A Proactive Approach Toward Intercultural Communication:

An Experimental Course in a Teacher Training Program at Yamaguchi University

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Introduction

The Ministry of Education and Science announced the revised *Course of Study* for primary and lower secondary schools in 2017. In this curriculum, while mutual understanding and collaboration with diverse people are emphasized in moral education as a special subject, which was newly introduced in 2015, the purpose of English language learning has shifted to the acquisition of skills to actually use the language rather than the acquisition of linguistic knowledge per se (Ministry of Education and Science, 2018a; 2018b; 2018c; 2018d). Learners are encouraged to express their thoughts and feelings in English and at the same time, to be aware and considerate of cultural differences between them and the people they are communicating with (Ministry of Education and Science, 2018c).

In addition to this mainstream curriculum reform, there was a previous significant change in school curriculum policy—the recognition of the special curriculum for students in need of Japanese language support. This policy was introduced in 2014 and has been reflected in the revised course of study, although it is not explicitly described. Students in need of Japanese language support include Japanese and non-Japanese children who have difficulty understanding Japanese language for reasons such as growing up abroad or having parents who were not native speakers of Japanese.

The aforementioned examples indicate that Japanese school education needs to diversify in two ways: to enable Japanese children to communicate in English and accommodate students in need of Japanese language support in regular state school classrooms. Thus, the revised course of study is based on the premise that no matter where learners go, daily interaction with culturally diverse people is indispensable.

This recognition of a diversifying society, however, has not always been in Japan's curriculum policy despite the fact that Japan's post-World War II school education was aimed at democratizing the country. The purpose of this paper is to explore the transition of the recognition of intercultural competencies within the context of Japanese school education and the potential for pre-service teacher training which can help future teachers acquire intercultural competences in its contemporary meaning. The paper will analyze how the national curriculum treated the topic of intercultural awareness and competences in the post-World War II period. Then, a discussion concerning the influence of the recently revised school curriculum on pre-service teacher training is followed by the introduction of a practicum established by a multi-national group of teacher educators to provide university students with first-hand experience of intercultural communication and discuss what participants learned from their interaction with students from other countries.

1. The meaning of intercultural awareness in Japanese context

In Japan, the term "international" is preferred and more commonly used than the term "intercultural". Despite the fact that intercultural understanding has been considered a critical component for "internationalization," which, in the Japanese context, means cultivating Japanese people's international orientation, the term "international" has been widely used in policy documents. This paper argues that such emphasis on "nation" derives from a state-promoted ideology of "Japan playing an important role in the international community", formed during the modernization drive in the late 19th century and maintained thus far. To explain why this ideology emerged, the following sections will briefly

overview Japan's modern history.

Japan had retained its isolation policy for more than 200 years until the mid-19th century. When Japan opened up to Western countries, it was still dominated by a single ethnic group with a very small population of ethnic minorities. In order to obtain equal status with Western countries, Japan started its modernization drive, and in the process of establishing a nation-state, ethnic minorities were included in the nation of Japan. However, their status in Japanese society was lower than the majority group. To develop a national identity as the Japanese, a cultural assimilation policy was applied to those ethnic minorities, and to Koreans and Taiwanese from newly obtained territories.

Excess emphasis on Japanese pride led to ultra-nationalism, which was nurtured through school education. However, Japan's attempt to be at par with Western powers ended in its defeat in World War II, and Japan was placed under US control for seven years. During the US occupation, Japan was deprived its diplomatic function and excluded from the international community as a former enemy. In order to be re-accepted to the community, Japan had to transform into a peaceful and democratic country. The transformation of the whole population from ultra-nationalistic to peace-loving citizens was an urgent state project. For this purpose, Japan's school education system was reformed, and the course of study was published in 1947. Among general objectives in the course of study was an item on the understanding of various features of other countries to cooperate and establish peace with them.

