

Roles of Schools in Addressing Community Issues in Japan: A Study Focusing on Educational Approaches Implemented by Schools

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Abstract: The present paper discusses the roles of schools in addressing community issues, based on the results of education systems implemented by Japanese schools, which have been suggested by previous studies.

In Japan, various approaches to school education have been implemented to develop measures to support children of relatively-poor parents living in areas inhabited by people subjected to discrimination or by foreigners and immigrants, and to develop communities, for children in particular, facing the issues of depopulation due to population aging and a declining birthrate.

In the implementation of those approaches to education, schools play important roles in encouraging community residents, both individuals and families, to address problems in collaboration with one another, facilitating cooperation among children and other community residents to discuss problems, and supporting children's participation in the process of addressing community issues that influence them, such as poverty relief support and community improvement.

Key words: Schools, Community, Education systems, Children's participation, Japan.

I. Introduction

Since the establishment of the school education system, emphasis has been placed on collaboration between schools and communities in Japan. Under the Japanese democratic system, people involved in education had become motivated to develop open schools while establishing new relationships with communities based on mutual trust, so that schools would be able to collaborate with the community to play important roles in providing education for children. Furthermore, as children-related issues diversify and the ability of individual families to provide education decreases, increasing burden has been placed on schools in recent years, and policies have been developed to promote sharing of their roles by communities. For example, the Office for Supporting Regional and School Education, the Social Education Division, the Lifelong

Learning Policy Bureau, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, has established regional school support headquarters and developed systems to help nurture children through collaboration among schools, families, and communities, based on the rules newly established in accordance with the revision of the Fundamental Law of Education.

Previous studies on school-community collaboration also discussed the development of mutual relationships between schools and the community, as well as community activities to provide schools with support. As an example of the development of this kind of mutual relationship, one study introduced a school's efforts to promote its activities implemented with the support of regional committee members and based on the school's council system.¹⁾ As examples of community activities, previous studies introduced educational activities to ensure the safety of

elementary school and other students on their way to/from school, and activities for community residents and NPOs to provide children with learning support.²⁾

In Japan, collaborative activities between schools and the community have been implemented in which schools provide the community with support to help it address problems. To promote collaboration between schools and the community, it is important to examine their mutual roles in relation to their collaboration, based on the actual educational approaches implemented and their results.

II. Objective and Methods

The present paper discusses the roles of schools in addressing community issues,

based on educational approaches implemented by Japanese schools, to promote educational activities in schools and collaboration between schools and communities.

The paper presents examples of the implementation of school education to address problems in the community, including findings published with the support of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, local governments, and the boards of education, and discusses the roles of schools in addressing community problems based on the results of the implementation.

III. Results

In Japan, various approaches to school education have been implemented with the aim of addressing community issues: support for the relief of relatively poor children in the community, and community development for children living in areas faced with the issues of depopulation due to population aging and a declining birthrate.

1. Support for the relief of relatively poor children in the community

In Japan, learning support and other educational approaches have been implemented as measures for addressing relatively poor children in the community,

for schools attended by immigrant students and children of foreign residents, and students living in specific areas inhabited by people subjected to discrimination.

(1) Yokohama Municipal Icho Elementary School in Kanagawa Prefecture

(In April 2014, the school was incorporated into Yokohama Iida-Kita Icho Elementary)

The school zone of Yokohama Municipal Icho Elementary School, located in Yokohama City until March 2013, included the Kanagawa Prefectural Icho Kami-Iida Housing Complex, in which the majority of residents were refugees from Indochina, returnees from China, and other foreign residents.³⁾

The majority of the students attending the school and their families were under psychological stress because they were unable to understand the Japanese language and customs, and had difficulty communicating with Japanese people. Furthermore, they were not native speakers of English, which may have been used as a useful communication tool, and the parents in particular had few opportunities to learn Japanese expressions and culture.

The school, characterized by the above-mentioned attributes, provides students with learning support to improve their communication skills in particular, and emphasizes its open administration, as a school in/for the community, to support the parents and community residents.

The school positions the diversity of its students as its strong point and has developed a special curriculum in which students learn and share the languages, food, and other cultures of their peer's home countries, as well as the Japanese language and culture, to encourage individual students to value and feel proud of their roots. The school also has a library as a space for students to feel relaxed and rest. In addition, personal interviews with students and their parents as well as home visits are conducted on an as-required basis to communicate with individual students and parents.

The school also established Japanese language and family education classes for children and their parents to learn Japanese expressions and culture with the support of

volunteers, and operates a restaurant to promote interaction among community residents.

