Teachers and Ethics:
Developing religious self-awareness

Tinka Delakorda Kawashima
(Received. October 3, 2019)

Abstract: Responding to the growing internationalization of schools in Japan, a debate arose among scholars of religious studies on the possible contribution of religion for developing the intercultural skills in education. Some had argued that religious education would promote intercultural understanding (Inoue 2011); others warned it could facilitate nationalistic ideologies (Fujiwara 2007). In the meantime, however, since 2018 and 2019 ethics (*doutoku*) became an official (graded) subject in elementary and junior high schools nationwide. Although teaching ethics seems less controversial than teaching about religion, it is believed to be challenging to teach and grade ethics objectively as the teachers' knowledge, beliefs and values can have a significant impact on children's moral development. This article introduces an approach that makes religion a factor in education, promoting understanding of different beliefs and values. The author developed an interview about religious awareness and asked future elementary school teachers to answer them. The questions were mainly focused on beliefs in the existence of gods, kami, Buddha, ancestor spirits, heaven; visiting graves and carrying talismans; and their images about religions (Shinto, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, New religions), etc. After answering the questions, the students compared their answers with others in their group, and finally, with the statistical data from a public survey. The results revealed students' lack of awareness about their own culture and (non)religiousness. Besides that, the interview process itself proved useful as it helped teachers become aware of their existing knowledge and experience with religion. Also, as teachers themselves conducted the interviews, they noticed significant differences among each other. In teacher's training programs, such "self-reflective learning", taken from the sociological study of religion, could be used to spark future teachers' interest in their historical roots, beliefs and values and enhance their understanding of multiple dimensions of religion as a step toward achieving multicultural competence.

Key words: Internationalization, public schools, ethics, teacher training, religious awareness

Internationalization of schools

Numbers of international students in public schools have risen to around 43,947 (Saito et. al 2018) and will climb even higher due to renewed governmental policy of increasing foreign workers, researchers and students in Japan. For example, in Higashi Hiroshima, the city housing Hiroshima University, the number of foreign researchers, and other workers coming from almost 90 different countries around the world has increased to 7,451 in 2019 (Higashi-Hiroshima City Official Website).

Because many bring their families with them, public elementary schools, without much experience with »foreign students" in the past, now have about 30-70 new students and the number is growing. In the future, as this trend seems to last, every teacher and student might "have to" share a classroom with a student from a different country.

Ethics for diverse reality - the need for training in diversity

Measures to adapt and coexist with foreign workers have been taken; in December 2018, the government pursued preparations for this by compiling activities focused on supporting non-Japanese residents in their daily lives from a broader perspective (Hamaguchi 2019). However, a little help has reached public schools, where support for Japanese language instruction and integration to school life is exceedingly needed.

Momentary existing educational policy toward "immigrant students" is remedial education. "The term "immigrant" refers to foreigners called the "newcomers" who have arrived in Japan since the 1970s, in contrast to the existing ethnic minorities such as the Koreans and Chinese who are labeled the "oldcomers"" (Tokunaga 2018: 2). The newcomers used to be called "foreign children" (*gaikokujinno kodomo*), but recently a term "children with foreign roots" (*gaikuni ruutsuno aru kodomo*) is often used. "This change occurred in order to include the rising population of immigrant children having Japanese nationality, and those who grew up in mixed marriage families" (Tokunaga 2018: 2). The reason why the existing remedial education that has taken root since 1989 is insufficient today lies in the fact that it was modeled for the returnees (*kikokushijo*). "*Kikokushijo* are Japanese children who lived and went to school abroad due to their fathers' job transfers" (ibid.). International Education Unit (*Kokusai kyouikuka*) under The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, an Technology (MEXT) is responsible for education of both groups, returnees and immigrants together, as if the educational issues of returnees and immigrants would be similar, "including difficulties in learning the Japanese language and adapting to Japanese school culture" (ibid.: 4).

Similar to "an assimilative approach in education for minorities such as *Zainichi* Koreans (Motani 2002), there is a lack of a "multiculturalism" approach" (ibid). "Given the absence of multicultural education approach in MEXT policies, most schools do not value notions such as social justice, equity, and diversity in their educational practices towards immigrants" (Tokunaga 2018: 5; Tokunaga 2017). Some schools with a large minority population do include the idea of "multicultural co-existence" (*tabunka kyousei*) in their school programs (Tsuboya and Kobayashi 2013). However, "it is rare for public mainstream schools to provide education that affirms native languages, cultural traditions, and the ethnic identity of immigrant students" (Tokunaga 2018: 5).

