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6. EFFECTING THE "LOCAL" BY INVOKING THE "GLOBAL"

State Educational Policy and English Language Immersion Education in Japan

INTRODUCTION

An educational or schooling system can be considered a mirror of society. Certainly many observers would agree that the challenges presently facing the Japanese education system are issues that reflect broader cultural debates within society. The issues that surround such heated educational topics as creativity, critical thinking, the curriculum, literacy, and immigrant students correspond fairly directly with recent societal debates regarding diversity, identity, national pride, and the economy (Willis, 2006). The introduction to this volume discusses in detail how language education reflects these debates.

This chapter is an account of foreign language immersion education based on qualitative research at two private primary schools: Jōshū International School (JIS) and Nantō International School (NIS).[1] Both institutions are examples of alternative learning communities that have been conceived at least in part as a response to the realities and rhetoric of "globalization" on the one hand, and a critique of educational policies on the other. In both examples, the educational corporation creating these language immersion schools has espoused a similar ideology—an education that purports to reach beyond the boundary of the nation-state yet at the same time firmly rooted in the cultural knowledge of an "imagined community" (Anderson, 1983), tied very closely to statist schooling objectives (Marshall, 1994). Although this ideology is on the surface contradictory, we will discuss how this educational approach is related to recent discourses on Japanese identity (Hashimoto, 2000; Burgess, 2004)—strategies to both build the "local" while embracing, or appearing to embrace, the "global."

The choice of the field sites for this study arose out of the personal interests of the authors as members of the communities where the schools are located—a city in southern Gunma prefecture, 80 kilometers north of Tokyo, and a city in the middle of the main island of Okinawa. Both authors conducted small-scale fieldwork projects consisting of semi-structured and informal interviews with board members, principals, teachers, and parents, as well as firsthand observations, including an extended ten-month period of participant observation in the case of NIS. In this

S. Horiguchi et al. (Eds.), Foreign Language Education in Japan, 85–102.

chapter we will first briefly summarize the qualitative and textual data we collected and then present an analysis of this data in an attempt to situate the schools within more general societal debates on language, education, and identity.

JIS

School History and Mission

JIS is the brainchild of the mayor of the city, who is the chairman of the parent organization, Jōshū International Academy.[2] The mayor had the vision for and then put into action plans to create one of the first schools in Japan to take advantage of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's (MEXT) designated "Special Zone" school of English education. Unlike other "international schools" or "schools for foreigners" (i.e., ethnic minority schools, see Tsuneyoshi et al., 2010), JIS is fully approved under the Japanese School Education Law as an *ichijōgakkō* or *ichijōkō*, Article One school, giving it legal and accreditation status equivalent to all other private and public schools in Japan.

Although JIS is a private school originally set up with support by a management team from a private educational publishing company and with half of the students commuting from outside the municipality, the land and much of the financing for the school was supported by public municipal funds. The administrative office is partly staffed with city government employees. This practical (and political) decision by the mayor to mix private and public sectors has been a continuous point of protest by citizen groups.[3] Many feel that public funds should not be used for the personal gain of a few families perceived as "elite," especially when they are not even city residents.[4]

In April 2005, the school opened its doors to its first students. There were initially two intakes of students at both the first and fourth grade levels of primary school. In 2006–7, there were 100 first and second graders and 120 fourth and fifth graders. In 2008 classes opened in all the primary school years, first through sixth, along with preparations to open a junior high school (JHS). The initial goal for JIS to educate at all grade levels of primary and secondary school, K-12, was realized with the opening of a high school in April 2011 at the site of a former local junior college located in the city. As a local resident, Poole had the opportunity to visit the school in early 2007 and also meet the chairman, the mayor of the city, on a number of occasions. Of course this personal interest as a member of the local community certainly influenced his perspective on JIS, fluctuating between frames of subjectivity as friend, partner of a local resident, and researcher.

Educational Philosophy and Methodology

The former primary school principal, Dr. Good,[5] an American Ph.D., in an interview explained that he saw JIS as "a test-bed for educational innovation in Japan." By this,

he meant that the ongoing curriculum evaluation of the three educational pillars of JIS—English immersion, open classrooms, and team-teaching in pairs of Japanese and non-Japanese teachers—be disseminated to the public through cooperative research. Part of this approach is both collaborative curriculum development and action research.