After the conclusion of the San Francisco Peace Treaty in 1951, Japan recovered its full independence in 1952. At the same time, people from former colonies were deprived of their Japanese nationality by the conclusion of the Peace Treaty, and since then, have been excluded from Japan's state education policy. The government's logic was that Japan could not bind non-Japanese residents to fulfill a duty to have Japanese compulsory education. At that time, it seemed reasonable to exclude these people from the government's project of transforming the Japanese nation from ethno-centric to international-minded and peace-loving people because those non-Japanese residents were victims of Japan's assimilation policy, and therefore not the target of the transformation. This interpretation of compulsory education that was established during post-war reconstruction became a source of contradiction in the 1990s.

Based on the framework of the reform of school education, the Ministry of Education conducted a thorough revision of the national curriculum in 1958. Prior to this revision, Japan was offered membership to UNESCO in 1951 and had started participating enthusiastically in the UNESCO Associated Schools Project (ASP) for education for international understanding. The influence of UNESCO's ideal can be found in the following phrase from the curriculum for lower secondary school moral education.

Let's raise the awareness of citizens and nurture international understanding and brotherhood. It is natural that we feel attached to our land and fellow countrymen as citizens and respect cultural tradition. Let's nurture this sentiment in a correct way and try to build a better nation.

However, since patriotism tends to turn into ethnic discrimination and exclusive emotion, let's be cautious of it. Let's understand other countries and ethnic culture in the world correctly, develop brotherhood, create unique culture and be a proud member of the international community.

(Ministry of Education 1958, author's translation)

Japan's determination to transform itself into a peaceful nation is obvious in this quotation. The quotation also indicates that the promotion of intercultural understanding is considered within the framework of international relations. Thus, in post-war Japan's policy, "being intercultural" primarily meant intercultural understanding between nations for Japan to be re-accepted in the international community.

2. Intercultural awareness in the 1980s and 1990s

Japan's diplomatic relations with China recovered in the 1970s. This triggered a shift in Japan's diplomatic policy from being a harmless and invisible former enemy to an active and respectable member of the international community. Furthermore, in the 1980s, Japan's economy was at its best and its influence on world economy was recognized by others. With Japan's improved international relations and status, then Prime Minister Nakasone emphasized the

importance of the "internationalization" of Japanese school education so that Japan could play an active role in international relations.

In addition to the prime minister's, there were other interpretations of the term "internationalization." One was based on UNESCO's recommendation on international education in 1974, and emphasized the member states' responsibility in the quest for world peace and the resolution of global problems (UNESCO 18th General Assembly, 1998). This interpretation was favored by educationalists. Another interpretation was the view of the business world that emphasized economic goals overseas. After the 1970s, the desirable human resource for the business world became people who could communicate with those from other countries based on good intercultural understanding (Nippon Keieisha Dantai Renmei, 1974).

Whichever interpretation may be adopted, they all agreed on the need to "internationalize" Japanese schools. In the 1989 course of study, the need for international understanding and respect for the Japanese nation were emphasized, but there was hardly any change in English language education. The primary reasons were worries about its influence on Japanese language acquisition and primary school teachers' lack of readiness to teach English. "Being international" remained an ideological slogan rather than a reality.

3.   The 1996 report on curriculum revision

In the 1996 report on the next curriculum revision announced by Chuo Kyoiku Shingi-kai (the Central Council on Education), three important perspectives were suggested as necessary for the era of internationalization. They were:

(a) To enable children to have broad views and understand other cultures, and simultaneously nurture their respect for other cultures, and their quality and ability to live with people from different cultures.
(b) To establish children's Japanese and personal identity for the purpose of international understanding.
(c) To develop the potential to communicate, such as the basis to use foreign languages and express oneself in order to develop the basic ability to emote ideas and thoughts while showing respect to others' perspectives in the international society.

(The Central Council on Education 1996, author's translation)

In item (a), besides respecting other cultures, the ability to live with culturally diverse people is added. Item (b) emphasizes the importance of contributing one's opinion based on the person's Japanese perspective in the international community. Item (c) encourages the ability to communicate, particularly using foreign languages. The report also encourages the attitude to recognize cultural differences without judging right and wrong, finding commonalities, and respecting each other's historical tradition and diverse values. Thus, the report encouraged recognizing cultural diversity and discouraged ethnocentrism.

