarchy.

Hardships in my life as a teacher

Becoming a teacher, I experienced some difficulties in my first teacher life. Of course many students "get a jolt" after being employed. However, my one was not temporal, but a long-running frustration. I was somewhat confident about English

pronunciation and communication skills, both of which were almost useless in high school education. The school I attended was concentrating on grammatical explanations and translations. Therefore, I had to learn again and again in my first year at school. My slow lessons prevented me from teaching communicative English to students. The textbook had so many interesting topics, but there was no time for me to talk about such topics.

From the second year, I started to put communication activities in my lessons, which only got negative assessments from teachers in my school. Many teachers seemed to think that communication activities are fun, but that's what it's all about. It's useless for studying. Thus, I started to talk about additional information about the topics in the textbook. I talked about street children when we learned about Bono, a famous singer and a benefactor. After the lesson some of the students told me how much their heart bled. At the end, one student said, "Today I learned something more important than English." That comment made me confused, but I was happy to hear that. [Email October 9, 2013]

Now let's turn our attention to a veteran high school English teacher with a passion for teaching GCE (see also Nakamura, 2004, 2006).

Ishimori-sensei's Global Citizenship Education for High School Students[2]

Here, I describe a unique high school-based curriculum pioneered by an English teacher and graduate student within a high school in Sendai, Japan, with a focus on global citizenship education. This is a rare program within a highly standardized and uniform education system. In Ishimori's words (Arimoto & Ishimori, 2013),

An education for global citizenship has never been more necessary, as globalization continues to be an important determinant in many aspects of life. In a fast-changing global and interdependent world, education for global citizenship should and can help young people lead fruitful lives, while enabling them to develop their knowledge, skills, and sound values needed for creating a better world. (p. 308)

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[2] While Marina and Ken are former students of mine based in Utsunomiya, Hiromi Ishimori is a former graduate student of my colleague, Masahiro Arimoto at Tohoku University. She is also a co-author of a paper including some of the data reported here (Arimoto & Ishimori, 2013).

In 2010, the Global Citizenship (GC) elective course was offered to students in Ishimori's English course of study. In this class, students learned about various global issues such as poverty, human rights, peace and conflict, and sustainable development. The course was designed to foster students' 21st century skills (critical thinking, creativity, and multiliteracies) through student-centered activities including group discussions, participatory workshops, role-playing, and presentations. After one year, students' global awareness grew drastically, and they were enlightened as global citizens (Ishimori, 2012).

Ishimori (2012) identified three key components in her framework for GCE: 1) teaching/learning contents; 2) teaching/learning style; and 3) intended (desired) outcomes & assessment. Furthermore, GCE is interactive, inquisitive while building on learners' preconceptions. Thus, Ishimori uses a wide variety of formative assessments, including tests, worksheets, assignments, essays/reports, presentations and portfolios as well as measures of learning attitudes and participation. Also, interaction between the students and the teacher (facilitator) is highly valued in this class. These are the elements of Assessment for Learning (Arimoto & Ishimori, 2013). Students are not evaluated merely for grading. Rather, they are encouraged to learn for their future. Multi-assessment with various approaches supports and enhances student learning for better lives.

Students' reflections at the end of the GC course led Ishimori (Arimoto & Ishimori, 2013) to identify five major themes: 1) Connections between the world and the individual; 2) Improvement of thinking skills; 3) The spirit of inquiry and interest; 4) A wide view and multi-angled perspective; and 5) Self-searching, self-exploration. The following quotes from students exemplify their learning:

> I'd like to study global issues deeply in the university, although I was not interested in going to the university before, because the GC lesson opened my eyes. And I want many people to know various global issues, and I will try my best to solve them. I really appreciate this GC class.

> In every lesson I could realize that my view had been broadened and that I had improved myself.

> Not knowing is a fear. I learned in this class that this is the most important subject for us, the young generation who will make the future. If I had not taken this class, I think I

would not have known this in my life.

In addition to a lot of knowledge and skills that I could acquire in the class, my biggest achievement, I think, is a mental change in myself. My view of the world and life has broadened. Now I understand there is a meaning in every event happening in the world, and I'd like to create ideas to solve the issues. I gained such a positive attitude and wide view and a will to action.

