Teaching about Plurality of Perspectives: Educational Practices in Japanese Schools Teaching Social Sciences

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to illustrate the lesson and the teaching methodologies in a social studies lesson which was designed to promote respect of the plurality perspectives in relation to a particular concept. The Japanese social studies curriculum and instructional research stress the important role of lesson studies.

In Japan, content and methods are developed and research regarding the concept and definition of social studies is performed. In this article, I show the six characteristics that are present in Japanese social studies educational practices, and present an example study lesson for civics education. The result of this research raises two points. First, I demonstrate a social studies lesson practice in the type of ‘argument’ with reactions from an actual lesson and students. Second, I illustrated the methodology how students were able to pluralise concepts of ‘freedom’, which is a theme of this practice.

1. Types and characteristics of social studies educational practices
1.1. How is the practice developed in Japan?

Social Studies is a subject taught in all secondary schools in Japan. Its implementation is based on the relevant curriculum developed. Schools can use a variety of relevant textbooks which are all authorised by the Ministry of Education. It can be argued that this leads to a notable lack of diversity in lessons, and restricts somewhat the teachers’ freedom. However, teachers’ practices are not based solely on textbooks. Depending on the theme and outcome of a lesson, teachers can use any type of literature, document, website, or learning materials at their own discretion. In other words, the content and methodology of a lesson are substantial and vary according to the
practitioner’s theoretical approach, as well as the students’ needs.

Due to the above, Social studies educational practices in Japan vary considerably among different schools, and the social studies educational practice changes dependent upon students’ background and the experiences that they bring as well as the educational practices endorsed by the practitioners. However, for the overall educational aims, as prescribed by the relevant curriculum are rather common and include the development of many types of skills, such as ‘problem solving’, ‘understanding’, ‘explanation’, ‘argument’, ‘decision making’, and ‘social participation’.

In the present research I presents six types of teaching theories that can be observed in social studies educational practices, and adopts a lesson plan based on the type of ‘argument’ and describes actual changes in the child. This article will first present six characteristics that can be observed in social studies educational practices. Second, it provides a concrete lesson plan according to the details of the ‘argument’ type using the symbolic culture. Third, results of the lesson are analysed and the students’ transformations are identified. This research intends to show the logic of social studies educational practices in Japan and facilitate a research method and concrete practice through the three procedures above.

1.2. Observable characteristics in social studies educational practice

In this section, I present the logic and components of the lesson’s structure as six different types with four individual phases. Additionally, the researcher highlights characteristics and issues related to each type of study. First, it is established that the basis of the practice lesson is ‘problem solving’; the researcher aims to describe ‘the Fukuoka station’, a traditional Japanese practice as an example. The rationale behind this lesson is as follows. First a stage is set to grasp the problem. In accordance with the Fukuoka Station, children attest that they recognise differences in people at a station based on the shoes and clothing that they wear each day. By observing social issues in a society, students can recognise their own intuitive understanding. Secondly, children examine and investigate a social issue. This stage entails considering an approach to investigate a problem that has been recognised as specifically different. Children perform a field investigation at the Fukuoka Station to reach an intuitive understanding of what was initially recognised. Children cannot judge the value of a person from his or her clothes, and must recognise that each person is important, including those working at the station. Lastly, the teacher completes the lesson so that it can be reviewed when the social issues are experienced first-hand. A characteristic of this approach is to examine an
imminent problem in light of the students’ own experiences. The problem is that this kind of learning is difficult to evaluate, and that it is impossible to form a solid example because one does not encounter problems such as diplomatic relations between children again.

The second entails situating ‘understanding’ as a mainstay. For example, let us examine the struggle of a child with muscular dystrophy\(^3\). The rationale of this practice is as follows. First, the objective is to grasp the external situation. The chief subject understands this situation having been bound to a wheelchair for many years and achieving excellent results while aspiring toward the future. The next step is to grasp the internal situation. The children learn that the chief character failed a high school admission test due to an obstacle and sympathise with the character’s emotions, such as annoyance or sadness. Then, it is expected that the children investigate the issue by re-enacting it. If placed in a similar position as the main character, what would the students do? Children contemplate the predicament and its outcome as well as examine and analyse the time spent suffering and how the school year was affected. Lastly, students consider the social implications for the character. The lesson will conclude after considering the impact of struggle on a society. This is typified by coming to understand the social value and meaning of identifying with the main character’s feelings and desires as he or she experiences them. One task is ensuring objectivity and a non-linear viewpoint that can be easily limited to ‘a universal experience’.

