



Citation for published version:

Smith, M & Past, T 2024, 'Navigating Shallow Waters: Symbolic Violence and its Implications for Education for Sustainable Development in Neoliberal Japan', *Power and Education*.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/17577438241239828>

DOI:

[10.1177/17577438241239828](https://doi.org/10.1177/17577438241239828)

Publication date:

2024

Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication](#)

Publisher Rights

CC BY-NC

You are free to: Share — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format. Adapt — remix, transform, and build upon the material. The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms.

University of Bath

Alternative formats

If you require this document in an alternative format, please contact:
openaccess@bath.ac.uk

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Navigating shallow waters: Symbolic violence and its implications for education for sustainable development in neoliberal Japan

Power and Education
2024, Vol. 0(0) 1–9
© The Author(s) 2024
Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/17577438241239828
journals.sagepub.com/home/pae



Michael D Smith 

Graduate School of Intercultural Studies, Kobe University, Kobe, Japan

Travis Hunter Past 

Center for General Education, Kyoto Sangyo University, Kyoto, Japan

Abstract

In the face of ongoing ecological, economic, and social concerns, the UN's sustainable development framework emerges as a map for securing a brighter tomorrow. Yet, against this backdrop, the neoliberal values of deregulation, open marketisation, and individualisation constrain sustainable development outcomes. Building on previous research conducted in Japan, a nation positioned at the forefront of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), this 'think piece' seeks to offer a critical examination of its implementation and positionality within Japan's education system, specifically the imbalance between public and private educational providers. Drawing on Bourdieu's symbolic violence, we seek to shed light on the social norms (in this case, skill-based human capital development) replicated through education, the long-standing power structures reinforcing them, and finally, the gap between the 'haves' and 'have nots' in terms of access to attaining coveted neoliberal skills. The goal of this piece is not to reject the altruistic good of ESD. On the contrary, through this analysis, we hope to generate greater awareness by engendering a more meaningful and transformative ESD aligning with sustainability as a shared public good. Consequently, we call for more equitable ESD available to all students, regardless of educational setting.

Corresponding author:

Michael D Smith, Graduate School of Intercultural Studies, Kobe University, Rokkoudai 1st Campus, 1 Chome-2-1 Tsurukabuto, Kobe 657-0001, Japan.

Email: michael.dean.smith@people.kobe-u.ac.jp



Creative Commons Non Commercial CC BY-NC: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>) which permits non-commercial use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified on the SAGE and Open Access pages (<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/open-access-at-sage>).

Data Availability Statement included at the end of the article

Keywords

Education for sustainable development, neoliberalism, new public management, symbolic violence, Bourdieu, Japan

Introduction

The United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emerged as key policy directives for educational authorities as part of a global drive for social, economic, and ecologically just pedagogy. Ostensibly an altruistic endeavour, the neoliberal ethea of deregulation, open marketisation, and individualisation (Bourdieu, 1998; Dubin, 2023; Smith, 2022) nevertheless draw our gaze towards the political structures upholding education for sustainable development (ESD) and the means of provision that, rather than emancipate, serve to uphold pre-existing power relations. Indeed, studies placing sustainable development within the scope of neoliberal managerialism are, at this stage, increasingly prevalent (Kopnina and Cherniak, 2016; Schulte, 2022; Slocum et al., 2019), with Bessant et al. (2015: 417) describing a growth in academic reforms that ‘both drive and limit the sustainability education agenda’. Slocum et al. (2019: 41), too, depict laissez-faire policies in higher education (HE) as constraining sustainability as a learning outcome, imploring underfunded practitioners to prepare learners ‘as critical thinkers while encouraging the job skills necessary for students to succeed’. ESD thereby reveals much about ‘whom’ or, more precisely, ‘what’ learners should be upon entering the job market: creative, flexible, and highly skilled units of human capital positioned to meet future labour market needs (G20 Development Working Group, 2019: 3–5).