Furthermore, the school implements cultural activities, classes for learning languages of the families' home countries, and community activities and workshops, which are participated in by many community residents, in collaboration with day-care centers and schools in the neighborhood. The school holds country-specific gatherings at night on a regular basis and serves as a center for multicultural interaction activities in the community.

The educational approaches produced effective results because they were implemented with the support of clerical, technical, and other staff members, financial aid from the Yokohama City Education Board, and four-person groups consisting of assistant class teachers, teachers in charge of classes for students requiring individual support, and interpreters. The school also administers an international class in collaboration with the Kanagawa prefectural government, which is attended by people working in municipal educational boards, government offices, and universities to provide opportunities for people to learn Japanese expressions and culture, provide education on specific subjects, and share knowledge on multicultural education, as well as promote collaboration with parents and community residents.

Part of the results of those educational approaches implemented by the school developed into the multicultural education forum held in 2004, and the importance of respecting the languages of the students' mother countries, providing their parents with support, and collaborating with the community and local government was confirmed through discussions.

(2) Iwata Municipal Eastern Elementary School in Shizuoka Prefecture

The school zone of Iwata Municipal Eastern Elementary School covers a group of factories representing Iwata City, and many children of Japanese Brazilians and other foreign workers attend this school.

Due to this, Iwata Municipal Eastern Elementary School was specially organized to cater toward immigrant children in 1999. The school was positively evaluated for these

educational approaches, and designated as a center school for community projects for the promotion of international education by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology.

The school established "Nakayoshi World" (Friendship World), to which counselors and supporters were assigned to help students learn starting from an initial stage and improving their knowledge and skills in a stepwise manner. The school has also promoted collaboration between elementary and junior high schools, with the Multicultural Center for Elementary and Junior High School Students acting as the center of the promotional activities.

(3) Nunose Municipal Elementary School in Matsubara City, Osaka Prefecture

The school zone of Nunose Municipal Elementary School includes a specific area inhabited by people subjected to discrimination, and the school has addressed the issue of poor academic performance among these students. As a school for the promotion of anti-discrimination education, Nunose Municipal Elementary School has organized a team consisting of specialists in anti-discrimination education and other staff members to improve students' academic performance and help develop school and local communities.

In the 1960s, the school initiated a movement to encourage students to attend schools in their school zones. Since the 1970s, the school has emphasized home learning to help students develop basic academic skills. These educational approaches developed into a reform of the teaching system in the 1990s, and the school has since emphasized every day and after-class learning by utilizing brush-up notebooks and examinations for the analysis of academic skills.

In the 1980s, the school introduced human-rights learning with an emphasis on interviews with individual students to ask about their personal histories, conducted group activities and presentation meetings for students to express their opinions and feelings and to share them with others as well as learn about their lives, and provided support for group activities by implementing education to improve both the academic performance of students and

quality of relationships. These educational approaches to improving students' academic performance and supporting group activities were positively evaluated as subjects of survey research projects and studies designated by the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare.

The school has been conducting the program for human-rights learning called "Nunosho Town Works" to promote comprehensive human-rights learning, in which students undergo multicultural education, volunteer activities, and learning experiences for future careers based on their reflections on the working experiences of their parents as well as their lives.

(4) Kanagawa Municipal Elementary School in Tagawa City, Fukuoka Prefecture

Since around the 1990s, Kanagawa Municipal Elementary School in Tagawa City had been faced with the issues of poor academic performance and low self-affirmation among students, particularly in those from the homes of coal miners and from areas inhabited by people subjected to discrimination, and the school and community were urged to implement education of a higher quality.

To address the above-mentioned problems, the school placed emphasis on the implementation of education based on grounds including data. The school encouraged students to review their knowledge and skills in class by utilizing data to improve their academic performance, and their self-affirmation was restored. Additionally, the school positions the community as a supporter of students and education, and in collaboration creates an education community.

(5) Toyokawa Municipal Junior High School in Mino City, Osaka Prefecture

The school zone of Toyokawa Municipal Junior High School in Mino City includes areas inhabited by people subjected to discrimination, leading to a problem of truant students due to their poor academic performance and/or hardships of life.

The school organized daily-life groups in which students can play various roles as leaders, and provided support for group activities to improve both the academic performance of students and quality of these groups.

(6) Amagasaki Municipal Southern Junior High School in Hyogo Prefecture

Since the Meiji era, the school zone of Amagasaki Municipal Southern Junior High School has experienced issues in providing support for students who do not attend school, are absent from school for a long period of time, and who withdraw due to poor academic performance, particularly in areas inhabited by people subjected to discrimination. Despite the establishment of the Unity Measure Operations Special Act and development of systems for stable employment and scholarships in 1969, disparity in the academic performance between those and other students have not been reduced.

