Session I

EDUCATION FOR INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING
IN THE JAPANESE CONTEXT

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It is my great honour and privilege to have the opportunity for presenting my paper on the occasion of the inauguration of the Asia-Pacific Centre of Education for International Understanding.

We all know that the following words in the Preamble of the Constitution of Unesco “Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed” describes the supreme objective of Unesco. This phrase has been referred to by thousands of people who are involved in Unesco activities throughout the world. However, the subsequent phrases in the same Preamble seem to be more important at least for us who are gathering here to discuss how to develop Education for International Understanding in the Asia and Pacific Region.

Let me quote these sentences, despite them being a little bit long. “Ignorance of each other’s ways and lives has been common cause, throughout the history of mankind, of that suspicion and mistrust between the peoples of the world through which their differences have all too often broken into war. The great and terrible war which has now ended was a war made possible by the denial of the democratic principles of the dignity, equality and mutual respect of men, and by the propagation, in their place, through ignorance and prejudice, of the doctrine of the inequality of
men and races. "unquote.

We find in these phrases a foundation of Education for International Understanding, which has been one of the most significant efforts made by Unesco since its inception until this day. As a matter of fact, the expression “Education for International Understanding” is already seen in the document of the first session of the General Conference of Unesco held in 1946.

The Article 4 of the Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedom adopted by Unesco’s General Conference at its 18th session in 1974 identified 7 objectives of Education for International Understanding, the second of which is “understanding and respect for all peoples, their cultures, civilizations, values and ways of life, including domestic ethnic cultures and cultures of other nations”.

I should say that mutual understanding and mutual respect of different cultures and different ways of life of peoples are essential aims of Education for International Understanding advocated by Unesco.

The Article 7 of the afore-mentioned stipulates that each Member State should formulate and apply national policies aimed at increasing the efficacy of education in all its forms and strengthening its contribution to international understanding. This means that each country may develop Education for International Understanding in its own political, administrative, social and cultural context.

Now, I am going to touch upon the general trends of Education for International Understanding in the Japanese context.

In almost every country, “education” has been traditionally considered as something highly internal or national, since the main objective of education is to bring up young people so that they become good citizens of the nation.

Japan was not an exception in this respect. Until the end of 1960s, there had been no specific bureau or office in the Japanese Ministry of Education dealing with international matters, except the Secretariat of the Japanese National Commission for
Unesco. Within the National Course of Studies which is formulated and revised every ten years by the Japanese Ministry of Education as national curriculum standards, Geography and History were the only subjects that had international aspects. This means that Education for International Understanding *per se* did not exist in the Japanese schools with a very few exceptions.

From the late 1970s to the early 80s, the "internationalization" or globalization of the Japanese society became a main interest of the people. The National Council on Educational Reform which was established in 1984 as an advisory body to the Prime Minister repeatedly urged in its reports that, to cope with an age of internationalization, it would be necessary to make Japanese educational institution more open to the international community, as well as to help bring up Japanese people who are competent to live in an international community, and the Council proposed various guidelines of educational reforms in this line, including the strengthening of educational measures for Japanese children living abroad and those who have returned from a long stay overseas, the improving and reinforcing of the mechanisms for accepting foreign students, the reviewing of foreign language education at schools, the enriching of teaching Japanese language to foreigners, widely opening higher education to international community, etc.

Thus, I can say that international aspects in Japanese education became more explicit following these guidelines. It goes without saying that each item of those guidelines is important for the development of Japanese education. For the last ten years and so, the Japanese Ministry of Education has actively promoted Education for International Understanding. However, I cannot help finding some discrepancies between the Education for International Understanding initiated by Unesco and what is prevailing in Japan today.

Exactly ten years ago, namely in 1990, I created with dozens of researchers, school teachers, and administrators, the Japan Association for International Education. Teachers who are members of the Association are very active so that Education for International Education may be effectively introduced in their classes. Some others who are faculty members of universities are trying to develop educational materials for this purpose. I highly appreciate these initiatives taken by the members, but on the other hand, I often feel a slight disappointment.
My disappointment seems to derive from the impression that something very important is missing in Education for International Understanding in Japan. First of all, it is the lack of attention to those with non-Japanese origins living in Japan. The Japanese society has long enjoyed homogeneity in terms of race, language, culture, living standard and so on. This racial, social, cultural, and economical homogeneity in Japan is, however, rapidly fading away due to an inflow of foreign workers into Japan. At present, the number of non-Japanese pupils and students is sharply increasing throughout the country.

However, educational structure, methods and contents in Japan are not prepared to educate those non-Japanese young people. Teachers are trying to find ways how to protect and develop their own cultural identities, how to guide them to live together with Japanese people, how to help both Japanese and non-Japanese pupils and students find common values, etc. etc. I believe that the answers to these questions are to be found in Education for International Understanding.

Secondly, Education for International Understanding initiated by Unesco is not restricted to mutual understanding and respect of different peoples. In particular, after the 1974’s Recommendation, it is closely linked with Education in respect of human rights and fundamental freedom, both of which are common precious values for all human beings. I understand that this is the very reason why Values Education, Moral Education, Civic Education, and Religious Education are to be enhanced together with Education for International Understanding. It has often been pointed out that such spiritual aspects are very weak in today’s Japanese education.

Thirdly, mutual understanding and respect between different peoples should be established on the basis of full awareness of the human history as a whole. I regret to say that the historical point of view is not always given appropriate attention in Education for International Understanding in Japan. I believe that any facts should not be hidden in teaching human history, and that pupils and students have a right to know all the facts without any political biases.

To conclude my speech, I am convinced that the newly established Asia-Pacific Centre will open a new perspective for Education for International Understanding by giving the highlight to Values, Moral, Civic and Religious Education. Furthermore, I really do hope that the Asia-Pacific Centre of Education for International will make
a research in depth on how to teach History of the Region to young people based on affinity, friendship and respect, but not on hate, prejudice and mistrust.