

Introducing Experience of Intercultural Awareness into Early Childhood Education

A Case Study of the Planning and Implementation of Yamaguchi City's Rainbow Program in 2019

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Introduction

This paper is a case study report on a program for introducing first-hand experience of intercultural awareness into early childhood education in Japan. As exemplified by the large numbers of tourists from other countries which started visiting Japan in the second decade of the 21st century, Japan continues its slow evolution into becoming a more international society. However, away from Japan's major cities and famous sightseeing locations, there are substantial semi-rural areas of the country in which the internationalization of Japan is, as yet, unlikely to be experienced by the local people on a daily basis. The International Outreach Committee of the Yamaguchi Prefectural Board of Education wanted to design a program of intercultural awareness which could be implemented in kindergartens in semi-rural areas of Yamaguchi City. The aim of the program would be to offer children an opportunity for education in intercultural awareness which they would otherwise not encounter. This paper will describe the objectives of the program and the planning process for it before proceeding to describe the activities undertaken in the project. Finally, the paper will examine the practicalities of the implementation of this program in regard to issues highlighted from a previous initiative for early childhood intercultural awareness in Yamaguchi City.

1. Background to the Rainbow Program

1.1 Intercultural Awareness Education in Japan

In July 1996, the Japanese Ministry of Education published a report from the 15th Central Council for Education entitled "A Vision of Japanese Education for

the 21st Century"^[1]. The report stated that education in intercultural awareness is important because it encourages children to develop the ability to understand, respect, and coexist with different cultures. In addition, the report stated that education in intercultural awareness helps children to confirm their identity as individuals and it also increases their communication skills. Although some effort has been made in Japan to promote education in intercultural awareness since the publication of that report, the activities undertaken in schools have mostly been limited to providing children with information about other countries and cultures, along with occasional experience of intercultural differences when opportunities for contact with people from other countries were available.

It seems that Japan's attempts to promote education in intercultural awareness have not produced satisfactory results in terms of raising children who can go on to lead proactive lives in international society. A paper published by the Ministry of Education in August 2005 under the title of "Report of the Investigative Committee for the Promotion of Intercultural Awareness in Elementary and Secondary Education – Nurturing Human Resources for Life in International Society"^[2] recommended that, within Japanese elementary and secondary education, there should be a system for education in intercultural awareness that reflected the reality of issues within intercultural awareness from various angles in order to develop human resources for an internationalized society.

The report also proposed measures for enhancing education in intercultural awareness. At the level of elementary and secondary education, the report recommended that education in intercultural awareness

should aim to provide all children with an attitude of acceptance towards different cultures and people belonging to different cultures, and an ability to coexist with them. Secondly, education in intercultural awareness should help in the confirmation of children's own identity as rooted in the traditions and culture of their own country. Finally, it should encourage children to develop an attitude of wanting to express their own ideas and opinions for themselves and then have the skills to take appropriate action. The report also stated the necessity for nurturing in children the basic attitudes and skills which are required for taking a global viewpoint and taking a proactive role within global society.

Following on from the reports referenced above in 1996 and 2005, the Ministry of Education's commentary relating to the sections of the Elementary School Course of Study Guidelines in 2017 concerning Foreign Language Activities and Foreign Language Classes contained the following paragraph. "In the current revision of the Course of Study Guidelines, foreign language activities will be introduced from the middle two grades of elementary school, and by focusing on listening and speaking activities, children will have increased motivation for future study of foreign languages because children will already feel a degree of familiarity with them. On top of that, in the final two grades of elementary school, English reading and writing activities can be introduced, step by step, in line with the appropriate stage of children's development. In addition to making language lessons more comprehensive and systematic, this will also be important for making connections with the study of English at junior high school."^[3] The course of study guidelines published in 2017 were built on the foundations of the previous course of study guidelines published in 2008, and claimed that children's motivation for studying English could be increased by introducing foreign language activities from the middle grades of elementary school.