Many students of this school, whose ancestors are from Korea, are afraid of being discriminated against, and many are unable to accept their own unique cultural backgrounds, and use alias Japanese names to assimilate themselves into Japan.

The school held remedial classes only for students whose academic performance was poor. A limited number of students underwent the classes to brush up their knowledge and skills in mathematics, Japanese, and English effectively in a short period of time, and their participation in these classes increased their career options and helped them regain confidence. The remedial classes, which had adopted a two school term system taking into consideration the academic level of students, aimed to help students return to original classes within six months. Pairs of teachers (one was in charge of teaching subjects) conducted classes using the same learning materials, at the same rate of progress, and based on the same standards as those of regular classes.

The school also established a class for anti-discrimination with the support of financial aid from the city government. The class for anti-discrimination, which serves as a community workshop, was established by the community residents with the support of all teachers of the school and city officials in charge of social education to improve students' academic performance, and to nurture people who can overcome discrimination. In this course for anti-discrimination, Japanese, mathematics, and English classes are held at night for a few students to develop their learning attitudes and brush up their knowledge and skills.

The course for anti-discrimination holds steering committee meetings once every few months, and implements educational activities in collaboration with parents and community residents.

The school continues to implement these educational approaches to encourage students to trust their teachers and interact with others based on trusting relationships.

In Osaka Prefecture, similar educational approaches have been implemented in Ibaraki, Neyagawa, and Yao Cities, which have specific areas inhabited by people subjected to discrimination.

Firstly, a municipal junior high school in Ibaraki City, Osaka Prefecture, has been collaborating with other elementary schools in the school area to develop geography (social science) classes, as part of human-rights education in the education community. These classes, in which students are divided into groups without regard of academic year, aim to teach about community lives, improve students' academic performance, and increase student career options, while establishing relationships with elementary and junior high school teachers.

Secondly, public junior high schools in Neyagawa City have adopted a unit system with the aim of improving students' academic performance and school environments. Under this system, each class is divided into two and reorganized into several units again without regard of academic year, and two or more class teachers are assigned to each unit for human-rights education. Junior high schools in the city hold school trips as opportunities for students to develop their skills for group behaviors, and promote independent activities as challenges during school trips. The schools also train teachers to conduct these activities, and to respect students' independent decision-making regarding school trips.

Thirdly, public junior high schools in Yao City provide education on human rights, in which students learn through playing participation-based games. Public junior high schools in the city encourage students to hold meetings to discuss their daily lives while taking notes during homeroom activities to help them develop relationships as members of groups. The schools promote independent

participation of students in activities to improve their academic performance and helps students enhance their self-esteem; students write scripts for plays to be performed in school cultural festivals and establish rules for appropriate clothes to be worn on school trips.

In Kyoto City, public junior high schools have been implementing special needs education. The results of surveys have suggested several points: that many households, including single-parent families, in areas of the city inhabited by people subjected to discrimination are eligible for public financial support for education; there are a larger numbers of students with behavioral problems and developmental disorder in these areas; and differences in the environment in which parents have grown up and their cultures influence the behaviors and development of their children. The schools have recognized the necessity of developing basic measures to address these problems, and have taken on the challenge of improving the academic performance and self-concept of students requiring special needs, based on the results of these surveys.

(7) Tsurumi General High School in Kanagawa Prefecture

The population of Tsurumi Ward has been increasing due to the large number of foreign nationals from Korea, China, the Philippines, South American countries, and other countries moving into the ward. In response to this trend in Kanagawa Prefecture, the prefectural government reviewed the administration of Tsurumi Prefectural General High School, including its entrance examination system and multicultural education, and introduced a system to provide educational support for immigrant students.⁴⁾

Firstly, the predecessor of Tsurumi General High School introduced a special entrance examination system for immigrant students or children of foreign residents. Improvements of the entrance examination system included a reduction in the number of examination subjects to three subjects (English, Japanese, and mathematics), extension in time for answering questions, inclusion of kana syllabary characters for Chinese characters used in the questions, and reformation of interview conduction so that highly-motivated students would be positively evaluated despite

poor Japanese language skills. Since the number of applicants for the school increased due to these reforms, the school was integrated into a general-education high school, and a system was established to provide the school with complete support.