On the ground, in the public schools, teachers face difficulty in instructing immigrant students due to two essential reasons: 1) shortage of teachers trained in Japanese language education, and 2) severe lack of teacher training for diversity (The Society for Teaching Japanese as a Foreign Language 2018).

Teaching ethics today should be done concerning the changing social reality characterized by cultural and social diversity. Therefore, it has become imperative for all teachers (not only the teachers who are to teach ethics) to develop a deeper understanding of different cultural traditions, values, and beliefs. Teacher training for teaching ethics, which was proposed by MEXT, thus intrinsically relates to the problem of dealing with "immigrant students" and should be considered on this broader perspective.

A brief international view on education about religions and ethics

In the international laws concerning the rights of the child (Convention on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No.1 of Article 29-1) regarding education, in particular, it is stated that children should be encouraged to develop an extensive range of different values because they are expected to fulfill their role in overcoming differences in an international environment. Especial stress is on the importance of teaching all aspects of discrimination and prejudice. Specific ethical values the education should aim to promote are respect for peace, tolerance, and natural environments (Yamamoto 2016).

In recent years, "many European countries have faced two opposing trends: secularisation and growth in the numbers of people affiliated to particular religious groups" (Darmody and Smith 2017: 2; see Evans and Evans 2008; Davie 2006). The reasons for this trend are people's changing attitudes towards organized religion, but also immigration (Casanova 2006). Moreover, "emerging social tensions in some countries have highlighted the need to place a policy focus on creating tolerant, mutually respectful societies where people are prepared to live together in increasingly diverse social settings" (ibid.: 5)

Educational systems about religion and ethics (often referred to as "religious education" (RE)) across Europe have depended on different historical backgrounds regarding the extent of separation between church and state. Some countries provide religious education as a compulsory segment of the curriculum, in other countries RE is optional or is not provided; yet others provide both religious education and ethics as an alternative (see Table 1). In France and Slovenia, religious education as a subject is not provided. However, the topics concerned with religion are incorporated into other subjects, i.e. philosophy.

Table 1 Approaches to Religious Education (RE) in State-supported Schools across EU Countries

Description	Countries
Compulsory	Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Netherlands, Sweden, UK.
Optional	Estonia, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain
Combination of approaches	Belgium, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Portugal
Ethics/values as alternative	Belgium, Lithuania, Finland, Germany, Italy
Opt-out possible*	Belgium, Ireland, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, UK
Opt-in possible	Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania
No provision of RE	France, Slovenia

Note: * "The law permits parents to opt their child out of any subject that is contrary to the conscience of the parent of the student or in the case of a student who has reached the age of 18 years" (Darmody and Smith 2017: 6).

Approaches to religious education principally depend on definitions of what constitutes RE. Various theorists have built on the fundamental distinction between learning *in* religion, *from* religion and learning *about* religion (Grimmitt 1987, Avest et al. 2009). "Learning *in* religion tends to focus on the faith formation; learning *from* religion relates it to the child's own experience; learning *about* religion enables children to learn about the dominant religion in addition to other religions and belief systems" (Darmody and Smith 2017: 6; see Halsall and Robben 2010). The question how educational systems shape children's moral and religious development raises different problems for majority and minority faith groups, as well as those without specific religious affiliation, or the non-religious (Tinker and Smart 2012). Schools focusing, not on religious formation, but on learning about religions, are less likely to face tensions around religious issues. "Intrinsic to the goal of educating students about religions and beliefs are the instruments of civic and peace education, tolerance and ethics education, as well as global and cross-cultural education". These approaches can advance the understanding of 'living together' in multicultural societies (Darmody and Smith 2017: 3-4).

Results from the dialogues on religious awareness

For teacher training, we must explore how to achieve a first step toward acknowledging cultural differences by learning on the personal level about each other's religious awareness.

One hundred and forty-four (98 female + 46 male) future elementary school teachers in their 3rd year of undergraduate university program were presented with an interview and a public survey material and asked to answer the interview in three steps: 1) answer questions about your religious awareness, 2) compare your answers with others in your group, and 3) compare to statistical data from a public survey. All questions cannot be mentioned here, but they mainly focused on "beliefs" in existence of gods, kami, Buddha, ancestor spirits, heaven (see results obtained from 98 students (results) in Figure 1); "practices" of visiting graves, going to shrines and temples, reading about fortunetelling and spirituality, carrying a talisman (see results in Figure 2); images about religions, such as Shinto, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, NRM (see results in Figure 3), etc.