In order to implement the aforementioned suggestions, the report announced the establishment of the period for integrated studies in the curriculum and encouraged teachers to choose themes related to international understanding in this period. For the first time in primary school education, teaching foreign languages became available as a part of international understanding when feasible. It was a step forward in the promotion of intercultural awareness and competencies in daily lives of individuals. The course of study was revised based on this report in 1998 and fully implemented in 2002.

4.   Intercultural competencies in the 21st century

Changes in *The course of study of 2008* indicate that along with the progress of globalization, the Ministry of Education and Science's (former Ministry of Education) effort to adapt converged on the strengthening of children's national identity as Japanese and the acquisition of skills for intercultural communication (Ministry of Education and Science, 2008; 2010). This policy was reflected in various subjects. For example, Japanese traditional martial arts were introduced into the subject of physical education as a compulsory element. The teaching of traditional poetry was

emphasized in the subject of Japanese language. In terms of intercultural communication, foreign language activity, which had been established in the period for integrated studies when feasible, became a mandated activity for the fifth and sixth-year pupils of primary schools.

While promoting national identity as Japanese and English communication skills for Japanese students in the curriculum revision, the Ministry also recognized the need to improve education for an increasing number of non-Japanese children in Japan's classrooms. Although this recognition was not reflected in the mainstream curriculum policy, the Ministry began investigating it and gradually introduced support for children with difficulty with the Japanese language (Kojima 2016, 148–149). The Ministry of Education has since introduced various measures to improve education for foreign children within the limitation of *Regulations for the Implementation of School Education Law*. Following this process, *Regulations for the Implementation of School Education Law* was amended in 2014, and a special curriculum for children with Japanese language needs was established. This was an epoch-making amendment as it marked the first time that education for non-Japanese children at schools in the Japanese educational system was given an official status in post-war Japanese school curriculum system.

An attempt to enable Japanese children to live in a culturally diversifying world can also be seen in the partial revision of the national curriculum in 2015 that upgraded moral education from a learning area to a special subject. The new curriculum placed emphasis on Japanese students' ability to view things from various perspectives and interact with diverse people (Ministry of Education and Science 2015a; 2015b). Thus, towards the revision of the course of study in 2017, acquiring skills for actual intercultural communication became increasingly important in the curriculum policy.

The courses of study for primary and lower secondary schools were revised in 2017 in line with this policy trend. The aforementioned revisions related to a special curriculum and moral education were maintained in the new curriculum, while education for acquiring English communication skills took a step forward (Ministry of Education and Science, 2018a; b; c; d). The subject of English was introduced in the last two years of primary education, and consequently, foreign language activity was introduced to third and fourth-year students. Among the subject's three objectives was raising children's awareness of the cultural backgrounds of people they are communicating with (Ministry of Education and Science, 2018a). The objective was also included in the lower secondary school English curriculum, and the acquisition of skills to conduct face-to-face communication was encouraged (Ministry of Education and Science, 2018c). Thus, the content of the course of study placed emphasis on developing children's competencies to actively participate in intercultural communication.

In order to cope with these changes at school, the Ministry is trying to improve teachers' ability for intercultural communication by making first-hand intercultural experience a required element in courses for pre-service English language teacher training. The author has personally experienced the revision of the course syllabus to fulfill the requirement by the Teachers' License Law, which was submitted to the Ministry of Education and Science in order to obtain its approval. The Ministry demanded the course for intercultural understanding to include students' actual interaction with people from other countries. In pre-service teacher training courses for education of children with special needs, education of children with Japanese language needs was added to its scope (Kyoshoku Katei Koa Karikyuramuno Arikatani Kansuru Kento-kai, 2017). This suggests that ideological "internationalization" is changing to down-to-earth "intercultural awareness and competencies" for the sake of effective intercultural communication in Japanese school education.

5. IPC project

In order to integrate interaction with people from other countries into pre-service teacher training curriculum at Yamaguchi University, the author participated in the International Project (IPC) in 2017 and 2018. The IPC is jointly organized by a group of university teachers who are involved in pre-service teacher training or English language education from Germany, Bulgaria, Spain, Australia/Sweden (same teacher), the United States, and Japan. The German professor organized the project and constructed the online program for teachers and students of all member countries to interact by sharing text messages and files. This program does not have a function for audiovisual interaction, and it is also difficult to conduct real time interactions with other programs such as Skype and Zoom due to differing time zones.