1.2 Situation in Yamaguchi City

In the case of Yamaguchi City, the Second Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education in Yamaguchi City argued that if education is to become a force which can open doors to the future, "opportunities and activities must be introduced into learning which will nurture the communication skills which children need in order for them to discover a future for themselves within a

changing social environment and a society of diverse values."^[4] The plan identifies that it will be necessary to create a full course of learning which nurtures a global point of view and full opportunities to develop children's communication skills if this is to be achieved.

In light of these developments, the International Outreach Committee of the Yamaguchi City Board of Education decided to investigate the practicality of providing four kindergartens in Yamaguchi City with a program of intercultural awareness education that would be suitable for preschool children. The program was developed with reference to a previous initiative organized by Yamaguchi City called the ABC Program which had provided an opportunity for preschoolers to do some fun activities with international university students. The program was intended to help preschoolers develop a rudimentary awareness of intercultural concepts and also to provide a template for the future implementation of preschool intercultural awareness activities at other kindergartens.

The objective for the Rainbow Program was that through interaction with international university students, preschool children would acquire a proactive attitude in their interactions with people of different cultures and people with different lifestyle values. Also, that the children would acquire an attitude of tolerance towards diverse cultural values, and finally that the children would acquire a sensitivity to human rights from a global viewpoint. The Rainbow Program aimed to achieve these objectives through repeated exposure to intercultural experiences.

A further objective for the Rainbow Program was that it would not simply be an opportunity for preschool children to engage in play activities with people from different cultures. On the contrary, the Rainbow Program aimed to nurture in children a broadminded outlook and to give them the skills to be able to lead proactive lives in future society in which the social environment has changed in accordance with globalization. In order to achieve this objective, the program was designed to include opportunities for learning about the culture and lifestyle customs of the international students' home countries. The preschoolers were also given time to share their feelings about what they had learned or experienced for the first time as a result of having communication with the international students. Finally, the Rainbow Program was designed to give the preschool

children the opportunity to become sensitive to the sounds and rhythms of different foreign languages.

1.3 Laying the foundations for foreign language learning at elementary school

At the preschool level, education in intercultural awareness can provide an opportunity for children to come into contact with a variety of people, cultures and lifestyles and to enrich their sensitivity to communication. Getting to know people from different countries and cultures helps to nurture an attitude of proactive involvement and this can develop into a realization of the necessity for communication with a diverse range of people for life in a globalized society.

After leaving kindergarten, and having successfully negotiated the first two grades of elementary school, students in the 3rd and 4th grade of elementary school can then experience more intensive exposure to a foreign language by focusing on listening and speaking. At this stage, children can learn the ways in which communication can be accomplished by using a foreign language, with the objective of fostering the attitude of tolerance which is necessary for communication to take place. Finally, in the 5th and 6th grades of elementary school children can develop their personal skills for communication by using a foreign language. This can be achieved by children making use of their intercultural knowledge to improve their communication skills by listening, speaking, reading and writing in a foreign language. A planned program through which children develop intercultural awareness in manageable steps can give them the experience and knowledge they need to be confident in, and familiar with, intercultural communication before they become teenagers.

The objective of the Rainbow Program was for the kindergarten children to start to get used to interaction with people from different countries and it was therefore desirable any activities used in the program should enrich the children's sense of communication at that stage of intellectual development. The Rainbow Program planning committee therefore decided that the activities should be concerned with aspects of life that the kindergarten children could relate to easily, and also that the activities should appeal to the five senses of the children.

2. Format of the Rainbow Program

The Rainbow Program was implemented as a series of three sessions at which the children from four kindergartens in a semi-rural district of Yamaguchi City would have the chance to interact with a variety of international students from Yamaguchi University. The four kindergartens involved in the program frequently hold events where the children go to play at one of the other kindergartens, so although the children were used to mixing and playing with children from the other kindergartens, it did mean that a number of the children were experiencing intercultural awareness in an environment which was not so familiar to them. It was therefore decided that the activities of the Rainbow Program should aim to replicate the atmosphere of the other events which the four kindergartens held together and that the activities should be introduced within the framework of the regular daily experiences of the children. This meant that the children's lack of familiarity with the international students, the guest teachers from Yamaguchi University, and the concept of communication in a foreign language, would be counterbalanced by familiarity with their surroundings, their regular teachers, and the kindergarten environment, and the result would be the smooth introduction of the intercultural awareness program into the kindergarten curriculum.