The cooperative effort between teachers, staff, and parents at JIS began with the preparation committee before the school opened. One result was the collective mission statement that emphasizes the need for instilling in students an awareness of and an appreciation for "Japanese culture," a major difference with international schools and other immersion programs in North America, for example (Hamers & Blanc, 2000, 333–340). Japanese members of the preparation committee all included in their individual vision statements a need for "the maintenance of Japanese customs" (see also Downes, 2001).[6]

As a tool to begin to reflect on exactly "what Japanese culture is," the principal and his staff implemented a North American program called The Virtues Project. Using this teaching resource they hoped to identify which items on the menu of "universal virtues" are most strongly held by the majority of individuals in Japan. According to JIS, The Virtues Project is a "morals education with the goal of intellectual understanding of the meaning of these virtues." The principal believed that recognition of virtues most often exhibited in Japan, or those least often seen, helps students to understand themselves and others, both intellectually and emotionally

As with the first educational experiment of its kind, the St. Lambert project in Quebec, the foreign-language immersion aspect of JIS gets most of the publicity (Grosjean, 1982, 217–220).[7] Dr. Good felt, however, that the open classroom techniques actually have the most potential for immediate applicability across different schools and contexts in Japan. Immersion methods are much more of a long-term project in terms of widespread application in Japan, not least because they need the support of extensive teacher-training programs at universities.[8] On the other hand, the former principal believed that open classrooms—a methodology that he said "promotes critical thinking skills through both individual and group work, project-based learning, and less direct instruction"—could be more easily and readily adopted in primary and secondary schooling settings in Japan. This vision was not necessarily held as essential by the JIS board of directors and families[9] who all seem to hold dear the immersion, or at least the "international English," aspect of the school.

Teacher, Student, and Family Experience

The JIS leadership expressed that the most difficult challenges facing the school are managing both the recruitment of teachers—Japanese teachers, but especially non-Japanese—and conversations with parents. It is not easy to attract qualified, non-Japanese content subject teachers to JIS (not least because of the location being quite

a distance from the Tokyo metropolis). Also, while parent involvement is encouraged, some parents are "over-involved" (as one administrator put it). Correspondence between teachers and parents about individual students is considerable, and much of this burden is placed on the Japanese teacher in the team-teaching pairs, since interestingly very few of the parents speak English. The dynamics of open classroom management and discipline techniques is also a cause for difficulty—teachers come from a variety of different countries, and the diversity in beliefs about education and the Article One schooling regulations often become points of contention. Although some teaching teams work cooperatively and find healthy consensus through compromise, in some teams the Japanese teacher basically follows the lead of the headstrong non-Japanese and complains that they are often "busy *tidying up* after them." Most teachers had little or no experience with open classrooms and immersion education, but they did seem to become invested in the approach after a time. A few view their role less idealistically than others, but generally speaking there is great dedication from the teachers.

Even though JIS is in a regional city, four prime ministers hail from the prefecture and, unlike Tokyo, there are few choices for private alternatives to public schools considering the strong local interest in education. The basic attraction to the school for parents then is a disappointment in the local public schools combined with the rather fashionable allure of "native" English speaking teachers (see the Introduction to this volume). The teaching philosophy of open classrooms and the methodology of learning through a second language are less important to the parents than the practical view of English as a tool for opportunity. This opportunity is one many of the parents themselves did not have as probably less than twenty percent of the parents have conversational English ability, and of these, only a very few have the confidence to speak directly with the principal or teachers in public. One teacher mentioned that in the first two years of the school, during in-school meetings they recall, only two parents asking questions directly to the principal in English. Of course the limited English ability of the parents affects the amount of educational support at home that they can provide for their children.

According to the principal and teachers, the children at JIS are very accepting of differences and are flexible in their thinking—there is almost no bullying and very little thought of their own identity, per se. Adults (especially leaders even more than parents), however, are quick to try to squeeze and pigeonhole the alternative approach of JIS into a "Japanese standard" to fit the Article One regulations—many worry about *hensachi* (standardized exam scores), teaching more classes in Japanese, and children losing their Japanese language skills (and hence their "Japaneseness," see Befu, 2001; Downes, 2001). These concerns developed into a conflict over the JHS curriculum between the principal and the board members—Dr. Good was intent on offering social studies subjects in English "to ensure students gain skills in critical thinking." However the Japanese board members were concerned that at the JHS level the students and parents should be concerned with getting into elite high schools and universities, which would of course also serve to further the reputation

of JIS in the wider community. Because of this concern, many argued that social studies classes should be taught in Japanese, defusing the principal's argument by asking,"Why can't critical thinking skills be taught in Japanese?" This disagreement precipitated Dr. Good's resignation.

Reflecting this debate, in an open forum on immersion education held for the JIS community, one parent questioned a graduate of the first primary school immersion program in Japan, Katoh Gakuen (Downes, 2001)—"When you made the decision with your parents to attend an immersion school, were you not concerned about your future in society, issues such as gaining entrance into a prestigious university and finding employment?" The Katoh Gakuen graduate, by then a university student, explained very patiently to the parent that they "were totally missing the point of immersion education. If you are worried about social status then why not have your child attend any number of high schools in Japan that will provide rigorous preparation for entering a 'good' university?"