Of course, we do not denounce said traits as fundamentally corrosive or label them unwelcome. Yet, we *do* acknowledge critiques of sustainability as an ‘empty signifier par excellence’ (Swyngedouw, 2011: 41): an often capricious and indistinct apparatus reaffirmed by empty gestures which, against the backdrop of the global market order, allow ‘elites to present it in ways that suit their own agenda’ (Brown, 2015: 130). If we are to fully appreciate ESD as a ‘neoliberal ideological construct’ (Cervantes, 2013: 30), it is wise to examine sustainability not wholly in terms of the States, intergovernmental organisations, corporations, and schools it privileges but the obfuscated processes of tension and accommodation that serve to aid or hinder human capital outcomes. As such, this ‘think piece’ builds upon our recent work in ESD (Past and Smith, 2023) to address sustainability within the Japanese context. Japan positions itself at the forefront of SDG advocacy and as an exemplar of integrating sustainability within mainstream reform (Jodoi, 2020; MEXT, 2021; Nagata, 2017). Notwithstanding these efforts, ESD locally remains broadly shallow, failing to deliver the ‘profound transformation’ demanded by Nagata (2017) due, in part, to superficial pedagogy (Past and Smith, 2023; Samuell, 2023) and, more pertinently, a schismatic terrain of deregulated, privatised, and outcome-focused education that consolidates sustainability as a symbolic power ripe for imposition and exploitation.

The rationale for this think piece

When situating ESD within the scope of economic liberalisation, ethical and sociological *as well as* pedagogical considerations come into focus. Adopting a critical stance, pedagogy manifests via the ‘imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power, (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990: 5)’, wherein educational institutions socialise explicit representations of society and, for that matter, what it means to be a ‘productive’ citizen. Given the noted ties between the sustainability discourse and

global marketisation (Cervantes, 2013; Schulte, 2022), one may interpret the G20 and UN-backed ESD agenda as an accountability measure for nurturing the ‘right kind’ of human capital. Indeed, returning to Japan, a report stemming from the 2019 G20 Osaka summit states in no uncertain terms that ‘investing in human capital is the foundation for achieving sustainable development’ (G20 Development Working Group, 2019: 1). For our part, the motivation for this inquiry stems from a recent idiographic study on sustainability within Japanese HE (Past and Smith, 2023). Here, learner testimony indicated that ESD functions, in part, as a pedagogic differentiator between public and private education, with fee-paying students reporting a heightened awareness of sustainability, additional ESD exposure, and more frequent extra-curricular and study-abroad opportunities centred upon global cooperation. Unfortunately, yet entirely predictably, this system contributes to what Past and Smith (2023: 96) term a ‘shallow ESD’ among the less privileged. In taking a Bourdieusian stance, therefore, this piece seeks to clarify the veiled power dynamics upholding Japanese ESD and, in turn, lay the groundwork for future research efforts.

Linking neoliberal managerialism to Japanese ESD

Consonant with New Public Management’s (NPM) enterprise ontology, wherein *every* social institution is an economic entity (Fisher, 2009), the businessification of Japanese education saw a shift in responsibility from the public to the private sector (Horiguchi et al., 2015). Commencing in 2002, *yutori-kyōiku* (lit: relaxed education) promoted internationalisation, initiative-building, and, through the *school district free system*, afforded households a degree of ‘choice’ in their child’s education via an expansion of private schools that, while semi-autonomous, uphold national curricula (Smith, 2021). The presence of neoliberal rationalities (i.e. ‘initiative’, ‘autonomy’, ‘international’, and ‘relaxed’) in *yutori-kyōiku* discourse is explicit, with Bjork (2015) noting the influence of the Ministry of Trade and Industry in these reforms. Here, bureaucrats ‘endorsed revisions to the education system that followed the logic of neoliberalism and New Public Management’ (Bjork, 2015: 26). Nitta (2008: 23), too, describes Japanese educational reform as embodying ‘a New Public Management (NPM) approach championed by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’. As manifested in *yutori-kyōiku*, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) encourages a sink-or-swim competitive logic among schools, which, in turn, engenders outcome-focused education, rewarding institutions that ‘toe the line’ while (further) cutting funding to underperforming competition and prefectural governments (Smith, 2021). Hence, within the context of NPM, it is logical that schools align with State (vis-à-vis corporate) interests.

