

How Elementary School Teachers Support Students' Communication in an Online Cross-Cultural Education

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to identify how school teachers intervene in students' cross-cultural exchange and communication. This study focuses on three Japanese teachers from an elementary school in Osaka (herein after referred to as the J School) and one Nepali teacher from an international school in Tokyo (herein after referred to as the N School) who have started a cross-cultural exchange program since 2022 April.

The number of Japanese researches on cross-cultural education has gradually increased as globalization deepened in the Japanese society. One of the main objectives of cross-cultural exchange programs is to promote conviviality among students. However, mainly due to distance issues, students are obliged to start their communication online, which could negatively affect the eventual outcome of the program. In this paper, authors seek to clarify what teachers can do to support students' online communication, especially at their very first step of encounter, in this case between Japanese and Nepali students, through an observation and interview approach.

Keywords: Cross-Cultural Education, Intercultural Communication, Multi-Cultural Exchanges, Online Collaborative Learning.

Introduction

As globalization in the Japanese society deepened, people were required to live together with those who have foreign roots and different cultures. On the other hand, people who have foreign roots had to face difficulties in creating connections with the traditional Japanese society. Especially, foreign people who had to integrate themselves in small communities of the same ethnic group tend to have less opportunity to create relationships with the local community. Though it seems that the Japanese society is very much globalized, it is nonetheless important for both the Japanese and foreign persons to interact with each other. In order to achieve conviviality, it is important to understand that each person has a different cultural background (Sakai et al, 2021). In school education, cross-cultural education is encouraged in order to develop the capacity of children to adapt to the society. However, in reality, there are only a few cases that aims to realize conviviality with people from different cultures as an educational goal. Moreover, although cross-cultural educations in elementary education have been introduced, it is still not sufficient to achieve the goal of deepening cross-cultural understanding among students (Kimura, 2020). Such classes often offer opportunities to deepen understandings on the diversity of cultures, but they do not necessarily encourage building relationships with people who belong to different cultural settings.

It could deepen the separation between the local population and the foreign students, if the cross-cultural understanding is undermined. Such situations could potentially lead to strengthening their stereotypes (Kumatani, 2013). As a researcher of cross-culturalism, Enoi (2021) indicates the necessity of reviewing the structure of cross-

cultural education that divides people by their nationality or ethnicity. In order to understand and grow sympathy towards diverse cultures, it is important to build necessary connections in the relevant field. Taking into account these missions, cross-cultural education must be developed. One of the methods that enables students to build convivial relations with foreign people is the cross-cultural exchange program.

Cross-cultural exchange programs develop capacities for students to communicate with those who have different culture. Sato (2015) indicated that one of the educational issues to foster of qualities and abilities in new society where people with diverse cultures coexist is to try interact with people and build relationships. Cross-cultural exchange program is a way to understand different culture and conviviality with foreign people. In this method, teachers play an important part in students' valuable communication because it is hard for students to start communication online with those who have never met. Therefore, it is important for teachers to encourage students' communication in cross-cultural exchanges to realize conviviality.

Methods

In this research, the authors collected data through observations and interviews to the teacher A, B, C from J school and a teacher D is from N school. Using a software for qualitative data analysis called MAXQDA, the authors analyzed two videos. One being the first online exchange, the other being the second online exchange. The authors noted when teachers intervened and followed the changes the students made. children in Tokyo. Teacher A is in charge of one of the 5th grade classes and mainly organized this program for 62 students in two classes of his school. Teacher A has conducted cross-cultural exchange programs with people in Taiwan, Cambodia, and the Philippines. Teacher B is in charge of the other class of 5th grade students with teacher A. Teacher C supports this program mainly as an interpreter. She has supported cross-cultural exchange programs with people in Korea, Taiwan, Cambodia, and the Philippines. Teacher D is in charge has no experience with school collaborative programs.

The teachers including the authors talked about the goals and finalized the plan of activities through online meetings and SNS. Teacher A visited the international school in Tokyo and met with some teachers and some students currently enrolled. Before the first activities started, the first class had some students send letters and shared videos introducing each school. In 2022, the first exchange between classes was conducted using online meeting applications on June 23rd and the second exchange was conducted in June 30th.

The authors participated as supporters and researchers in this program from the beginning to the first and second online exchange. They observed activities in May and the online exchanges in June. The also interviewed teacher A on April 12th, 2022 and on June 23rd, 2022. The authors often talked with teacher D and took notes.

Results

Through the analysis, it was found that the actions that teachers took to promote communication were: (1) advise students to communicate in a clearly manner, (2) assist students in deepening their understandings on their counterparts, (3) indicate students concrete communication methods, including how to interest their counterparts, (4) physically facilitate students' online exchange through controlling turns and timings of the communication.

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