Location and Role within the Community

Although within the community there is political opposition to JIS as a drain on public money, there seems to be support for the educational experiment in and of itself. Rather than questioning the alternative educational philosophy per se, the problem among citizens seems to be with a perception of "privilege."[6] Japanese society is becoming more and more stratified (e.g., Kariya, 2001), and OECD statistics (2009) have recently shown how Japan is positioned among the worst five in terms of discrepancy of annual income families in advanced countries, along with Turkey, the U.S., the U.K., and Portugal (also see Mock, 2009). The principal estimated that of the families with children enrolled in the preschool and kindergarten programs at JIS, 5–7% of these parents are unable to send their children to the primary school because they cannot afford the tuition. Indeed, this socio-economic stratification is evidenced among the families with children enrolled at JIS. Staff members note, for example, that some parents are able to afford the time for intensive help with homework each evening. Nearly 100% attendance by mothers (and fathers to a lesser extent) on parent participation days also suggests that these are single-income families, although the trend in Japan is for more and more mothers to work in order to supplement their husband's incomes. There may be a certain truth to the perception of privilege.[10]

Interestingly, no public school teachers in the city send their children to JIS. When asked why, a JIS administrator thought that one reason she had heard voiced was that public school teachers have a pride that prevents them from admitting that there may be a more desirable alternative to a public school education. "What is wrong with the job we are doing?" Of course this is an interesting comment in light of the tolerant attitude most public schools and MEXT have toward the cram school industry in Japan (Roesgaard, 2006), which in a way contradicts the more general worldview that places high import on meritocratic and egalitarian educational ideals, no matter

the stratified reality (e.g., Rohlen, 1983). The other reason is, of course, the tuition fees—upwards of US $10,000 per year per child—as compared to state-subsidized, free compulsory education. Residents echo the sentiment of public school teachers with some pointing out that the school is not meeting the needs of the community. Since this area of Gunma has the highest concentration of Brazilians in Japan (Tsuda, 2003), some have pointed out the linguistic demands of the citizens is not being met by offering an immersion program exclusively in English and not Portuguese (which echoes the points about multilingualism that Kubota makes in the Foreword).

NIS

School History and Mission

The idea of creating an international school for children of international background in Okinawa originated with the foundation of Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology (OIST), a nationally funded international graduate school and research institution in central Okinawa. In order to attract qualified international researchers and professionals, it was thought necessary for Okinawa to establish an international school where these international researchers and professionals could send their children for an education in English. Three entities were responsible for the building of the school—Okinawa Prefecture, a central Okinawan city, and a private educational publishing company (the same institution that managed JIS). Okinawa Prefecture funded the building of this international school with the conviction that the success of OIST depended on the existence of a quality international school for the children of the international OIST community. The Okinawan city provided the land for the school building site, formerly a natural recreation park. The publishing company was responsible for the school administration. The primary and convincing reason that this Tokyo-based publishing company—and not a local Okinawan management team—was selected and given total control over the institutional management, school philosophy/mission, and day-to-day operation down to and including the level of the classroom, was because of the prior experience that this publishing company had with running the English immersion program at JIS.

The school states as an important element for founding the school the need for an English immersion school in the community of Okinawa:

> …a large percentage of local people expressed the necessity to have an English immersion school that develops young people who can cope with the rapidly-globalizing society in Okinawa Prefecture. The survey data gathered from the parents whose children are attending public schools, and OIST staff members showed that 60% of the parents of public school students and 80% of OIST staff feel the need to have a school which offers classes in English. (NIS, 2015)

Although the consensus of designating a Tokyo-based company to administer this new, important school for the future of Okinawa due to their prior experience with

similar international school was viable, one can only suspect the resentment of local community leaders towards having Tokyo outsiders taking charge of the school, especially given Okinawan autonomy and its complex historical relationship with Japan (Pearson, 2001).

The school literature further explains the complexity of establishing an English immersion school while being authorized in the Japanese education system:

> Though several international educational institutions are located in Okinawa, including some alternative schools, the majority of these are unauthorized, except for a few "miscellaneous schools." There is no international educational institution in Okinawa that is authorized under the First Article (Article One) of the Japanese School Education Law. In light of the above, the foundation of an international educational institution is in demand [sic]. Such an institution will be able to offer an option to the [sic] people who are interested in English or international education, such as the children of OIST staff, employees of the institutions involved in the Asian Gateway Initiative, US military forces, and citizens of Okinawa.