Nevertheless, public services, including schools, operate outside conventional economic mechanisms like open pricing. Consequently, MEXT sought decentralisation and deregulation, where ‘the objective is to provide sufficient flexibility and local control at the school level that creativity, individual initiative, and the spirit of entrepreneurship will become part of the teaching/learning process’ (Muta, 2000: 455). Here, public and private institutions vie for learners through innovative curricula and ‘value-added’ options, which, in turn, expedite placement in brand-name universities and choice employment beyond them (Samuell, 2023; Smith, 2021). Yudkevich et al.’s (2015: 413) claim that competitiveness necessitates ‘the development of unique strategies, and the reliance on high-cost equipment or facilities – being smart and rich helps’ is thereby telling. Pre the *school district free system*, learners were, irrespective of socioeconomic background, placed in local schools. By ‘target[ing] high-achieving students outside of traditional catchment areas’ (Smith, 2021: 1662), however, capitalism’s ‘invisible hand’ guides wealthy households to the institutions best-suited to their child’s needs, further exposing Japanese education to market forces. Fee-paying

schools nurturing ‘21st century skills ... such as creativity, flexibility, critical thinking, socio-emotional skills, and digital and entrepreneurial skills’ (G20 Development Working Group, 2019: 3) are prioritised. Consequently, Poole and Takahashi’s (2015: 97) claim that Japanese NPM reform has ‘been cause for the creation of a wider gap between the [poor and] privileged, wealthy groups able to afford to compete’ is hard to ignore.

Pedagogy and the question of power

To Bourdieu, *symbolic violence* constitutes ‘non-physical forms of domination manifesting per hierarchised power differentials’ (Smith, 2021: 1656); it is unconsciously agreed upon, indirect, and exercised through pervasive societal institutions. Consequently, the social actor against whom it is exercised remains complicit in this hegemony. Symbolic violence encompasses the internalisation of elite-driven norms and accompanying patterns of action and thought, which, in turn, facilitates social reproduction, or ‘the replication of the ideals of the dominant culture’ (Andrews, 2021: 158), including the transmission of financial and symbolic power across generations (economic and cultural capital in Bourdieusian terms). Crucially, pedagogy inflicts symbolic violence when ‘disadvantaged students only acquire a basic functionality with little knowledge of the powerful genres and facility with language that grants access to various educational and vocational opportunities and, in turn, increased social mobility’ (Watkins, 2018: 49). Thus, we should interpret symbolic violence in terms of the skills, dispositions, and capitals influencing social status that may not be, or only nominally, realised among marginalised groups (Nam, 2023). From an educational policy standpoint, this ‘distinction’ secures itself through discursive actions aimed at venerating specific cultural abilities as a public good, which, in time, socialises and reproduces the belief that said credentials bring prestige not only to those possessing them but society more broadly.

As noted previously, Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) view *pedagogic action* as imposing cultural norms, with educational policy stipulating how society should function. In this regard, all pedagogic action is symbolic violence insofar as it strives to legitimate and socialise meaning within the limits of power relations (Andrews, 2021), namely, the cultural authority of the dominant. Hence, it would be a ‘logical contradiction and sociological impossibility’ (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990: 12) to remove pedagogic action from the scope of *pedagogic authority* or the ‘right’ to reinforce arbitrary power free of external validation. Indeed, the mere recognition of pedagogic authority demonstrates and sustains its dominance; thus, resistance is ‘impossible’ (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990: 11). We may conceptualise pedagogy in its broadest sense as a relational field encompassing the macro, meso, and micro levels, respectively. State and intergovernmental policies give rise to *pedagogic action*; this, in turn, permits educational providers and institutions to exercise *pedagogic authority*, which, as a consequence, produces *pedagogic work* at the practitioner level (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Pedagogic work not only inculcates knowledge but secures the effects of symbolic violence insofar as it produces a durable cognitive disposition (i.e. habitus). Thus, pedagogy serves as ‘a substitute for physical constraint’ (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990: 36).

Questioning power in Japanese ESD

Having mapped out the neoliberal terrain of Japanese education, how does one chart its current inflexions with symbolic violence and sustainability? The Government of Japan (2022: 1) stresses that ‘Japan is the country which first proposed the idea of Education for Sustainable Development’. Heady claims, yet its pledge to realise ‘a “New Form of Capitalism” and SDGs ... [through] ... investment in human resources’ (The Government of Japan, 2022: 1) is more telling. Links between

sustainability, an ostensible public good, and human capital, the subjectification of skill-based capitalist enterprise, impose a pre-existent economic order upon learners. If we allegorise this relationship as a symbolic contract between State and subject, the orthodoxy (doxa in Bourdieusian terms) of ESD building ‘productive, resilient and innovative societies’ (G20 Development Working Group, 2019: 1) reproduces through education. Specifically, it constrains agency by justifying ESD credentialism as a ‘requisite professional competence and, from a quasi-nationalist perspective, civic moral worth’ (Smith, 2021: 1672); this ‘dependence through independence’ (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990: 177) represents the *true* ‘invisible hand’ of neoliberalism. More pointedly, by situating sustainability within the NPM-oriented credential ladder, wherein human capital is economically rewarded proportionate to its investment in education, ESD opens itself to symbolic violence in its most base form: socioeconomic reproduction.