After students answered the questions, they compared their answers with others in their group and wrote down their comments. Finally, they discussed in their groups the statistical data from a public survey and wrote their final free comment.

The objectives of this dialogical approach can be divided around three issues:
1) What is the students' religious awareness?
2) What is the meaning of dialogue in the interview process?
3) Did students recognize (and accept) different beliefs?

1) The results obtained directly from the interview data pointed to the students' lack of knowledge about religion, as well as about their own (non)religiousness. Majority of students stated to be non-religious but all students, including the non-religious and religious/spiritual recorded to believe in the existence of multiple supernatural entities, such as gods, Buddha, ancestor spirits, heaven, afterlife, and so on. In their daily life, most of them care about various "mystical" phenomena. In the comments, many students wrote that they have not (until now) at all thought about Japanese religions, or about any other religious tradition in general. Thus, they cannot tell which religion is right or wrong.

2) Using the dialogical approach for this interview was aiming at giving the students the opportunity to "express" their beliefs and opinions about religious traditions to their peers. In the comments, many wrote that this was the first time to talk to someone about these issues. The interview process through dialogue thus proved to be useful as it helped the students become aware of their existing knowledge and experience with religion, and enabled learning at a personal level about each other's traditions and beliefs.

3) As students themselves conducted the interviews in groups with their peers, they noticed significant differences among each other.

According to their guotes from comments, students realized through dialogue and discussion that they had different beliefs as others in the group; that their friend was "religious"; that they do not know much about religion; that they care about many "supernatural" things in their everyday life; that not everybody has a *butsudan* in their home, etc.

In their free comments, although many students wrote that some beliefs and practices were common in their group or prevailed in Japan in general, the majority stated they were surprised at realizing the different experiences and knowledge of religions when compared to their peers.
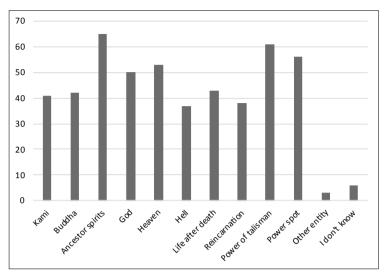
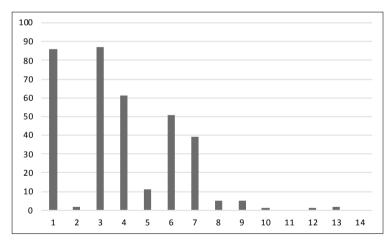Figure 1 Do you believe in the existence of the following?

Figure 2 Do you practice or participate in the following:

1 Make a New Year's pilgrimage (visit) *hatsumoude*

2 Visit a church on Christmas Eve

3 Make equinoctial visits to family graves

4 Carry a talisman, *omamori* or *ofuda*

5 Visit a shrine or temple or church

6 Pray for family safety, health, success, a passing of an exam, etc.

7 Read about fortunetelling (*uranai*) or visit a fortuneteller

8 Read sacred scripts, Bible or other literature on the topics of religion/spirituality

9 Read manga/ watch anime or movies on the topics of religion and spirituality

10 Zen meditation/Yoga / Church Mass/ Recite Sutra/ Spreading the faith

11 Practice Yoga as fitness

12 Other activities

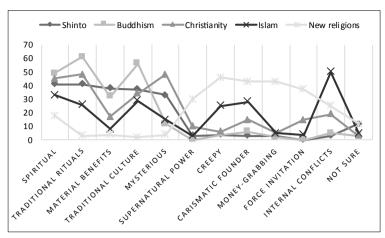13 Nothing of the above

14 I don't know

Figure 3 How do you perceive Shinto, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, New religions?

Conclusion

The development of moral education that recognizes diverse values is a prerequisite for a peaceful society. What should educators do to assist students mutually accept/recognize diverse values? Researchers and educators on religious education working in different European countries emphasize dialogue in classrooms and participative learning that gives agency to students (Leganger-Krogstad 2003; Weisse 2003, Ipgrave 2003, Jackson 2004).

The approach I tested among the future teachers of elementary schools showed that discussing religiosity could help raise awareness of one's beliefs and values concerning others.

In teacher training programs, such "self-reflective learning" could be used to spark teachers' interest in their historical roots, beliefs and values and a deeper understanding of different religious traditions, as well as multiple dimensions of religion as a step toward achieving multicultural awareness and understanding.