NIS opened in April, 2011 in Okinawa as a private international school that provided two strands: an "international strand" and an "English immersion strand." The school was designated by MEXT as an Article One school, adhering to government rules and regulations as an officially sanctioned Japanese school. As mentioned in the section above, whether public or private, Article One schools receive funding from the Japanese government unlike non-Article One international or ethnic schools in Japan. Students who graduate from primary and secondary schools not accredited as an Article One school, outside the officially sanctioned schooling system, often have difficulty entering Japanese high schools and universities. The alternative entrance pathways that exist in the admission process at most universities designed to accommodate Japanese returnee students (*kikokushijo*) or foreign students (*ryūgakusei*) do not apply to Japanese students educated in international schools in Japan. NIS' status as an Article One school following the MEXT rules and regulations was appealing to parents of Japanese nationals since once their children graduate from this school, they would receive the same certificate and qualifications as the counterpart local public schools or private Japanese schools. When these students graduate from NIS Junior High School, they would have the qualifications to apply for entry to any Japanese high school.

Educational Philosophy and Methodology

The school mission was to be a "unique school" providing a "unique experience for children like no other school in the country." The core of the school's educational philosophy is to provide education to children so that they can become independent in their learning, thinking, and behavior. The mission further states that for children to develop their own worldview they need to develop knowledge and understanding

of global society. The school puts emphasis on the learning of English as a means to communicate effectively with "the world's people [sic]": "Cultivating such a person requires the ability to communicate effectively with others… Focus on educating children in English is rooted in the reality that English is a valuable tool for communicating with the world's people… children will reap the benefits of expanding their communication through English and Japanese, through a greater sense of partnership with people, and with more appreciation and deeper respect for the world's people [sic]." The school philosophy goes even further to say that "children will gain more understanding of themselves and their country… Children of diverse background [sic] and nationalities who come together to learn at [NIS] in the same space embody the essence of globalized education."

In addition to English education, the school provides other features not found in conventional Japanese elementary schools, such as open-classroom style buildings where students can work freely interacting and communicating with others. The school is also situated in a location with many trees and hills where students can be immersed in a natural environment. The school's educational philosophy states that "lively, flexible communication will help to develop a unique, creative persona." NIS also provides a unique opportunity for children to interact with horses. They established a horse facility within the school grounds with as many as ten horses, stables, a horse arena, and personnel for taking care of the horses. Activity clubs at the end of school day included a variety of activities to foster children's varied interests. These clubs range from ones not common at many other primary schools such as *uma-bu* (horse club), karate, cycling, pottery, and traditional Okinawan crafts, to more conventional activities like soccer, art, and music.

The school offers two educational programs in which students can choose to enroll: an "Immersion Course" for Japanese students, and an "International Course" for international students. However, since both courses are accredited under the MEXT Article One, the curricula and instructional contents offered are rather similar. Students enrolled in both programs have a homeroom team of one Japanese bilingual teacher and one international English-speaking teacher assigned to each class. In all classes in both programs the content is offered in English as the medium of instruction (EMI), except for Japanese language arts (*kokugo*) class. The only other exception is a social studies class (*shakai*) in Japanese offered for immersion course students.

Teacher, Student, and Family Experience

NIS is in its fourth year of operation since the opening in April 2011. Student enrollment has been increasing every year. The first year began with kindergarten, first, second, and fourth grades in the primary school. Each grade had two classes, one "international" class and one "immersion" class. The second year, the enrollment nearly doubled with the addition of one class each in the first and second grades along with new kindergarten students. In the third year, the primary school was completed

with a total enrolment of over 400 students in all grade levels, kindergarten through sixth. In the fourth year the junior high school opened with a group of students who had graduated from the primary school. NIS, with the label of "private international school with accreditation from the Japanese Ministry of Education," achieved a rapid growth in enrollment, attracting many students not only locally but also from cities outside of Okinawa.

More than 90% of the student body turned out to be Japanese nationals with varied abilities of English language. One crucial reason for not attracting many international students is that student recruitment is conducted according to the Japanese school calendar. The school year starts in April and ends in March. NIS has entrance exams in October for the following April like all the other private, MEXT-accredited schools in Japan. Many foreign students or returnees coming to Okinawa from a system not on the Japanese calendar look for schools during the summer months in order to begin the school year in the fall. NIS is often not flexible about accommodating students coming from outside the Japanese system by allowing them to enroll midyear or during the summer. Accordingly, it was inevitable that the school ended up enrolling mostly Japanese students already on the Japanese school calendar. Another reason for low enrollment of non-Japanese is that the tuition is high even when compared to other private schools and international schools in Okinawa making it difficult economically for young scientists from OIST, many who are postdoc fellows and entry-level researchers, to consider NIS for their children.