The Rainbow Program planning committee also decided that it would be better to introduce intercultural communication activities to the kindergarten children by starting with the children all together as a large group, before dividing into smaller groups for direct communication with an international student. The end result was that the children were given a chance to communicate individually with one of the international students. This progression from a large group to individual interaction was designed to make the children feel more comfortable in a situation which would be unfamiliar to them at first.

On each of the three occasions when the Rainbow Program activities were scheduled, the children taking part were always the same (with the exception of absentees due to illness) however, the timing for the program coincided with university tests and also the end of term. The international students from Yamaguchi University where therefore extremely busy and the same international students could not always come to

each session. However, this provided ideal conditions for the kindergarten children to encounter a broad spectrum of students. On the other hand, the children might feel it unsettling because of meeting different international students each time. It was therefore decided that each program should follow a rigid pattern of activities which would be repeated each time. It was hoped that this would be an effective way of helping the children feel comfortable when dealing with unfamiliar adults. Activities which appealed to all five senses were also used to increase the educational effectiveness of interaction with people from a different culture.

3. Content of the Three Rainbow Program Sessions

A decision was taken that the leader for the activities would be Associate Professor Tokuko Kawasaki, one of the authors of this paper and a member of the faculty of education at Yamaguchi University, whose area of research includes early childhood education. It was also decided that, in order to be of educational benefit, the activities should be conducted mainly in Japanese, but with English and other languages used at appropriate times but sparingly. On the one hand, it was felt that children of kindergarten age would not respond positively (through lack of understanding) to all instructions being given in English, and on the other hand, none of the international students invited to take part were native speakers of English, so it was important to avoid the possibility of suggesting that intercultural awareness and intercultural communication are necessarily linked to the ability to understand English. Table 1 shows a breakdown of the international students who participated in the Rainbow Program sessions. As has been mentioned, none of the students were native speakers of English but that was simply a reflection of the students who chose to take part in the program. Native speakers of English would have been welcome to take part and in future years it is hoped that they will do so.

As shown in Table 2, the activities followed a similar pattern for each session. Each session started with a finger-play song sung in Japanese and with the international students copying the actions and singing along too. This activity was used to help the children settle down before introducing activities that they had not experienced before. After one finger-play song in Japanese, the children were introduced to a very simple

Table 1. Nationalities of student participants

1 st Session	2 nd Session	3 rd Session
Taiwan 10 China 4 South Korea 1 Hungary 3 Germany 1 France 2	Taiwan 10 China 4 South Korea 1 Hungary 3 Germany 1 France 2	France 1 Indonesia 2 China/Taiwan 11
21 students	21 students	14 students

finger-play song in English. The children were not expected to sing all the words, but to copy the actions and to join in with the song where they felt able to do so. The kindergarten staff were also encouraged to participate in order to help the children feel the closeness of a different culture without hesitation.

After the finger-play songs, there was an activity given the name of *minna-chigatte*, *minna ii* (everyone is different, everyone is wonderful) named after a phrase in the poem “A Little Bird, a Bell, and Me” by Misuzu Kaneko. This activity used very general topics, such as likes and dislikes in food, and mixed the children up with their teachers and the international students. Three teachers made a choice of a favourite fruit, by saying, for example “I like apples”, “I like grapes”, or “I like melon”, and the children and the international students could then choose which group to join based on their own preference. The activity was designed to make the children realize that they shared some common ground with the international students even though the international students came from different countries. Also, the children could see that not all the international students made the same choices and therefore that differences between people are not limited to nationality. This activity was a good example of the essence of intercultural awareness and understanding, and hopefully helped the children to realize that people from different countries and cultures are just like themselves. The activity also has obvious potential for use in intercultural awareness activities with elementary school students especially if the children are encouraged to try saying simple sentences in English for themselves. A different topic for the *minna chigatte*, *minna ii* section was used in each session.