The third stage entails practice, or applying an ‘explanation’ to the foundation. The researcher would like to adopt an idea from the field of economics known as ‘investigative confidence and undercutting’ as an example\(^4\). The rationale behind this practice is as follows. First one must understand the foundation of the event; children should understand the actual practice of undercutting at a supermarket using juice at half price as an example. The next stage is to understand the interpretation. At this phase, a consumer determines whether their interpretation is adequate when further undercutting occurs. Next is to understand conceptual knowledge. At this stage, one comes to realise that the advertisement is for a sale designed to attract customers. The final stage is a rebuttal of conceptual knowledge. At this point, the teacher determines whether a dissenting opinion is risky because a discounted product is purchased, and students realize that discounts are part of a comprehensive management strategy. A characteristic of this type is to think about a cause and condition that allows a social phenomenon to be transformed into a public law by understanding an example. A problem here is the security of a correspondence, the plurality of the interpretation, and whether the law
and theory are of a correctable nature.

The fourth is practice entails applying an ‘argument’ to the foundation. As an example, I take on the topic of ‘brain death, organ transplant laws, and civil rights’\textsuperscript{5}. The rationale of this practice is as follows. The first stage entails grasping an event. Children learn about various laws concerning brain death and their relationship to organ transplantation. The next step entails an analysis and inspection of events. Opposing opinions are analysed to determine the problem’s four primary facts, claims, premises, and proofs before analysing the logical structure of each claim and fairness of the assessment. Next, it is applied to similar issues; children analyse the arguments for issues unique to the United States of America using the same logic. The process may conclude at this stage, although constant value judgement and consensus building occurs in the classroom concerning the problem. A component of this stage is to make a social judgment based upon an individual’s decision or criticism, and adjust the social process according to the issues. This ensures that there are no problems by guaranteeing that comprehensive and systematic knowledge poses a challenge, and that through a substantial and formal agreement an appropriate conclusion can be reached.

The fifth practice includes ‘decision making’ at its foundation. For this the researcher examines the ‘unpaid pension problem’, which has become a major social dilemma in Japan\textsuperscript{6}. The rationale to approach this problem is as follows. At the first stage, the issues must be clarified. The teacher shows the students newspaper articles concerning the unpaid pension problem and considers the key issues. In the following stage, students investigate a potential solution. For this exercise, we divide the children into groups representing two separate viewpoints: ‘to pay pensions’ and ‘not to pay pensions’. Both groups consider solutions such as compulsory collection or adjustment of payment rates. Students then reach a conclusion and identify values that are inherently part of the issue. Children analyse concepts such as the value of freedom, abiding by the laws, self-interest, public well-being, and cost. Finally, based on concepts, values, and various choices, the children make decisions independently. A component of this exercise is that it declares its objectives concerning the topic; it also encourages individuals to devise clear, pluralistic solutions. These exercises can allow for a balance between the expected choice and supporting details concerning specific principles.

The sixth step entails emphasising ‘social participation’ as a mainstay. For example, let us examine the issue of ‘illegal parking’\textsuperscript{7}. Initially, at this stage, an understanding of the issue must be established and the problem identified. Next, students examine the issues. Children should consider why these issues
are a problem in the area surrounding the station and why so much illegal parking occurs. Then, children should think about a solution to the problem and engage in decision making both individually and as a whole. For example, they may examine the measures that have been taken to solve the issue of illegal parking, how it is enforced, and search for the best solution. The final consists of a proposal and the children’s participation. Children suggest their own solutions to members of the local government. This practice is typified by decision making and value judgements that will affect society. However, there are time constraints that make solving the problems very difficult related to learning evaluation, teaching materials, and lesson development.

Each section contains parts that are more congested than others. However, the procedure is designed according to the aim of the lesson. I cannot go into detail about each of the above educational practices, however those mentioned above are of specific benefit to social studies education in Japan.

2. Citizenship education to acquire plural perspectives of the criterion through the concept of ‘Freedom’

2.1. The purpose of this lesson

This lesson is designed to foster self-judgment, raise one’s ability to act independently, and gain multiple perspectives useful in analysing society. In later years, there have been lessons that consist of explanations? especially in social studies. Consequently, students have no interest in learning. Furthermore, they fail to form their own opinions and lose all critical thinking ability; they have also lost the opportunity to broaden their horizons.