Since there are few students with L1 English skills, there is in effect nearly no distinction between the International Course and Immersion Course. Although students for the most part communicate with their teachers in English during the instructional times of the day, in settings among themselves they naturally gravitate towards using Japanese almost exclusively for both social interaction and even during peer-to-peer academic work. The dominance of Japanese language is such that even students who have strong English skills choose to use Japanese instead whenever possible.

In a kindergarten class that Takahashi was teaching, an American child had some Japanese as an L2. Interestingly, he preferred to speak Japanese as much as possible during the day and only would revert to his L1, English, when it was encouraged or enforced during certain times during the lessons. This boy had quickly recognized that Japanese is by far the dominant language of interaction amongst NIS students and therefore was required if he was to participate fully in social settings at school. Another student, a Korean boy who enrolled in the school mid-year, had come from another kindergarten where he was forbidden to speak Japanese. After a week of only speaking English in class, he realized that Japanese was the dominant language at NIS, and indeed, he could not make any friends if he did not speak Japanese. He stopped speaking English to his classmates in social settings, and appeared to be much happier in school.

For teaching and learning, English is the target language at NIS, and is a measure of success at various levels for the individual student, teacher, class, grade, and school.

However, Japanese is definitely the language of power; it is the dominant language in the school. There was no Japanese as a Second Language (JSL) program or any class designated for non-Japanese speaking students at the time. If a student cannot speak, read or write Japanese, he or she is outside of the norm, and is assigned to Japanese tutors for Japanese language instruction, which was not originally planned for and so takes place outside the regular curriculum in open spaces on campus such as the library, reinforcing further these JSL students' outsider status.

In this "international school," the Japanese nationals who are fluent in Japanese might potentially benefit from an additive bilingualism of English. However, since the school is resistant to any kind of international accreditation and only needs to adhere to the standard Japanese curriculum to meet MEXT Article One requirements, and since the social world of the children does not require any other language besides Japanese, there is no immediate incentive for students to gain English language proficiency other than perhaps maintaining a good grade in English language arts class.

Since NIS is an elementary school with kindergarten, parents are the major decision-makers when enrolling their children. There are numerous psychological, social, and emotional factors that influence the parent's decision to send their children to an international/immersion school rather than a local Okinawan public school. English education at an early age is the overriding reason for why the school attracts so many children. In the case of kindergarten students, many of them already had been to an English-speaking preschool before starting kindergarten at NIS.

One factor that affects the parent's decision to send their children to NIS is, the parent's own experience of learning, or attempting to learn, English. One parent shared her own experience of having a short stay in the U.S. in high school, but not being able to communicate with her host family because she did not speak much English. She then took many years as an adult to learn to speak English including another extended experience of living and studying in the U.S. in order to gain English language proficiently. She believes that if her son is exposed to English at an early age, he will not have the difficulties she had, especially in pronunciation. Another parent also mentioned her own experience of living in the U.S. and wanting her child to be exposed to the world at an early age. She says English language learning is not the objective for sending her child to an international school. Rather, she sees English as a way for her child to see the "bigger world." Another reason a parent stated was that she did not want her children to go through the regimented Japanese school system she had to experience.

Another factor of this kind of decision-making is the student's family background. For example, a bicultural family with a Japanese mother and American father shared a sense of family crisis when their children reached school age and started to spend their days at school speaking Japanese to their teachers and friends. They started to have difficulty communicating with their English-speaking father. The parents felt that in order to facilitate effective family communication, they needed to do something about their children's English development and hence the decision

to send them to NIS. In these cases the father had a limited involvement in the children's education when they were attending the Japanese school, since he could not communicate with the teachers directly or participate fully in school functions. One such father asserted,"As an international family, we really wanted our children to understand the world, understand the two cultures, and how their roots are in two languages, Japanese and English, and to be well prepared to make contributions to the world whatever they decide to do." They were particularly pleased with the school providing bilingual support, not just English, but also Japanese. The father explains, "Each of our children has two main teachers, one Japanese and one an international English speaker. Both teachers are highly experienced. For me it is important, because I can talk to them. I don't speak Japanese. I speak several other languages, but not Japanese. But I can speak to the staff and teachers. I can be involved in my children's education."

Location and Role within the Community

The news of an international school that would provide an alternative education excited the interest of many local Okinawan people. Since NIS opened, every year there has been more applicants than places, exceeding the school's capacity. Some children applied again the year after they had not been accepted. Many resident families from outside of Okinawa welcomed NIS, since their children sometimes did not get along with Okinawan children.

The unique location of Okinawa, with so many American military bases housing tens of thousands of American families on the island, creates another layer of complexity in terms of building an international school. In spite of a large number of native English speaking families and children living on the island, these families have very little contact with local Okinawan residents. The bases are restricted to American military-related personnel. The bases are equipped with all the social facilities, including several large elementary schools, therefore families living inside the base precincts and base system have no reason to go outside the bases. The few American children from base related American families were enrolled in NIS for the primary reason of getting Japanese experience while living in Okinawa. They were not looking for an international education in English, but rather, it was convenient to have English-speaking teachers and children when learning Japanese language and culture.