References

Avest, K.H. ter, D-P. Josza, T. Knauth and G. Skeie (eds.) 2009. *Dialogue and Conflict on Religion. Studies of Classroom Interaction in European Countries*. Münster: Waxmann.

Casanova, J. 2006. Religion, European secular identities, and European integration. In T. Byrnes and P. Katzenstein (eds.), *Religion in an Expanding Europe*, pp.65-92. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Darmody, M. and E. Smith 2017. Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics: views of teachers, parents and the general public regarding the proposed curriculum for primary schools. Consultation Paper prepared for the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) (available at https://www.esri.ie/system/files?file=media/file-uploads/2017-01/BKMNEXT324.pdf)

Davie, G. 2007. *The Sociology of Religion*. London: Sage.

Evans, J. and M. Evans 2008. Religion and Science: Beyond the Epistemological Conflict Narrative, *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 34, pp.87-105.

Fujiwara, S. 2007. Problems of teaching about religion in Japan: another textbook controversy against peace?, *British Journal of Religious Education* Vol. 29(1).

Grimmitt, M. 1987. *Religious Education and Human Development: The Relationship Between Studying Religions and Personal, Social and Moral Education*. Great Wakering Essex: McCrimmon.

Halsall, A. and B. Roebben 2010. *Religious Education in Multicultural Societies. Literature Review*, Dublin: ESRI.

Hamaguchi, K. 2019. How Have Japanese Policies Changed in Accepting Foreign Workers?, *Japan Labor Issues* Vol. 3-14.

井上順孝. 2011. グローバル化・情報化時代における宗教教育の新しい認知フレーム (<特集>宗教の教育と伝承)『宗教研究』**85**(2), 347-373.

Ipgrave, J. 2003 Dialogue, citizenship, and religious education. In: R. Jackson (ed.) *International Perspectives on Citizenship, Education and Religious Diversity*. London, RoutledgeFalmer, pp.147-68.

石井 研士. 2007.『データブック現代日本人の宗教』増補改訂版.

Jackson, R. 2004. *Rethinking Religious Education and Plurality: Issues in Diversity and Pedagogy*. London, RoutledgeFalmer.

Leganger-Krogstad, H. 2003. Dialogue among young citizens in a pluralistic religious education classroom. In: R. Jackson (ed.) *International Perspectives on Citizenship, Education and Religious Diversity*. London, RoutledgeFalmer, pp.169-90.

Motani, Y. 2002. Towards a More Just Educational Policy for Minorities in Japan: The case of Korean ethnic schools. *Comparative Education* **38**(2): 225-237.

The Society for Teaching Japanese as a Foreign Language 2018. *Gaikokujin jido seitou kyoikuwo ninau kyoinno yousei kenshuumoderu puroguramu kaihatsu jigyou [Development of a model program for training teachers in charge of foreign students]* (available at http://www.nkg.or.jp/pdf/2017momopro_hokoku.pdf).

Tinker, C. and A. Smart 2012. Constructions of Collective Muslim Identity by Advocates of Muslim Schools in Britain, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 4, pp.643-663.

Tokunaga, T. 2017. *Multicultural Education in Japan*. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education.

Tokunaga, T. 2018. *Possibilities and Constraints of Immigrant Students in the Japanese Educational System. (Background paper for the Global Education Monitoring Report.* (available at https://www.jica.go.jp/jica-ri/publication/other/l75nbg000010mg5u-att/Background_Tokunaga.pdf)

Tsuboya, M., and H. Kobayashi. 2013. *Jinken to tabunka kyosei no koukou: Gaikoku ni tsunagaru seitotachi to Tsurumi sougou koukou no jissen (Human rights and high school of multicultural coexistence: Students with foreign background and practices of Tsurumi sougou koukou).* Tokyo: Akashi Shoten.

Weisse, W. 2003. Difference without discrimination: Religious education as a field of learning for social understanding. In: R. Jackson (ed.) *International Perspectives on Citizenship, Education and Religious Diversity*. London, RoutledgeFalmer, pp.191-208.

Yamamoto, T. 2016. Moral Education System and Human Rights Education in Japan: Based on Recommendations Made by the United Nations (available at https://az.repo.nii.ac.jp/?action=pages_view_main&active_action=repository_view_main_item_detail&item_id=4558&item_no=1&page_id=13&block_id=17).