However, despite the lack of face-to face oral interaction, participation in this multinational course offers teachers and students a good opportunity to learn about other cultures directly through communication with people from different cultural backgrounds.

This online program was integrated into the existing course in each university. Participants were university students—most intended to be teachers after graduation—registered for the course at their university. Students were divided into 11 (2017) and 9 (2018) multinational groups and each teacher was assigned charge of one or two groups as facilitators. Students could thus communicate with students as well as teachers from other countries. There were two participating Japanese universities. At Yamaguchi University, an elective course for international understanding for third-year students was used; in all, 12 students participated in 2017 and 10 participated in 2018.

The course commenced in the third week of October and continued for 11 weeks. The course and the program were introduced in the first two weeks; students were given passwords to register for the program and informed that they were likely to be the only Japanese students in each group. After mutual self-introduction between participants and teachers, students were asked to write about their personal experience with teachers; questions and answers between participants were incorporated at this stage. So far, communication occurred via the "General Discussion Forum". By the third week, each student was distributed to a home group and introduced him/herself to group members in the "Group Discussion Forum". Students were also given an assignment to create a mind-map to share images and beliefs about good teachers with other group members.

From the fourth week to the tenth week, participants worked on the task of the final presentation, wherein each group was required to collaborate and prepare a visual presentation using PPT slides or posters; each group member gave an oral presentation at their university. This process could be divided into four parts. First, each group needed to select a topic for group discussion from eight suggested themes as follows.

Topic 1 History of teaching as a profession
Topic 2 What are the challenges and tasks of a modern teacher?
Topic 3 Competencies of a modern teacher
Topic 4 Natural teacher talents?
Topic 5 Ethical requirements or obligations for teachers
Topic 6 Teacher training from an international perspective
Topic 7 The perspective of children
Topic 8 The perspective of parents

Each group summarized readings on the selected theme prepared in each member's native language by his/her university teacher and introduced the content to other group members. Then, they compared and discussed the collection of their summaries in each group and created an integrated group summary. Finally, each group chose a form for their visual presentation and created a visual presentation, which was introduced orally at their respective universities at the end of 11 weeks. Over the course of 11 weeks, students exchanged self-introductions, mind-maps, summaries, visual presentations, and questions and comments via written messages that allowed time lag in this multinational project. Because students from Sweden and Australia could not fully participate in the 11-week program due to their academic calendar, they joined a three-week global discussion organized by the Swedish/Australian teacher that ran parallel to the 11-week course.

6. Students' performances at Yamaguchi University

In both years, all registered students at Yamaguchi University remained until the end of the course with a very low absence rate. They faced difficulties while reading and writing English messages, but were very extremely motivated to tackle the task in order to participate in group work. However, their motivation was limited to the classroom where the course teacher's advice and classmates' support were available. In this section, some students' comments in 2017 are introduced with results of the author's observation during the course in order to investigate participants' ideas about what they learned and how they changed through this course.

6-1 Students' reflections about how they felt and what they did at the beginning

The following comments were collected from participants at the end of the course. The comments reflect that in the beginning, students were nervous and worried.

"There was a language barrier. I couldn't express my thoughts in English. I had an inferiority complex compared to other members." (Two students mentioned the language barrier, and two other students mentioned an inferiority complex).

"I am not good at English." (Two students made this comment).

"It was difficult to write in English to express my opinion."

"It was very difficult to communicate in English. Sometimes other members could not understand what I was trying to say."

"I was worried. I couldn't imagine how to cooperate and accomplish something along with people from other countries."

"I regretted that I had registered for this course when I heard our teacher's explanation about it."

"I was worried about using correct grammar and words and writing understandable passages until the end."

"I was worried about making mistakes. I thought that I had to write in perfect English."

Students' worries stemmed from a lack of self-confidence in communicating with people from other countries while using grammatically correct English. There were also concerns about the fact that they couldn't continue to be receivers of messages and had to play active roles in communication as one of two or three Japanese members in the group. Indeed, after the first week, a student came to the author's office to express worries about being the only Yamaguchi University student in the group.