The PISA’s ability to evaluate critical thinking skills is insufficient; instead, emphasis is placed on academic skills. Based on the PISA, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology conducted a nationwide achievement test that investigated scholastic ability and identified two main problems: ‘a need for basic knowledge’ and ‘the utilisation of thought and judgment’. In Japan, students’ ability to answer knowledge-based questions is outstanding, but they cannot answer questions that require critical thought and judgment. This shows that schools prioritise acquisition of knowledge first and thinking skills second.

The following skills must be instilled in this generation: consideration of oneself, ability to present it to public, and the ability to act upon it. Thus, we base our lessons on debate. This means that students may participate in some discussions throughout the lesson rather than focus on the teacher’s explanation. This allows one to appreciate knowledge, learn to accept the opinions of others, and expand one’s own perspective and ways of thinking.
How does an individual obtain ‘freedom’? This lesson emphasises the idea that students’ freedom belongs to each other, and that they do not truly think about freedom in their daily lives. As a result, they have developed their own perspectives regarding freedom. This lesson focuses on each kind of freedom by using a cartoon called ‘ONE PEACE’, whose characters embody individual freedoms. The cartoons as the culture show one social condition in the society of modern times. Because the cartoons reflect a social phenomenon and event, and writing is accomplished, we often show a constant social viewpoint and way of thinking to a reading person. For example, the example which reflected a society includes "family description". The family description varies according to the times when cartoons were written greatly. The family who included parents and grandparents was drawn on the cartoon from the 60s through the 80s, but the cartoons after the 90s picture a nuclear family and a single-parent family. In other words, we can review the way of the family in the Japanese society and the change because cartoons pay their attention to a family image to draw. It makes it possible to analyse a society critically to analyse cartoons as the culture that reflected a social event. Students can question the soundness of one's thoughts by considering viewpoints designed to foster new modes of thinking.

2.2. Lesson plan
Lesson plans is as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher’s instruction</th>
<th>Students activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questions from the teacher</td>
<td>Activities performed by the teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think there are regulations at school. Do you think that since certain hairstyles and clothing have been mandated, there will be an absence of personality and freedom?</td>
<td>Ask the students. Teacher cites traffic laws as an example.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel that there is no freedom in our daily lives?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So what does it mean to be free?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Japan decides not to go to war, and instead allows freedom of speech and expression. How do people in places where freedom is limited feel? Do you feel that it is bad when people do not have freedom? Is there a perception of individual freedom in the real world?

Freedom and individuality actually discussed in cartoon. Do you know about a cartoon called ‘ONE PEACE’? It is a cartoon in which the hero, Mr. Luffy, becomes a pirate king and participates in various adventures. During the adventure, ‘Luffy’ meets many people. Among them, many want to read a scene from the cartoon.

In this scene, Ms. Nami becomes a friend. Worksheets are handed out along with a scene from the cartoon featuring Ms. Nami. Please read because this exercise will take some time.

Please write your opinion concerning a problem that you have read about.

The point of this scene was to consider Ms. Nami’s final words, ‘I took eight years so I could be free at last’. Think of how ‘freedom’ is depicted by each character. Please share the idea in the groups.

Please summarize an opinion that was shared your ideas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discuss the social issues in our world. Ask to students</th>
<th>There should be freedom. Without it there are annoyances. A country engaged in a war understands freedom when there is peace. Students feel bothered when they do not have any food.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An illustration of ‘ONE PEACE’ is attached to the blackboard.</td>
<td>‘I don’t know the contents in detail but I have heard the name’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copies of the cartoon are distributed so that students can read from a scene featuring Ms. Nami. Distribute worksheets.</td>
<td>‘Should I write what I personally think?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lines have been drawn to the part where Ms. Nami states, ‘I took eight years, because I was accustomed to freedom’. Teacher advises students to write their thoughts concerning Ms. Nami’s, the islanders, Arlong, and Luffy of Freedom</td>
<td>‘Mr. Luffy fights for Ms. Nami’s freedom and happiness’.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students present world problems to consider individually. They pay closer attention to the world and think about the meaning of FREEDOM and express it.

Students look at an illustration of cartoon “ONE PEACE”.

Students fill out a worksheet.

Students understand the content of the scene shown in the hand out.
Since we have an opportunity to ask questions, please try to discuss potential answers. I will request some groups to have presentation.