Following neoliberalism’s individualisation of society (Bourdieu, 1998), the ‘responsibility’ for accumulating the cultural resources demanded by the market falls upon subjects, reshaping society as an economically Darwinist competitive arena wherein the ‘strong’ thrive over those who ‘choose’ to disregard the rules of the game. Notwithstanding the myth of neoliberal meritocracy, privatisation and decentralisation within education benefit households with the economic resources to succeed (Samuell, 2023). Following a UNESCO roadmap, MEXT (no date), for its part, seeks a comprehensive uptake in ESD, placing it as ‘the foundational principle of the next revision of the National Curriculum Standards’. However, in our phenomenological research, students graduating from public schools reported, ‘When I was an elementary or high school student, I hadn’t studied about SDGs. So, I think they are not a focus. They don’t focus on the SDGs at all’ (Past and Smith, 2023: 204), experiences echoed by all state-schooled participants. Of course, phenomenological research is, at its heart, idiographic; the incidents reported here may not be generalisable. It is, however, important to understand MEXT’s delivery method within the context of NPM: ESD is not a standalone subject but one subsumed within the cross-curricular remit of ‘integrated studies’ (NIER, 2019: 4).

The Working Group for Living Environment Studies and Period for Integrated Studies (2015) reports between 50 and 187 h of integrated studies per year, with ESD jostling for contact time with subjects as broad as information education, international understanding, and health education. The scope for learners to ‘think globally, act locally’ (MEXT, 2021) during these sessions remains; yet, given the leeway afforded to institutions through NPM, ESD is not *guaranteed*. At this point, it is worth highlighting Japan’s *esukareitā gakkō* (lit: escalator school) system, wherein prestigious schools offer non-traditional transitions from kindergarten to, potentially, post-doctoral-level education. Of course, terminal education grades differ by institution. Still, points of commonality among *esukareitā gakkō* include their private status, lack of entrance examinations (Timsit, 2018), and, following NPM, relative autonomy in shaping curricula. Consequently, while public school teachers struggle to prepare learners for Japan’s hyper-competitive period of ‘exam hell’, their private counterparts are, potentially, afforded more time for institution-specific content tailored to meet the demands of emerging human capital and, in turn, corporate Japan (Smith, 2021). The irony is that by seeking NPM-derived ‘education that leaves no one behind’ (The Government of Japan, 2022: 2), Japan’s ‘New Form of Capitalism’ pours neoliberalism’s old wine into new bottles.

Bourdieu’s nested vision of pedagogy constituting *action*, *authority*, and *work* demonstrates how, in the Age of Neoliberalism, ESD reinforces violence despite its standing as an altruistic ‘public good’. Sustainability, as championed by the OECD, UN, G20, and industry (Bessant et al., 2015; NIER, 2019; Slocum et al., 2019), allows said institutions to secure their influence in educational reform. Here, national education systems act as support systems for imposing cultural and societal norms through ESD, wherein pedagogic action ‘trickles down’ via pedagogic authority before

manifesting as pedagogic work. Of course, given the links between ESD and intergovernmental agencies, one may claim that MEXT is unjustly influenced, perhaps even *dominated by*, these Western-led institutions, resulting in cultural hegemony (Dubin, 2023). Notwithstanding the status of the OECD, UN, and G20 as arbitrary powers (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990), let us consider Japanese ESD as a device for nationalistic character building against the backdrop of internationalism. As noted by Andrews (2021), globalised educational outcomes, while culturally pluralistic, may still be exploited by States. While countries with high levels of immigration frame them ‘in multicultural terms’, those with high levels of nationalism may use them ‘for maintaining their global status’ (Andrews, 2021: 161).