The contradictions in people's perceptions of the school and their expectations for the school are revealing. Some parents and teachers perceive and expect the school to be a true international school that provides an international curriculum in English with some Japanese support. This perception is challenged by the conspicuous fact that the management and administration of the school is entirely run by staff hired by a Japanese corporation, a Tokyo-based firm that according to many informants elicits little or no input from the teachers with extensive international experience. Other parents and teachers perceive and expect the school to be a Japanese school

with a Japanese curriculum and an English-language education, a view that is again challenged by the questionable educational credentials of the corporation's administrative staff and management, a point that some parents and teachers argue would not be the case at a typical MEXT-accredited school funded by Japanese taxpayers. Indeed, NIS is a new category of school that does not fit any established mold and is still in the process of shaping its educational model.

The timing of the establishment of the school also affected the student population. Just before NIS opened in April, 2011, the catastrophic earthquake and tsunami hit the Tohoku area of mainland Japan. Families from the Tokyo area moved to Okinawa because they felt that it was not safe for their children to live in Tokyo after the Great East Japan Earthquake and resulting Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Plant meltdown in 2011. Because there are very few private schools in Okinawa, especially at the primary level, families who could afford to send their children to a private school rather than a local public school simply preferred to do so. NIS seemed like a good option for these relatively wealthy families seeking refuge in Okinawa. Many of these families did not speak English well enough to send their children to an all-English international school.

With high tuition fees and additional fees for entrance and teaching materials, NIS students are invariably from wealthy families. Most of the parents are professionals—medical doctors, lawyers, professors, business owners, and celebrities. A high percentage of Japanese students are from mainland Japan (for example, one-third of Takahashi's NIS class was from outside of Okinawa). Surprisingly, some families are split, with fathers staying and working in their home cities of Tokyo, Osaka, or Fukuoka, while the mothers and children relocate to Okinawa for the purpose of sending their children to NIS.

CONCLUSION

The pursuit of "global education" in Japan is faced with complexities such as how educational approaches and initiatives outside the norm can be incorporated into the state schooling system. Local (read Japanese) MEXT Article One accreditation regulations effectively create insurmountable barriers to educators pursuing the global (read "international") approaches—the oxymoron of an "international Japanese school." Alternative education is marginalized. The complexity of being both an international school and a MEXT Article One school seems to create barriers for the pursuit of global education. The school is required to follow the MEXT rules and curriculum, which are aligned with Japanese educational philosophy and traditions. This rule limits any initiatives to be innovative for providing international and global pedagogy. If they break away from the MEXT, they can no longer receive any funding from the government or obtain the accreditation for the students to be able to go on to Japanese high schools or universities.

The local politicians and community leaders in Gunma and Okinawa who advocated to fund the establishment of these international schools had high hopes

for JIS and NIS to be able to prepare local children to be competitive in the world as well as providing international educational venues for international children from regional international communities, such as OIST. The educational philosophy and the goals the schools aimed for were to provide a global education and create independent thinkers, with English language being the major medium of instruction. However, once the schools started, the various operational constraints of the rules and regulations of Article One created forces that ultimately reconstructed the schools into institutions indistinguishable from a "regular" Japanese school. The instructional content through all the grades had to follow the MEXT curriculum. The entrance exams and the school schedule of starting in April and ending in March made it difficult for international students coming from non-Japanese schools to be enrolled, and there was much confusion among staff members and parents as to whether the school should be a MEXT Japanese school or a new type of international school. For example, local Japanese bilingual teachers sometimes treated international teachers as outsiders coming to teach at a Japanese school in Japan, rather than including them as part of the same "international" school. Instead of trying to understand each other, and analyzing the real source of disagreement—the MEXT regulations—Takahashi overheard Japanese teachers commenting, "Foreign teachers are lazy. They just complain about work hours and not having enough vacation days."

The schools provide opportunities for English language education and exposure to international views through international teachers, however, they have not gone any further to provide an education that might nurture students with global skills and thinking to be competitive in a global environment. This was felt by many of the students and parents of mostly international students with good English skills who did not fit the majority group profile of Japanese students learning English which resulted in NIS losing fifty or so students in the first three years. Some of the international students moved away from Okinawa due to their parent's job situations, but many of them moved to different international or American schools.

In the end, one wonders if these schools, knowingly or inadvertently, simply perpetuate the societal status quo—children from wealthy and educated families gaining resources to compete and maintain the social advantage of links with "the international." The result is that the popularity of "international" as a fad and buzzword drives the conversation among the elite and privileged. The schools fail to be an agent of change for Japanese youth and society since any links they can provide to global awareness are only offered to advantaged, elite children given the prohibitive tuition fees.