By reading the same scene, many opinions were extracted. It would be good to categorize the opinions that were expressed today. Do you have a similar opinion? I want you to name this classification. What do you suggest?

| Give the answer to the team. Let the team write the answer for each item on the mock student paper. |
| The paper is attached to the blackboard. Classification occurs. Labelling occurs. A keyword description is devised. A description is given to a scene that did not contain a keyword. At this time, the scenes and words are pasted onto the blackboard to make a point. |
| ‘Ms. Nami creates a map of the ocean so Arlong can help the island people’. ‘The island people give money to Arlong to obtain freedom’. ‘Arlong uses the military’s power and force’. ‘Why did you think freely when ~?’ ‘What kind of feelings did ~ evoke at this point’? |
| Students categorize the types of FREEDOM that they thought about. |
| Students listen to other groups’ thoughts and provide constructive criticism. Students partake in classification while observing the thought process of other groups. We distribute the worksheet while observing the classification. |
| Students realise that there are many definitions of FREEDOM, not just one. |

‘ONE PEACE’ is actually filled with ideas concerning freedom. Other scenes are also included that prompt one to think about freedom of ~ ~

Cartoons, like other media, can be used to convey messages or concerns. There reader’s perception of the content may vary in levels of praise and criticism.

Some people try to obtain freedom for themselves. However, some people fight for the freedom of other people, such as Luffy. I think that ONE PEACE is popular because it addresses freedom, promotes imagination and empathy, and because it is exciting.

Each person has a different approach to thinking freely.

We addresses the idea of a multi-faceted look at issues.
2.3. The content of this lesson

The subject of this unit is ‘To analyse the concept of freedom’. Although we often do not think about freedom in our daily lives, we are restricted by certain laws and rules. This lesson prompts students to pay closer attention to such freedoms, their inconveniences, and think about what these freedoms mean to them. In addition, ways of thinking about freedom vary. Military power and force are used to demand freedom for oneself, and may cause the majority of the people hardship. The cartoon ‘ONE PEACE’ describes many different types of freedom through each character.

Regarding the negative power of such freedom, Mr. Lufy who is the hero fights against happiness for the sake of freedom, and evokes sympathy and a connection with the reader. We analyses the characters’ freedom from the various viewpoints presented in ‘ONE PEACE’, and considers whether a point of view regarding a certain kind of freedom is embedded in this cartoon.

From a variety of perspectives, this lesson focuses on individual thoughts held by students while building upon new ones. Our intention is to implement a variety of views to nurture individuals intellectually and allow them to empower themselves.

3. Recognition of the transformation and its process

This lesson was conducted in a twelfth grade classroom at K High School in Osaka, JAPAN in January 2013. The unit was intended to present plural frameworks of ‘freedom’ to the students. The students extracted a concept of freedom expressed by each character in the cartoon and filled out a card where the concepts were categorised and gathered. Teacher separated the students into three groups and developed an activity. The fist group students classified and mapped the concept of freedom into six categories as figure 1.

The category of ‘discharge’, contained many items demanding noninterference, liberation from debt, and escape from the tyranny of a ruler named ‘Arlong’. In the category titled ‘rule’, the students pointed out that we have come to not worry about life and death; in the category named ‘existence’ students noted that even tyranny can be overcome. The students also noted that a person forced into labour under tyranny still had free will and categorised such cases under ‘intention’. They also placed the creation of the tyrant’s empire under the category of ‘action’, and pointed out that rebellion against a tyrant is a freedom that each person possesses. For the category labelled ‘consideration’, the students suggested many different options for the destruction of tyranny from the bottom of the political system.
The second group’s mapping of consisted of seven categories as figure 2. For the category titled ‘freedom to influence’, the students included freedom and cases of arrest while ruling, and a village that considered placing the world under its control. In the ‘released freedom’ category they included the freedom to bear arms as a step away from tyranny. Under ‘liberation from rule’, the students noted that one can return to their former life, and mentioned a tyrant who returned to life after returning to town. For the category of ‘freedom from self-sacrifice’ and ‘freedom of self-sacrifice’ the students chose self-sacrifice to save the party, including the room of a servant helping the party who disappeared. The students classified ‘freedom of expression’ and ‘freedom to dream’ elsewhere.