Examples of the latter are present in multiple Japanese ESD documents, such as Japan being a ‘leading’ country in ESD and the nation’s proliferation of UNESCO Associate schools being ‘significantly higher than in other countries, which shows Japan’s commitment to creating a sustainable society, including ESD’ (NIER, 2019: 2–3). Additionally, by positioning ESD not only as ‘a concept proposed by the Government of Japan and endorsed by member states in the World Summit on Sustainable Development’ but as embodying ‘the goals that the world should share’ (MEXT, 2021: 1) Japanese efforts in this area may be viewed as attempts to ‘become a global leader in education’ (MEXT, 2016: 5). Nonetheless, despite pushes to be a forerunner in sustainability, Japan has arguably failed to secure this position due to the ‘shallow’ nature of its ESD (Past and Smith, 2023: 196). Nagata (2017) reports that when ESD international experts visit Japan, they often label the nation’s efforts ‘not progressive’ enough, with students left with little more than surface-level solutions of separating trash, taking an eco-bag while shopping, or not using disposable cutlery.

A call for transformative ESD

So, is ESD a mechanism for faceless corporations, States, and multinational organisations to attain and conserve power? Perhaps, yet it *does not have to be*. Any ESD anchored to neoliberal managerialism will remain stunted and, more to the point, continue to fall short of the mission set out by the SDGs. The Japanese educational system, policymakers, and practitioners must seek a greater balance between public and private ESD contexts to achieve meaningful transformation. Without reaching the economically disadvantaged, ESD fails in its pledge to uphold and advance sustainable practices (SDGs 4 and 10 being quality education and reduced inequalities, respectively); fundamental tenets of ESD that envision ‘a world where everyone has the opportunity to benefit from education and learn the values, behaviour and lifestyles required for a sustainable future and for positive societal transformation’ (UNESCO, 2005: 6). Transformative ESD is inherently at odds with the neoliberal edict of responsabilisation, wherein subjects are expected to agentively and individually accumulate cultural resources through education and, in turn, attempt to satiate the market’s incessant thirst for credentialed units of human capital.

However, the lack of depth and transformation in current ESD practices is not simply a matter of exposure. The quality of education must also rise to the standards set out by MEXT (2021), which reaffirmed its commitment to ESD through training education, empowering and mobilising youth, transforming learning environments, and local-level actions. Yet, *how* transformations of learning environments will occur remains to be seen. As reported in our previous research, Japanese culture remains deeply influenced by Confucian norms wherein power and authority are granted and wielded in a hierarchical, top-down model (Past and Smith, 2023), with the Japanese education system no exception. ESD is hampered when superficially integrated into long-standing, teacher-centred models of education (Nagata, 2017). Certainly, with Confucian education in view, ‘Deep’ ESD necessitates a power shift, where learners become active leader-participants (Egitim, 2021; Past and Smith, 2023). Granting agency enables learners to build collective leadership identities based on ‘shared vision and values, interdependence and shared

responsibility, mutual respect, empathy, and willingness to be vulnerable, ambiguity, effective communication, and synergy' (Lawrence, 2018: 91). Through this practice, youth mobilise, with learning environments better positioned to engender 'deep ESD'.

From a Bourdieusian perspective, transformative ESD as pedagogic work remains, at its core, symbolic violence due to its imposition of cultural norms and the normalisation of a society allied to neoliberal orthodoxy (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Indeed, in Bourdieu's reading, *all* pedagogic work is inherently violent (Andrews, 2021). Said critique notwithstanding, we implore ESD practitioners to abandon pedagogic work preventing disadvantaged students from acquiring the knowledge, experience, and cultural capital requisite to upward social mobility (Samuell, 2023; Watkins, 2018). Whether ESD is or is not symbolic violence, it is apparent that global society faces questions and challenges necessitating practical, sustainable solutions in the here and now. Thus, we caution practitioners *not* to throw out the pedagogic baby with the emancipatory bathwater as ESD, if adequately implemented, presents us with a means to realise these outcomes. Instead, we envision an ESD realising the meaningful transformation it seeks to achieve while, at the same time, cautioning that 'invisible hands' guiding neoliberal sustainability efforts will only hinder altruism.