Since there were many opportunities to express my opinions, now I am able to state my opinions and take in others opinions as well. I gained confidence in myself.

I deepened my thinking and how I will live, through knowing the reality and the problems the world are facing. There are a number of people who don't notice that humans harm humans and destroy the earth. I was one of them. Now I do know it is very important to know, learn and think about the issues and take action, and that's what we should do. [translated from Japanese by Ishimori]

The learning attained by students is not just about knowledge acquisition but also included various skills, attitudes and values. What's more, in a focus group discussion with seven students, four months after the GC class ended, the core elements of learning remained deeply ingrained in the students. For example, the students mentioned things like, "Now I don't deny those personalities whose values differ from my own." "I am able to see thing not only from my personal view but also from the views of the person that I talk to, or even a third party." "It is very enjoyable to learn and know new things now, so I buy books and learn by myself." "I have found what I want to learn in the university." "I can connect many kinds of issues in my brain and think them out well." "After the lesson, I feel my troubles are very small." "I've got to imagine the person's situation, and understand the pain." "I understand how precious it is to learn at school, so I enjoy studying now." These comments provide evidence that what they learned in the GC class has taken root in them and has been utilized in their daily lives (Arimoto & Ishimori, 2013).

Conclusion

Research has consistently shown that teachers tend to teach in the same way they were taught to as students (Britzman, 1991; Lortie, 1975; Zeichner & Gore, 1990). Traditionally, in Japanese high schools, the curriculum has been test-driven and teachers have tended to use a didactic, lecture-style of teaching (Arimoto & Ishimori, 2013; Rohlen, 1983). Generally, students' main activity in class is passively listening to the teacher. This has to change! There is hope for the future if enough prospective teachers can experience lessons in global citizenship education and social justice issues. A case in point, the educational philosophy and classroom teaching of Marina and Ken reflect the lessons they participated in as students in my teacher education courses. Moreover, Ishimori-sensei's GC lessons described here show very clearly what is possible when teachers think outside the box to actively engage students in GCE. In these transformational lessons, students are quite busy with various activities including listening, thinking, speaking, reading, discussing, exchanging ideas or opinions, writing, and working together in groups with their friends. Through various activities in group work or pair work in class, students are expected to find something meaningful and notice by themselves rather than being forced to learn something by memorizing facts or regurgitating information on a test. This learning process involves critical thinking and a with-it-ness or kizuki (Sakamoto, 2011) as students and teachers are actively confronting their preconceptions with different ideas and thinking deeply about their learning.

Indeed, reflection is a major part of learning in Japan (Akiba & LeTendre, 2009; Britton, Paine, Pimm, & Raizen, 2003; Rohlen & LeTendre, 1996; Shimahara & Sakai, 1995). Comprehensive, ongoing professional development is integrated into the routines of teachers in Japan and extends far beyond pre-service teacher education (Howe, 2005). It includes self-training (teacher initiated study circles, action research and research lessons), system-wide training, and university-based training (Padilla & Riley, 2003). A major component of self-training is kônaikenshû (school- based professional development), which is a teacher driven, continuous process that nearly all schools in Japan are engaged in (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999). Teachers work in grade-level groups, in subject-matter groups and in special committees. One of the most common features of kônaikenshû is jugyô kenkyû, widely known as lesson study outside Japan (Perry & Lewis, 2008). While action research is characterized by individual teachers conducting research in their own classrooms with the goal of improving teaching,

kenkyû jugyô (research lessons) are a highly public activity. Research lessons are often videotaped and may involve many teachers planning, observing and learning together. Furthermore, research lessons are usually a significant part of the more extended lesson study process, which is widely practiced by groups of teachers in Japanese schools. Lesson study provides an effective means to improve instruction based on careful planning, observation, reflection and collaboration amongst teachers (Lewis, 2002).

Thus, GCE can potentially spread through active and systemic professional development activities of progressive teachers throughout Japan. It is hoped that the next generation of teachers will pioneer further innovations in GCE. The teachers highlighted here show great promise in breaking free from the status quo of curriculum, teaching and learning in Japan. Through sharing these teacher stories from East Asian perspectives, it is a modest step to decolonizing global citizenship education.

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