The third group classified the characters’ freedoms into three categories. For the category ‘justice versus justice’ they noted that pluralistic justice existed, and there was a conflict in the story concerning the children’s desire to acquire something or help someone. For the category ‘liberation from rule’, they demonstrated that the characters escaped from a tyrant, and that it would be difficult for the party to cross into society; ‘the three-cornered relationship’ showed that former enemies could provide support.
Freedom of expression
The way of collapsing of the building

Freedom to dream
Aim at the dream that oneself wants to realize

Freedom from self-sacrifice
- The room of slave disappears
- I free friend from the place that dose not hope to live
- I want to save Ms. Nami
- I help Ms. Nami
- I save a friend

Freedom to influence
- Authoritarianism
- Put the world under the control of oneself
- There is a reason for Aaron
- Rule over the village

The freedom that is released
- Have a weapon
- I notice that I do not make me by one's power freely

Freedom of self-sacrifice
- I do not want to trouble people of the village
- I do not want to trouble the person of a village and the circumference

Liberation from rule
- Return to former life
- I want to release an island from rule of Arlong
- I must pay a friend of Arlong a tax
- Return to life before Arlong comes
- Arlong going out of the island

Justice VS Justice
- Make one's empire even if I use any means
- I establish an empire of Arlong, and unify the east seas
- I just put that oneself thought into an action
- Rule over the islanders
- Destroy a surveying room of Ms. Nami
- Help Ms. Nami
- I destroy a room if it is the room which does not wish Ms. Nami lives
- I hide a weapon protecting islanders
- Money

Liberation from rule
- I escaped from rule of Arlong and became free
- Escape from rule of Arlong
- I hit a captain

the three-cornered relationship
- Make a convenient friend
- Invite the person who wants to make a friend to one's ship
- Become my friend

Figure 2: A category and a mapping of the freedom the second group designed

Figure 3: A category and a mapping of the freedom the third group designed
From the mappings made by the students we assumes the following two points. First, the students were able to devise plural concepts of freedom derived from perspectives within the content. Freedom does not only include liberation from tyranny, but also freedom on other levels such as existence, discharge, intention, and rule – as shown by the first group. In addition, a contradiction exists between concepts of justice as noted by the third group. In each situation, there is no single solution, and the students were able to recognize that there was a conflict between each other's claims.

The second point concerns devising a method of mapping based on the KJ method and a method’s perspectives. The students did not understand the method of mapping by using the initial labels. Rather, they mapped an opinion according to the lesson and made a variety of categories in which freedom was inherent, and acquired the methodology required for classification. The category the students created contained some repetition. Furthermore, there is a clear category for insufficient rearrangement. However, we extracted individual claims and arranged them similarly for each opinion, and it could be said that we were able to recreate the structure of the opposing opinion and adjust it logically through substantial categorisation.

4. Conclusion

As result of this research, I notes the following three points. The first is that there is logic for arguments based upon a student centred approach and that it is a concrete lesson plan that produces results. This lesson recognizes a variety of values that can be drawn from media, and analyses the premise that a sense of values can be formed and classifies them appropriately. This differs from a lesson designed by an instructor solely to inject knowledge; I adopted an approach to constitute a lesson applying the student centred approach. This entailed not only presenting a lesson plan, but also elucidating its logic based on recorded lessons, which revealed the students’ reaction to them.

The second point is that a student can individually form plural concepts of ‘freedom’. Teacher asked the students to complete a worksheet concerning individual freedom at the beginning of the lesson. They were certain that ‘school regulations disappeared’ on this occasion because ‘a test disappeared’ and developed liberation from rule based on personal encounters with freedom. However, for the worksheet that asked the same question in a later lesson, they mention ‘analysing the opposition of both persons’ and ‘the thing that differed depending on a situation’. In other words, they understood that many aspects encompass freedom. As for the concept of freedom, a variety of methods to obtain it was devised based on each situation and way of thinking.
The individual freedom that the chief character in the cartoon embodied was thought to have helped save a group from tyranny. However, the lesson was that the tyrant thought about the country he ruled over. It can be said that the children grasped many kinds of concepts about freedom.

Notes
7 Kiyoshi Karaki, Social Studies lesson development and assessment as the type of ‘Social Participation’, Handbook of Teaching and Learning the Social Studies, Japanese Educational Research Association for the Social Studies, 2011,pp.41-44.
8 ONE PIECE is the most famous cartoon in Japan. This is a story in which a hero's pirate Monkey. D. Luffy travels the world. He meets a friend in a trip and it urges it to become a marine monarch with them. This cartoon are translated in many languages and sold in a lot of countries. It has become a best seller in Japan.