Conclusion

To conclude, the goal of this think piece is not to denounce attempts at ESD but the contrary: we aim to generate greater awareness, discussion, and action through critical analysis to engender the transformative vision of sustainability needed to assure a better future. Thus, we echo previous calls (Nagata, 2017; Past and Smith, 2023) for ESD extending beyond surface-level issues such as 'bringing my bag' when shopping and 'separating trash'. More pointedly, we believe such a transformation may only actualise by uprooting long-standing power structures and traditional styles of instruction. We thereby call for critical ESD research in Japan and, more broadly, across all national settings. For our part, research conducted in 2022 led us to gaps between the quantity and quality of ESD among public and privately educated learners; while these students were raised during the UN's Decade of ESD (Nagata, 2017), their experience and understanding remain shallow and unbalanced. Thus, with this divide in view, we seek further research critically evaluating ongoing efforts in ESD, particularly within the context of social inclusion and, more pointedly, exclusion.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iDs

Michael D Smith  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4492-1648>

Travis Hunter Past  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9700-5454>

Data availability statement

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

References

- Andrews T (2021) Bourdieu's theory of practice and the OECD PISA global competence framework. *Journal of Research in International Education* 20(2): 154–170. DOI: [10.1177/14752409211032525](https://doi.org/10.1177/14752409211032525).
- Bessant SEF, Robinson ZP and Ormerod RM (2015) Neoliberalism, new public management and the sustainable development agenda of higher education: history, contradictions and synergies. *Environmental Education Research* 21(3): 417–432. DOI: [10.1080/13504622.2014.993933](https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2014.993933).
- Bjork C (2015) *High-stakes Schooling: What We Can Learn from Japan's Experiences with Testing, Accountability, and Education Reform*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bourdieu P (1998) *Acts of Resistance*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu P and Passeron JC (1990) *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. London: Sage.
- Brown T (2015) Sustainability as empty signifier: its rise, fall, and radical potential. *Antipode* 48(1): 115–133. DOI: [10.1111/anti.12164](https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12164).
- Cervantes J (2013) Ideology, neoliberalism and sustainable development. *HUMAN GEOGRAPHIES – Journal of Studies and Research in Human Geography* 7(2): 25–34. DOI: [10.5719/hgeo.2013.72.25](https://doi.org/10.5719/hgeo.2013.72.25).
- Dubin B (2023) Teeth of the hydra: the policies and practices of English language teaching in Japan. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*. Advance online publication: 1–13. DOI: [10.1080/14767724.2023.2209508](https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2023.2209508).
- Egitim S (2021) Collaborative leadership in English language classrooms: engaging learners in leaderful classroom practices and strategies. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*. Advance online publication: 1–21. DOI: [10.1080/13603124.2021.1990413](https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2021.1990413).
- Fisher M (2009) *Capitalist Realism*. Winchester: Zero.
- G20 Development Working Group (2019) G20 initiative on human capital investment for sustainable development. Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/economy/g20_summit/osaka19/pdf/documents/en/annex_10.pdf (accessed 11 July 2023).
- Horiguchi S, Imoto Y and Poole GS (2015) Introduction. In: Horiguchi S, Imoto Y and Poole GS (eds) *Foreign Language Education in Japan*. Rotterdam: Sense, 1–18.
- Jodoin JJ (2020) Promoting language education for sustainable development: a program effects case study in Japanese higher education. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education* 21(4): 779–798. DOI: [10.1108/IJSHE-09-2019-0258](https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSHE-09-2019-0258).
- Kopnina H and Cherniak B (2016) Neoliberalism and justice in education for sustainable development: a call for inclusive pluralism. *Environmental Education Research* 22(6): 827–841. DOI: [10.1080/13504622.2016.1149550](https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2016.1149550).
- Lawrence RL (2017), Understanding collaborative leadership in theory and practice. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* 156(1): 89–96. DOI: [10.1002/ace.20262](https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.20262).
- MEXT (2016) A guide to promoting ESD. Available at: https://www.mext.go.jp/component/english/_icsFiles/afiedfile/2016/11/21/1379653_01_1.pdf (accessed 17 July 2023).
- MEXT (2021) Implementation plan for education for sustainable development in Japan (the second ESD implementation plan). Available at: https://www.mext.go.jp/en/content/20211208-mxt_koktoug01-1373244_1.pdf (accessed 14 July 2023).
- MEXT (no date) ESD (Education for sustainable development) Available at: [https://www.mext.go.jp/en/unesco/title04/detail04/sdetail04/1375695.htm#:~:text=ESD_is_a_concept_which,2014\)_adopted_at_the_57th](https://www.mext.go.jp/en/unesco/title04/detail04/sdetail04/1375695.htm#:~:text=ESD_is_a_concept_which,2014)_adopted_at_the_57th) (accessed 14 July 2023).
- Muta H (2000) Deregulation and decentralization of education in Japan. *Journal of Educational Administration* 38(5): 455–467. DOI: [10.1108/09578230010378359](https://doi.org/10.1108/09578230010378359).
- Nagata Y (2017) A critical review of education for sustainable development (ESD) in Japan: beyond the practice of pouring new wine into old bottles. *Educational Studies in Japan* 11: 29–41.