The next section was used as a brief introduction to the countries represented by the international students. This activity highlighted the number of nationalities present and a globe was used to help the children understand that

the international students came from different countries. In the second session, this activity was used to introduce different styles of body language in different cultures and the different onomatopoeia that different cultures use to mimic bodily functions such as sneezing or yawning. In the third session the international students taught the children the words for colours in their various languages.

As an interlude, a storybook was read to the children in Japanese, with page-by-page translation into English. A different storybook was read in each session. The storybook for the first session was “Mr. Elephant Goes for a Walk”, for the second session it was “Who isn’t asleep yet?”, and for the third session it was “The Three Billy Goats Gruff”. In each case the children could experience first-hand the different rhythms of English as opposed to Japanese.

In the fifth activity in each session, the children were

split into small groups of four or five, with each group having one or two international students with whom to interact. The international students showed the children pictures of items such as their home, traditional costume, or a traditional breakfast in their country. The children practiced saying the words taught to them by the international students.

Section six was everybody joining together to sing the English song “This is the way I brush my teeth” to the tune of “Here we go round the mulberry bush”. This song was chosen because it was a song the children were already familiar with in Japanese and there were easy actions for them to learn and copy while mimicking some of the words sung by the leader in English.

Finally, the kindergarten children had a chance to say good-bye to the international student to whom they had been talking and to play rock, paper, scissors with them.

Table 2: Objectives and Activities for Rainbow Program Sessions

Session (60 minutes)	Objective	Activities
1 st session Jan. 15, 2019	Attract children’s interest in people from other cultures through contact with, and learning about, international students and a variety of cultures.	1 Finger-play song 2 Minna chigatte, minna ii 3 Introduction to the countries international students come from 4 Storybook reading 5 Greetings in different languages 6 Sing and dance together 7 Goodbye
2 nd session Jan. 21, 2019	For children to become familiar with the activities pursued in the Rainbow Program by further contact with, learning about, and interaction with, international students and a variety of cultures.	1 Finger-play song 2 Minna chigatte, minna ii 3 Introduction to breakfast customs in international students’ countries 4 Storybook reading 5 Body language in different cultures 6 Sing and dance together 7 Goodbye
3 rd session Feb. 7, 2019	For children to enjoy the Rainbow Program activities through being proactive in contact with, learning about, and interacting with, international students and a variety of cultures.	1 Finger-play song 2 Minna chigatte, minna ii 3 International students talk about their countries 4 Storybook reading 5 Colours in different languages 6 Sing and dance together 7 Goodbye

4. Conclusion

Kawasaki (Kawasaki, 2018)^[5] proposed the following four questions in relation to a previous initiative for introducing intercultural awareness to early childhood education. It is now worthwhile considering these four questions in the light of what has been learned through the implementation of the Rainbow Program.

Question 1: What should be the objective for education in intercultural awareness in early childhood, and what should constitute the content of any program for teaching it?

As has been described in this paper, the Rainbow Program was designed to provide preschool children with the opportunity to have communication with a variety of people in the hope that the children would realize the value of connecting with different people. Another aim was for children to feel friendship with new people by experiencing differences in culture between people, and more importantly, by sensing the pleasure of doing activities with different people and learning to trust them. Further research is planned to analyze these activities in terms of results, but for the Rainbow Program in 2019 it can be said that the three sessions proceeded smoothly with no obvious difficulties and with active participation by the preschool children and the international students.

Question 2: What kind of activities and what type of program for education in intercultural awareness is suitable for Japanese preschool children, taking into consideration the current recognition given to intercultural awareness by Japanese children and their parents? Also, what is a suitable environment for doing such activities?