This phenomenon parallels that of the *yutori kyōiku*[11] ("relaxed education") initiatives as having been cause for the creation of a wider gap between the privileged wealthy groups able to afford to compete in a competitive *juken* system of entrance exams. Those who can afford studying opportunities such as *juku* (after school cram schools) gain a huge advantage over children whose families come from lower economic groups and therefore not able to compete with this "relaxed" education policy of *yutori kyōiku* (Kariya, 2002). According to Kariya and Rappleye's study

on the effect of globalization on Japanese education (Kariya & Rappleye, 2010), "relaxed education" increased the number of students who did not study and that the students from disadvantaged families stopped studying outside of school at a higher rate than those from advantaged families, therefore contributing to widening of inequalities in education. "As a result, for the disadvantaged students, not only were there fewer outlets and clear pathways for low-skilled manufacturing jobs in local areas, they became even more heavily disadvantaged because they lacked a strong set of basic skills in traditional core subjects (math, science, reading)" (Kariya & Rappleye, 2010, 51).

The educational initiative such as these English language immersion schools for Japanese elementary school age children could have great potential for creating *global jinzai*, "global human resources," talented young people who could work and compete in the global market. However these schools cater to parents and teachers who are only familiar with and most comfortable in Japanese systems that are in alignment with the educational priorities of the state—a Japanese curriculum for language arts, social studies, and English as a foreign language, rather than alternative curricula based on critical thinking and collaboration (such as the International Baccalaureate). Therefore this seemingly innovative educational setting of Japanese elementary schools with both an international and English immersion strand for economically advantaged Japanese families does not lead to cultivating globally minded individuals, but rather individuals comfortable only in a prescribed Japanese cultural and societal norm. This is not accidental, because fear of losing "Japaneseness" perhaps starts from state assumptions of cultural identity maintenance. As Befu argues, "Japan needs to develop an environment that can foster…multiculturalism…, abandoning its zero-sum game model of acculturation and embrace a positive-sum model" (Befu, 2009).

The stated goals of the immersion education at JIS and NIS is to address traditional arguments surrounding the failure of ELT in Japan (see Introduction), arguments that tend to focus on deficiencies related to the educational system, the teachers, the institutions, and the sociolinguistic environment. The problematic of globalization (or internationalization, as indicated in the name of the schools themselves) is also by implication an important focus of the schools. These arguments are similar to the ones that Imoto (2011) found at international preschools—English is the overt reason given, a powerful symbol of the programs. But there is a tension of purpose and orientation, since both schools state their goal is not as "mere language schools" but as national Article One accredited institutions whose mission is school education with EMI (if not the lingua franca amongst pupils and teachers). Identical to the situation that Imoto (2011) describes at early childhood institutions, English is a "multivocal symbol," at once a commodified product and an unmarked language for communication depending on the meaning given it by each individual actor, whether teacher, parent, or pupil.

Ideally one might expect that language immersion at JIS and NIS would be less about (re)defining cultural boundaries ("cultural literacy")[12] and more about

developing a "critical literacy" (Freire & Macedo, 1987), creating opportunities for students to construct knowledge and identities that are not inherently linked to a national cultural identity. Indeed, such language immersion might foster thinking beyond the dichotomy of *us and them* (the "transcultural," "creole," or "hybrid" e.g., Willis, 2006, Willis & Murphy-Shigematsu, 2008), with more diverse understanding of "Ourselves" and "Others." Unfortunately, analysis of our data shows this is clearly not the case.

A similar tension of "authenticity" appears to underlie the decision-makers themselves as well as the participants in these schools. On the one hand, there is a fear of becoming "too international," since to do so would render the schools "inauthentic" in terms of the Japanese educational system. On the other hand, the "international" label hints at an "authenticity" that links English to cultural prestige or even elitism. In essence, one might argue that these examples—English language, the symbol of "international"—are invoked as boundary markers. Though the institutional names of JIS and NIS give the impression to the local communities, prospective student families, and job applicants that these are "international schools," once in the school, students and teachers are constantly reminded that "this is a Japanese school in Japan." Typical Japanese school activities and cultural practices from the *nyūgakushiki* (entrance ceremony), *sotsugyōshiki* (graduation ceremony), *undōkai* (sports day), *gakugeikai* (performance day) to wearing *uwabaki* (indoor shoes) inside the school buildings all reinforce the "Japaneseness" of the schools. At NIS, when staff or parents made suggestions for changing these traditional customs and practices, they are simply told by the administration, "This is a Japanese school in Japan." At JIS a debate between the American principal and school board members over whether critical thinking skills can be taught in Japanese is another example of how such cultural boundaries are being reinforced. Because these "inverse bilingual programs" we are discussing are by definition *elite*, at least at JIS and NIS, the educational process itself and the cultural knowledge that is being transmitted tends to reinforce traditional stereotypes and norms. The nontraditional model of immersion education is unconsciously reformulated, pigeonholed by parents, board members, and teachers into familiar categories where borders between Japan and the "Other" can be constructed for security. This in the name of "globalization."