Language was not the only gap experienced by Japanese students felt while interacting with students from other countries. They also found that they could not write their opinions because they lacked positivity, knowledge of themselves and Japan, and Information Communication Technology (ICT) skills as follows:

"I had to be active and spontaneous because if I didn't access the site for a week, I was left behind. There was a gap between German students and me in terms of positivity and spontaneity."

"I learned from other members' positivity. They were very quick to tackle tasks and actively tried new tools."

"It was difficult to write about the Japanese education system."

"I didn't know much about Japan and myself. If I am not aware, I cannot expect others to understand me."

"I realized my lack of knowledge about Japan."

"I made mistakes using ICT, but other members were kind to tolerate my mistakes."

"I found Japanese students' uncomfortable feelings with ICT were different from the other members. Japanese people need to start learning ICT skills at younger ages."

As per the report of the Central Council on Education in 1996, knowing who they were indispensably contributed towards students' perspective in the international arena. Another element to promote international understanding in the 1996 report is the acquisition of communication skills, which was also be shared in the comments. They learned that even if they had positive attitudes towards intercultural communication, if they didn't have appropriate knowledge about themselves and skills to express their thinking, they could not put their desire for communication into practice.

6-2 Some change after several weeks

At the beginning, Japanese students were overwhelmed by other members' positivity and ability to communicate in English. However, after several weeks, they started to notice that people from different countries used various forms of English despite it being the common communication medium.

"English had different features depending on the country that the member was from." (Two other students made the same comments.)

"We had common problems as learners of English as a foreign language."

"I noticed that other members were also using broken English and writing ordinary things."

"I noticed that in the case of German students, while English is not their native tongue, they still communicate in it.

These comments would not have been made if they had communicated in English only among themselves, or only with American students whose English is generally familiar to the Japanese students. They realized that they did not have to use native speakers' English to communicate with speakers of diverse languages. It is all right if the purpose of communication is accomplished. In other words, once they learned that they could communicate in world English, they felt more comfortable at this course. The following comments were from students who experienced an inferiority complex at the program's outset.

"I started feeling comfortable after several weeks."
"I started writing my opinions after several weeks."

Communication by writing helped Japanese participants' understanding of other members' messages. This was compounded by the fact that Japanese students are generally better at reading and writing than listening and speaking.

"I felt more comfortable in written communication than oral communication."
"The advantage of written communication is that we can take time to read messages."
"Sometimes, by reading their messages repeatedly, I could suddenly understand what they meant to say."

6-3 Group unity and support

Mutual support among students was also an important factor in task completion. In the earlier stage, the support came mainly from their Japanese classmates.

"I did my best because I was with my classmates. I was mentally supported by them.
"When my proposal was ignored by other members, my motivation to participate in the discussion became low. However, I could continue until the end thanks to the support of my teacher and classmates.

As the collaborative project progressed, a supportive atmosphere emerged among the international group members and the participants started to develop a sense of unity regardless of their nationalities.

"We tried to understand each other and the feeling of unity and supportive feelings emerged."
"I was happy to have their visible reaction such as questions and "Like it" responses. So, I decided to do the same to others. I wanted to accomplish our goal together. I felt encouraged to work hard because other members were working hard. Then, I was able to write my opinions."
"I felt happy when I had responses from other members to my messages. I could be sure that my messages were understood by others."

6-4 What the students learned

During the 11 weeks, students had to learn how to take an initiative when nobody else posted any constructive opinion and consequently their group work was delayed, and how to self-assert when other members' suggestions caused inconvenience for Japanese participants because of the different ICT environment. Students often expressed feeling uncomfortable when they had to self-assert. After these experiences, they ultimately learned the importance of actively participating in discussions to become true members of the group. This included sharing their own opinions and trying to understand other members' opinions. There were some impressive comments regarding this aspect:

"We tried to understand each other, a sense of unity developed, and we could communicate!"
"If you try to understand others and communicate your opinion, others will try to understand you. They ask questions to understand you. They press 'Like it' when they agree with you. We could collaborate to produce

something together. Access the site, catch the flow of the discussion, and write your opinion. I learned that this repetition was important in communication. You are worthy in the group even for a small contribution."

