

Diversity and Equality in Education

Educational Equality for Immigrant Children in Japan

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1. To what extent are the educational opportunities for immigrant and refugee children guaranteed in Japan?

In this presentation, based on the interpretation by Kenneth Howe (1993), I will examine the extent to which the educational opportunities for immigrant and refugee children are guaranteed in Japan. Howe (1993) argues that “it is not the criterion of a formal system of equal educational opportunities that underlies the most defensible interpretation of the principle of equality of educational opportunity, but the criterion of educational opportunities of equal worth” and suggests the alternative interpretation of educational opportunity: equal access, compensatory interpretation, and participatory interpretation (Howe 1993, p.329). Along with these interpretations of educational opportunities, I will review the literature on the education for immigrant and refugee children in Japan and examine the current situation by focusing on the legal framework, (un)enrollment, academic achievement, knowledge, and curriculum. It leads us to the discussion on for what and whom is education being provided with regard to politics and human rights. Particularly, the participatory interpretation of educational equality gives us important insights into the problems of and possibilities in Japanese education system.

2. Case Study: Multicultural Curriculum

I will introduce and briefly analyze the pioneering educational initiatives for ethnic minority students in a junior high school in Japan and a high school in the US, from the perspective of the participatory interpretation of educational equality.

3. Diversity and Equality in Education in a Global Age

Finally, by using theoretical framework of educational equality by Kenneth Howe (1993) and the one of multiculturalism by Berry (1993), I will analyze the expected outcome of the educational initiatives, such as the curriculum that I introduced in the previous section, for ethnic minority students.

Multiculturalism is defined as an ideology that promotes socioeconomic equality without compromising cultural diversity (Berry 1993). Figure 1 shows the different patterns of integration of immigrants inspired by Berry’s (1993) and Fukuoka’s (1993) arguments. The vertical line indicates whether a society or system (such as an education system) promotes socioeconomic equality between majority and minority groups, while the horizontal line indicates whether it promotes cultural diversity or assimilation into the majority/dominant group.

Examining the cases that I introduced in the previous section, I will discuss the relationship between these two lines in Figure 1, in other words, the relationship between promoting both socioeconomic equality and cultural diversity, by introducing Howe’s (1993) argument about educational opportunities, in particular, the participatory interpretation. It suggests that the curriculum and evaluation standard (can be expressed as the vertical line in Figure 1) are often determined only by the majority, and the cases show that how they try to tackle this problem to empower minority students.

Multiculturalists argue that we should aim for both recognition of diversity and socioeconomic equality (Taylor 1994), while in contrast, liberalists, such as Barry (2001), argue that recognition of diversity hinders equality, discouraging minorities’ access to resources in the host society (recognition-redistribution dilemma) . Howe’s (1993) participatory interpretation of educational equality, being consistent with the idea of multicultural education [for e.g., the idea advocated by Banks & Banks (2015)], gives us an insight into the discussion on minority participation in creating “knowledge” and the official curriculum (the vertical line in Figure 1).

Several case studies have been cumulated in the field of educational research on ethnic minority children in Japan, and the statistical analysis of academic achievement, such as Kaji (2007), is gradually increasing. These studies should be more closely related to the theoretical framework of immigrant integration and multicultural society with the perspective of international comparison. This can contribute to the international discussion on multicultural society based on Japanese case as a non- “Western” society or a non-English speaking society, as well as provide feedback on educational practices to promote equality.

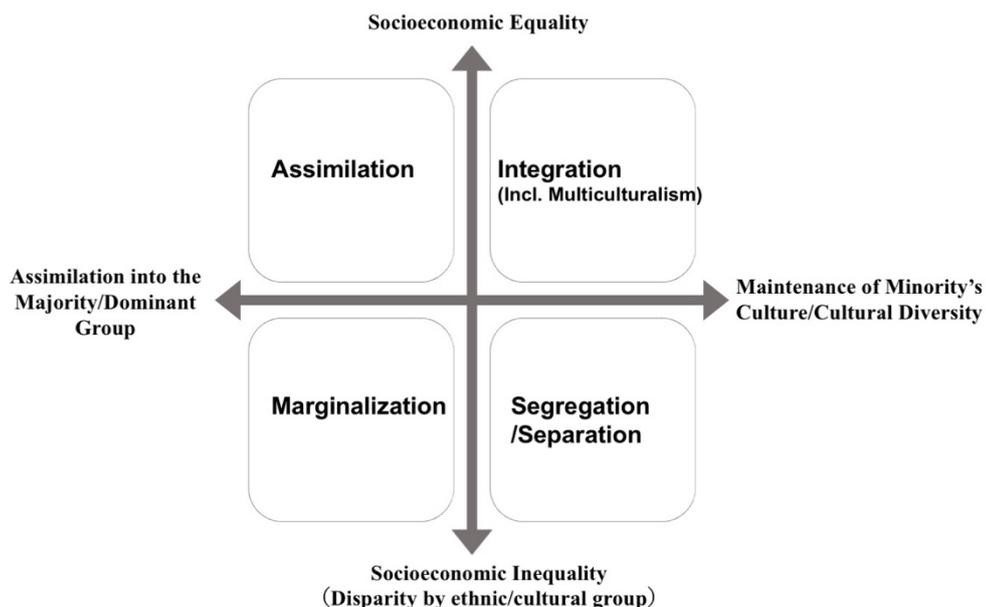


Figure 1: Socioeconomic Equality and Cultural Diversity

Note: Created by author, based on Berry’s (1993) and Fukuoka’s (1993) arguments.