Children themselves seem to have an inherent flexibility in the creation of transcultural identities (Downes, 2001). Ethnographic work shows that students are not particularly concerned with their own national identity. It is the adults (parents, school leaders, and, most importantly, the State) that are concerned with pigeonholing the learning of an identity, the transmission of culture through schooling, into the standardized testing and national curriculum benchmarks for fear that otherwise children will lose their Japanese language ability and national identity (a powerful tension, especially given the location of NIS in Okinawa, a region historically located alternately in and out of Japan and thus engaging with a long-standing identity debate over "Japaneseness"; see Allen, 2002). Where is the

place/space for these "global children" to flourish at the primary, secondary, and postsecondary levels of education within the present schooling structure?

As mentioned above, one question that scholars of Japanese education have asked is how initiatives such as *yutori kyōiku* actually exacerbate social inequalities if the underlying examination and entrance system is not adjusted. Is this a pattern? The related question we are tempted to ask is whether these Article One schools in Japan (or similar schools in other countries) that embrace as missions the ideals of a "global society" simply further entrench values that emphasize national boundaries? This question, in turn, touches on other questions of Japan as an emerging creolized, immigrant society—which it arguably must become if we consider the aging Japanese population and the declining birth rate as serious phenomena. Can alternative schools succeed in creating educational models that can help effect change towards such an *imin shakai* (immigrant society) in contrast to the present neoliberal model that supports nationalistic discourse on a "beautiful nation" (*utsukushii kuni*)[13] assumption?

NOTES

[1] Pseudonyms.

[2] Pseudonym.

[3] Interestingly, the opponent whom the incumbent mayor defeated in the last election ran on an anti-JIS platform. Because of the large subsidies it receives from the city, the school has been in this way used as a political tool of sorts.

[4] This perhaps reflects a deep-seated belief that in Japan education is egalitarian as well as "meritocratic," a stereotyping that has been questioned (e.g., Takayama, 2008).

[5] Pseudonym.

[6] This perhaps reflects the belief expressed by some in Japan of a cultural "zero sum"—gaining "foreignness" (e.g., proficiency in a foreign language) means a loss of "Japaneseness" (cf. Goodman 1990).

[7] Since bilingual immersion programs have most often been implemented to help minority populations to more effectively learn the dominant language of a community, this school could be considered an "inverse bilingual program" since the purpose is to educate a majority population in a minority language.

[8] For example, more than 4,500 bilingual teachers would be needed to implement immersion programs in merely 1% of compulsory schooling grades in Japan.

[9] No public school teachers send their children to JIS—one administrator whose husband is a public school teacher indicated that this was because of "pride" and perception of elitism. Interesting to contrast this with the very accepting view of *juku* cram schools by public school teachers—even though both JIS and*juku* indirectly question the effectiveness of the local public schools, the category of school is different.

[10] A recent report by the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare claims that in 2005 the income disparity in Japan was 7% greater than in the U.S., up nearly 40% over figures for 2000. This is quite significant, even though the MHLW does note that the figure is probably skewed because pensioners, of which there is a growing number in Japan, are recorded as having zero income (nikkei.co.jp, August 25, 2007).

[12] *Yūtori kyōiku* ("relaxed education" or "room to grow"), an education reform in Japan introduced in 2002, was an initiative for students to develop new types of academic abilities, including student initiative, independence, critical thinking, creativity, and the ability to investigate topics of interest

to students, all of which are considered essential qualifications for 21st-century global economic competitiveness (see Kariya & Rappleye, 2010).

[12] Edward Hirsch models of cultural literacy that speak of knowledge deficit—"What every American child needs to know"—are also quite common in Japan and often referred to as "theories of Japaneseness" (*Nihonjinron*).

[13] Prime Minister Shinzō Abe's "Toward a Beautiful Nation!" (*Utsukushī kuni e*, 2006) became a best seller in Japan. In this book, he claims that Class A war criminals (those charged with crimes against humanity) were not war criminals in the eye of domestic law. The Korean and Chinese governments, as well as noted academics and commentators, have voiced concern about Abe's historical views and his ties to the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform (*Atarashīrekishikyōkasho o tsukuru kai*) and the new history textbook, which among other claims denies the abduction of "comfort women" for sex slavery by Japanese troops.

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