"I learned the importance of self-asserting. When Japan was forgotten by others, I added it by creating an extra frame. I was worried that they might feel offended, but they simply accepted it and asked me questions. By self-asserting, I could become a part of the group. I learned that I felt excluded at the beginning simply because I didn't contribute any opinion."

Eight other students also mentioned the importance of active participation in order to become true members of the group.

Students found that even in strong self-assertion by members from other countries, there are certain rules and manners. Being self-assertive doesn't necessarily mean disrespect to others.

"Even if there were mistakes in my English, nobody scolded me. They politely asked me what I wanted to say. Even if there are mistakes, you can tell them what you want to say. If you don't understand what they write, you shouldn't pretend as if you have understood. Just ask them what they mean. This is what I learned about communication."

"Writing your opinions doesn't mean you are inconsiderate of others. Participants from other countries were communicating based on the understanding of their perspectives and other people's perspectives. They often wrote "My opinion is different, but I understand your opinion, too.""

"[I learned from] the way other members wrote their messages. They asked for others' opinions on their ideas and sent messages requesting other members' responses."

6-5 Final comments

The student who had come the author's office in the first week with concerns about being the only Yamaguchi University student in the group ended up being the only international student who remained until the end of the 11 weeks in the overwhelmingly German group. When it became obvious that students from other countries and another Japanese university dropped out of the course, her contribution was highly appreciated by the German group mates, and she tried very hard to respond to group mates' expectations. After 11 weeks, her attitude towards intercultural communication had significantly changed, as evinced in the following comment"

"It was fun doing a project with people from other countries."

Other students also wrote the following comments.

"I could do better than I thought in the beginning. It was demanding, but it was worth participating because I could broaden my perspective and learn a lot. I got what I couldn't otherwise get. Now I do not regret registering for this course."

"I'm happy with myself for participating."

"It was fun doing a project with people from other countries. I experienced difficulties in communication which I did not otherwise experience."

7. Conclusion

An analysis of these comments indicates that students gained knowledge from this project particularly in regard to the three perspectives for international understanding as encouraged by the 1996 report by the Central Council on Education. Students understood and respected other cultures, worked with people from different cultures, recognized the importance of establishing their Japanese and personal identity for the purpose of international understanding, and developed the ability to express ideas and thoughts while showing respect to other people's perspectives in international society. It was difficult for them to understand what these perspectives really meant by reading the government's policy document as they did not need to worry about other people's feelings and reactions. Through first-hand experiences of intercultural communication, students learned how to respect, discuss, and collaborate with people who have different

opinions and cultures. They could thus overcome initial worries by communicating with real people.

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概要

多文化間コミュニケーションにむけた先進的アプローチ
—山口大学教員養成課程での試み—

石井　由理

　平成29年に新しい小学校および中学校学習指導要領が告示された。その中では、小学校の外国語教育が高学年に教科として導入され、外国語活動が３年生からの実施に早められたほか、平成27年度に教科となった

特別の教科道徳の内容、平成26年に設けられた日本語指導を必要とする子どもたちのための特別の教育課程など、多民族、多文化が共存する社会で生きるための内容が多く含まれている。戦後、国際社会に復帰すべくUNESCOが提唱する国際理解教育に取り組んで以来、日本の教育政策は常に日本人の国際化ということを唱えてきたが、それは理念的なスローガンにとどまっていた。それに対し、今回の学習指導要領の改訂は、実際に多文化・多民族社会で生きるための術を身につける教育へと舵を切った感がある。大学の教員養成においてもこの変化への対応を求められている。

　著者は平成29年度と30年度に国際理解教育選修の専門授業の中で、ドイツ、ブルガリア、スペイン、アメリカ、スウェーデン、オーストラリアの大学とのインターネットを使った共同授業に取り組んだ。本稿では、これらの国々の主として教員養成課程の学生との混合グループでの共同作業を通して受講生が何をどのように学んでいったかを、平成29年度の受講生のコメントに基づいて検証する。結論では、彼らが実践を通して学んだことは、まさに平成8年の中央教育審議会答申が「教育の国際化」の中で求めた内容に一致するものであったことを述べる。

キーワード：異文間コミュニケーション、教員養成、教育課程