Secondly, the school established a committee on human rights to promote multicultural education, with assignment of staff members in charge of providing foreigners with support. The school also established a committee for multicultural interaction in its student council. The multicultural education program implemented by the school includes education on specific subjects, such as Japanese language, social science, and health education for individual students, educational support for families, and international classes, including cooking lectures and festival events, to be held as opportunities for enjoyable conversation, playing, and promoting interaction among community residents. Multicultural-education coordinators assigned to the school play a central role in the school's network with the prefectural board of education and NPOs for multicultural society in the community.

The school was highly evaluated for these educational approaches, and designated as a school for human-rights education and research by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology and Kanagawa prefectural government in 2010.

(8) Osaka Prefectural Nagayoshi High School

Osaka Prefectural Nagayoshi High School is a high school based on academic credits attended by many foreign and other students who do not need to learn Japanese.

The school implements various educational activities with an emphasis on students' self-management to respect their individuality; class teachers are not assigned, and small groups of students take classes according to schedules developed by themselves. The school has also established a circle for human rights culture to promote students' learning, provide career counseling, and to help students feel stimulated.

(9) Osaka Prefectural Matsubara High School

Students of the general course of Osaka Prefectural

Matsubara High School include those living in specific areas inhabited by people subjected to discrimination, of Korean nationality or children of Koreans, and those with disabilities. The school implements various activities for human-rights learning by holding human-rights meetings on a regular basis, camps for presentations on industrial society, and trips to Korea, including research assignments.

Furthermore, a prefectural high school in Osaka has been promoting education of poverty relief to ensure equality opportunity for students to learn, and to reduce disparity among them.⁵⁾ This school places an emphasis on teaching occupational skills required following graduation from high school, holds educational festivals to empower the community, and implements educational activities in collaboration with junior high schools to improve students' attitudes toward their daily lives and social development, with the aim of addressing the issue of relatively poor students.

2. Support for community development for children living in areas facing the issue of depopulation

In Japan, educational approaches for community development focusing on children have been implemented in areas facing the issues of depopulation due to population aging and a declining birthrate.

(1) Yasuoka Village in Gifu Prefecture

Since the 1980s, many schools in Yasuoka Village, Gifu Prefecture, have been abolished or merged due to depopulation by population aging and a declining birthrate. However, since 2010, the mean number of students in a single academic year in the junior high schools has been maintained at around ten students.

A camp event held in the village served as the catalyst for maintenance of the number of junior high school students. Students worked together to develop the program, including a plan for a one-month camping event, and implementing it by themselves.⁶⁾ This camp event was organized by an individual who successfully conducted a three-day-two-night camp event in 1981 at the former Nagano Outdoor Education Center (Outdoor Education

Research Foundation) in Iida City, Nagano Prefecture, for children living in the Tokyo metropolitan and other urban areas. This individual and a private organization took the initiative in developing a camp program called “Life School Daidarabocchi”. Up to 20 students of this school move to the village and camp for one year in a house built themselves in collaboration with the host organization. Students of the school are encouraged to independently participate in autonomous activities implemented by the school or community to learn to live as members of the community and village. Students of the school are involved in the following autonomous activities to learn about self-sufficiency in a natural environment: ignition of stoves, preparation of breakfast, chores before attending school, cleaning, work in paddy fields and on farmland, thinning the forests, cutting, transfer, and storage of firewood, and creation of eating utensils. Students of the school discuss and solve problems related to their daily lives, including meals, cleaning, laundry, taking baths, and disposal of garbage based on rules established themselves. Additional autonomous activities in the community include student involvement in regular gatherings with community residents such as gateball meetings, mowing, snow shoveling, festivals, activities related to volunteer fire corps, and ceremonial events.

In 2002, Inadani Anjane School was established in this area; Anjane is a word in the local dialect meaning “it is all right”. Local residents are recruited by the school to serve as teachers in various activities, such as the creation of coal stoves, straw crafts, and gyoza dumplings. They also procure firewood, build tree houses, and are involved in other activities for reforestation in the school.

These approaches to school education are implemented in an area facing the issues of depopulation due to population aging and a declining birthrate, and have been playing important roles in revitalizing the area. The educational approaches in the area focus on the “power” of villages, rather than regarding them as “lacking”, and create various work programs, including cultivation in mountain rivers, by respecting the lives of villagers and nature. Education implemented in the area has promoted human resource development and autonomy within the community.

IV. Discussion

The results suggest that educational approaches implemented by Japanese schools, as discussed in the preceding text, play the following three roles in addressing community issues:

The first role is to promote sharing of social issues in the community.