As reported in the case study, the basic materials used for the activities were games, songs, and stories with which the children were already familiar, and the children were encouraged to experience how they are the same or different to other people; this probably helped the children to enjoy meeting new people. Furthermore, during the first Rainbow Program session the children were carefully observed while doing the activities and due consideration was paid to how each activity developed into the next. For example, by making a small change to an activity performed by all the children and international students together, it was possible to develop a seamless introduction into the next activity without the need for the children's enjoyment to be stopped. The organizers also made efforts to treat the international

students as the equals of the children sharing the same space. This meant that, rather than feeling that something special was taking place, the children could meet the international students on their own terms as part of their daily life in the kindergarten.

Question 3: The challenge of creating a system so that international university students can take part in activities with preschool children. Who is the contact for the students and what role will students take? Who is responsible for giving international students any instruction in advance of joining in intercultural awareness activities?

In the case of the Rainbow Program one of the organizing committee members was Associate Professor Saeri Yamamoto of the Faculty of Global and Science Studies at Yamaguchi University. Associate Professor Yamamoto was able to incorporate participation in the Rainbow Program as an element in one of the courses she teaches to international students at the university. Since she was able to give the international students instructions about the content of the Rainbow Program in advance of the students taking part, a large number of students felt able to take part. The students were well-prepared before going to the kindergarten and brought with them objects and photographs in order to talk about their country and culture. Showing the children examples of national dress or banknotes and coins from another country stimulated their interest in the students' countries.

This kind of cooperation between the city and the university was another objective of the program and also demonstrates the potential for the city to make connections with university education.

Question 4: Since the program was designed to act as a link between the city and local areas, and since there is a desire to see the Rainbow Program continue and develop from now on, how much of the burden will be taken by the city and who will carry out the activities in the future?

One consideration in terms of asking international university students to take part in a program such as the Rainbow Program is how the students would travel to the venue. In the case of the Rainbow Program in 2019, the Yamaguchi City Board of Education provided a microbus to transport the students to the kindergarten. Providing suitable conditions which allow people to participate is an important factor in the smooth implementation of this

kind of program.

In addition, before each session a meeting was held between the principals of the four kindergartens involved together with the university teachers who would lead the activities and a representative from the Yamaguchi City Board of Education. This helped everyone to understand the objectives of the program and develop trust in each other. This sharing of information was an important factor in the smooth-running of the program and the involvement of the Board of Education in any future program will be vital to its success.

In the case of the Rainbow Program in 2019 the responsibility for leading the three sessions fell on members of the teaching staff at Yamaguchi University. However, if the format of the Rainbow Program is to be implemented in a larger number of kindergartens then members of staff at kindergartens or other nursery schools will need to prepare activities which they themselves can use to introduce preschool children to intercultural awareness.

The answers to some of these four questions remain unclear. However, the success of the Rainbow Program suggests that if there is the desire to continue with intercultural awareness activities at the preschool level then none of the potential difficulties are insurmountable. The authors of this paper plan to conduct further research into the outcomes of the Rainbow Program by conducting interviews with staff at the kindergartens involved and subsequently to refine their understanding of the matters arising from the implementation of the program.

Plans are currently being made to implement the Rainbow Program at two kindergartens in the current academic year and it is hoped that the final result will be a program that kindergartens will be able to implement by themselves, independently of university involvement after having recruited suitable people from different cultural backgrounds.

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概要

幼児教育に国際理解経験を導入すること

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本論文では、幼児期における国際教育の機会を提供する活動についてのプログラムを開発するために、実際に幼稚園で行った実践事例についてまとめた実践報告書である。

この取り組み自体は、Y市の教育委員会社会教育課と大学が協働しながら、幼児期の子どもが遊びを通して、国や文化の違いを感じ、また、それらを超えていろいろな人と一緒に過ごすことの楽しさや信頼感を感じる心地よさが味わえるような国際教育としての体験を重ねる機会を提供するものである。こうした幼児期からの活動は、国際社会をも見据えた人とのかかわりに必要な感覚を体得していくことを支える幼児期に必要な教育であり、本活動実践がその1つの方向性であることを提案するものである。

キーワード：幼児期、国際教育、留学生、人とのかかわり、教育プログラム