- Nam B (2023) Promoting global citizenship and multiculturalism in higher education: the Korea international cooperation agency's global volunteering in the Asia Pacific region (*Promoviendo el multiculturalismo y la ciudadanía global en la educación superior: el voluntariado global de la Agencia de Cooperación Internacional de Corea en la región de Asia Pacífico*). *Culture and Education* 35(1): 218–257. DOI: [10.1080/11356405.2022.2133284](https://doi.org/10.1080/11356405.2022.2133284).
- NIER (2019) Current climate of ESD in Japan. Available at: <https://www.nier.go.jp/English/educationjapan/pdf/20190408-02.pdf> (accessed 14 July 2023).
- Nitta K (2008) *The Politics of Structural Education Reform*. London: Routledge.
- Past TH and Smith MD (2023) Towards a 'leaderful' sustainable development? An interpretive phenomenological analysis of Japanese education In: Egitim S and Umemiya Y (eds) *Leaderful Classroom Pedagogy through a Multidisciplinary Lens*. Singapore: Springer, 195–210. DOI: [10.1007/978-981-99-6655-4_12](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-6655-4_12).
- Poole GS and Takahashi H (2015) Effecting the “Local” by Invoking the “global.”. In: Horiguchi S, Imoto Y and Poole GS (eds) *Foreign Language Education in Japan*. Rotterdam: Sense, 85–102.
- Samuell C (2023) Towards an understanding of Juku and inequality in Japan, current issues in language planning. *Shadow education, Bourdieu, & Meritocracy* 25(1): 45–66. DOI: [10.1080/14664208.2023.2209467](https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2023.2209467).
- Schulte M (2022) Exploring the inherent tensions at the nexus of education for sustainable development and neoliberalism. *Journal of Education for Sustainable Development* 16(1–2): 80–101. DOI: [10.1177/09734082221118621](https://doi.org/10.1177/09734082221118621).
- Slocum SL, Dimitrov DY and Webb K (2019) The impact of neoliberalism on higher education tourism programs: meeting the 2030 sustainable development goals with the next generation. *Tourism Management Perspectives* 30: 33–42. DOI: [10.1016/j.tmp.2019.01.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2019.01.004).
- Smith MD (2021) Social reproduction as language policy: the neoliberal co-option of English in global Japan. *Educational Policy* 36(7): 1652–1678. DOI: [10.1177/0895904821999840](https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904821999840).
- Smith MD (2022) Entrepreneurs of the self: symbolic capital and social (Re)production in the neoliberal knowledge economy. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*. Advance online publication: 1–11. DOI: [10.1080/14767724.2022.2089975](https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2022.2089975).
- Swyngedouw E (2011) Nature does not exist! Sustainability as symptom of a depoliticised planning. *Urban Forests* 1: 41–66.
- The Government of Japan (2022) Statement of Japan on transforming education. Statement, transforming education summit. Available at: https://transformingeducationsummit.sdg4education2030.org/system/files/2022-10/Japan_National_Statement_of_Commitment.pdf (accessed 15 July 2023).
- Timsit A (2018) Overhauling Japan's high-stakes university-admission system. *The Atlantic*. Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2018/01/overhauling-japans-high-stakes-university-admission-system/550409/> (accessed 15 July 2023).
- UNESCO (2005) *UNDESD International Implementation Scheme*. Paris: UNESCO Education Sector.
- Watkins M (2018) Little room for capacitation: rethinking Bourdieu on pedagogy as symbolic violence. *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 39(1): 47–60. DOI: [10.1080/01425692.2017.1304202](https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2017.1304202).
- Working Group for Living Environment Studies and Period for Integrated Studies (2015) About the period for integrated studies [Sōgōtekinagakushūnojikan ni tsuite]. Available at: https://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/shingi/chukyo/chukyo3/064/siryo/_icsFiles/afieldfile/2016/01/07/1365764_3.pdf (accessed 15 July 2019).
- Yudkevich M, Altbach PG and Rumbley LE (2015) Global university rankings: the “Olympic Games” of higher education? *Prospects* 45: 411–419. DOI: [10.1007/s11125-015-9365-y](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-015-9365-y).