The general course of Osaka Prefectural Matsubara High School provides students with various opportunities to share community issues with each other while learning about human rights, including the following: regular meetings for discussion on human rights; training camps to deliver presentations on industrial society; and a research assignment as part of a school trip to Korea. Iwata Municipal Eastern Elementary School in Shizuoka Prefecture facilitates the sharing of community issues by promoting collaboration among elementary and junior high schools initiated by the Multicultural Center for Elementary and Junior High School Students. In Nunose Municipal Elementary School in Matsubara City, Osaka Prefecture, teams consisting of teachers in charge of anti-discrimination education and other staff members promote the organization of school and community groups, as well as improve students’ academic performance, to address community issues. The former Icho Municipal Elementary School in Yokohama City, positioned as “the school for the community”, has emphasized its open administration, collaborated with day-care centers and other schools in the neighborhood, and implemented open cultural activities and country-specific gatherings to promote sharing of community issues.

The second role is to promote collaboration among community residents, including children.

As schools are positioned as supporters of children and educational activities, Kanagawa Municipal Elementary School in Tagawa City, Fukuoka Prefecture, collaborates with the community to develop an educational community with members of learning-support and other groups. Amagasaki Municipal Southern Junior High School in

Hyogo Prefecture holds a class for anti-discrimination with the support of financial aid provided by the city government, which serves as a community workshop participated in by all teachers of the school, city officials in charge of social education, students of the school, their parents, and community residents, with the aim of increasing the level of academic performance of students in the community as well as nurturing people who overcome discrimination. Ibaraki Municipal Junior High School in Osaka Prefecture holds joint-learning classes for its students and those of elementary schools in the same school area to learn about people's lives in the community. This also encourages the students to learn about human rights and promotes the establishment of relationships among elementary and junior high school teachers in the education communication. Kanagawa Prefectural Tsurumi General High School holds international classes and implements cultural activities to promote interaction among community residents. Multicultural-education coordinators assigned to the school play a central role in the school's network with the prefectural board of education and NPOs for multicultural society in the community. In addition, prefectural high schools in Osaka hold education festivals, which are organized to empower the community, to facilitate collaboration among many different communities, and to implement educational activities relating to the consciousness of life and development of society, as poverty-relief measures.

The third role is to provide children with support to help them become involved in the process of addressing community issues.

"Life School Daidarabocchi" in Yasuoka Village in Gifu Prefecture encourages children to independently participate in autonomous activities conducted by the school and community to help them learn to "live in the community". In addition to gatherings with community residents on a regular basis, autonomous community activities include mowing, snow shoveling, festivals, activities related to volunteer fire corps, and ceremonial events. These educational activities promote children's participation and encourages them to pay attention to the

power of the village, as well as to respect the lifestyles of the villagers and nature. Yasuoka Village in Gifu Prefecture also established the "Inadani Anjane School", in which community residents accompany students and play the roles of teachers, promote reforestation, and create various work programs, including cultivation in mountain rivers.

Educational approaches implemented by some schools involve specific activities to develop prerequisites for the promotion of children's participation. Toyokawa Municipal Junior High School in Mino City, Osaka Prefecture, divides students into daily-activity groups to ensure that they play independent roles as leaders through learning. Teachers of Neyagawa Municipal Junior High School in Osaka Prefecture respect children's independent decisions regarding school trips and other activities, and the teachers themselves undergo training so that they will be able to help students develop their decision-making skills. Yao Municipal Junior High School in Osaka Prefecture provides support for the independent activities of students on school trips and in cultural festivals, and implements human-rights education, with an emphasis on hands-on experience such as participation in games in homeroom classes on a regular basis. Osaka Prefectural Nagayoshi High School has established a system to implement educational activities based on the self-management of students, including the development of their own time schedules. A public junior high school in Kyoto City has taken on the challenge to help students restore their impaired self-concept in its special needs education.

European countries promote children's involvement in specific activities to address community problems as a school subject, and in Sweden, this is included in school textbooks.⁷⁾ It is important for the Japanese education system, including school subjects, to promote children's involvement in these activities to address community problems, based on the results of educational approaches implemented by Japanese schools.

V. Conclusion

The present paper has discussed the roles of schools in addressing community issues, based on educational

approaches implemented by various Japanese schools.

In Japan, various approaches to school education have been implemented to develop measures to support children of relatively-poor parents, including foreigners and immigrants, and to revitalize communities facing the issues of depopulation due to population aging and a declining birthrate.

The results of a study on educational approaches implemented by Japanese educational institutions suggest that schools in Japan should play roles in: (1) encouraging community residents to address problems in collaboration with each other; (2) facilitating cooperation among children and other community residents; and (3) supporting children's involvement in the process of addressing community issues.

To help schools fulfill the above-mentioned roles and address community problems, it is necessary to review and discuss the school education system, including its programs and methods, as our future challenges.

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