The Best Practice of International Understanding Education in Japan and Policy Suggestions for the Future of ACEIU

Mr. HIRATA Yorito
Senior Curriculum Specialist
Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture

1 The "best practice" of International Understanding Education in Japan


The First Report by the Central Council for Education, "the Model for Japanese Education in the Perspective of the 21st Century, July 19, 1996," shows the basic future direction of education in Japan. The First Report regards the field of internationalization and education as an important "pillar" of education from the perspective of future social changes.

Internationalization and education, according to the First Report, consists of 4 themes, one of which involves the "strengthening and enriching of education for international understanding." The First Report describes the situation as follows:

"In the context of the advance of internationalization, it is very important for children to develop a feeling of understanding of different cultures and an attitude of being able to live in harmony with people from these cultures. The kind of education needed to cultivate these qualities has already been incorporated in different forms into regular subject teaching, Moral Education and Special Activities, or into school-based events, in many schools. However, when we think of international society in the future with the increased deepening of interdependence, we believe there is a need for education in this area to be strengthened still further and for schools to have a very clear grasp of the ideas involved in education for international understanding."

The report also states that in the context of promoting education for international understanding, the significance of existing international exchange activities
conducted in a variety of forms, including study tours to foreign countries, affiliations with sister schools and the hosting of foreign students in Japanese schools should be recognized. There is also a need, depending on the level of the school and having due regard to the school's actual situation, to provide support for those efforts, already being made.

In addition to such support, the report states that since there can be no question about the importance of the role played by teachers, it is recommended that the curriculum concerned with international understanding in initial teacher education courses and in-service training should be strengthened and that the schemes for sending teachers overseas should be expanded. In line with this, the opportunities for overseas study by members of local boards of education who are involved in giving advice and guidance on school educational activities should be also expanded.

Based on such recommendations, we are trying to expand various programs for sending teachers overseas and to utilize teachers and other personnel with overseas experiences actively for international understanding education.

2) Introduction of "Period for Integrated Study" and Education for International Understanding

The Course of Study, which serves as the curriculum guideline for schools, has been revised according to the above-mentioned report of Central Council for Education. In the revised Course of Study, the "Period for Integrated Study", recommended in the report has been introduced.

This cross-curricular period for study covers such areas as information technology, environment, welfare as well as education for international understanding.

This "Period for Integrated Study" is an important feature of the new Course of Study and represents a large number of hours in curriculum. The period is to be introduced from the 3rd grade of elementary school and its aims for students are as follows:

a) To establish one's own tasks or projects from one's own motivation, think and judge independently, and develop quality and ability to solve problems better

b) To learn how to think and study, develop the attitude of working on problem-solving and research activities independently and creatively, and to become able to think about one's own way of living.

Based on these aims and in accordance with the particular characteristics of the school and the community, learning activities are to be carried out, such as cross-curricular and integrated tasks covering areas such as international understanding, information technology, environment problems, welfare/health, such tasks should be based on children's interests and concerns, according to the situation of the
community and the characteristics of the school.

The "Period for Integrated Study" involves each school level, elementary, lower secondary and upper secondary, and can be continued through each learning stage.

3) Case Examples of Education for International Understanding at Elementary school

Case 1
  a) Grade and features:
     4th grade of elementary school
     Instruction of Social Studies utilizing Internet
  b) Aims of instruction
     To understand relations with other countries through learning about Japanese lifestyles and culture, and to develop the basic qualities for living in an international society
  c) Class contents
     With an aim to introduce the children's own prefecture to foreigners, various groups were formed. Each group concentrated on a theme, obtaining information from the home page of the prefectural office and utilizing the Internet.
     This activity aimed to enable children to increase their use of information technology and to deepen the understanding of their own culture.
  d) Class development:
     * Confirmation of learning contents: consideration of Brazilian children
     * Decision on the group theme: nature in the prefecture, sightseeing spots, etc.
     * Discussion on how to get information: use of Internet
     * Utilization of Internet: accumulation of information
     * Presentation: making the contents easier for non-Japanese to understand
  e) Results and assessment for the future:
     Most children showed a strong interest in the Internet and were surprised that data was renewed on a daily basis. They became adept at selecting necessary information for their project. After making a home page, they received e-mails from Hong Kong and other places and expanded their communication with schools in and out of Japan. They are hoping that areas with which they exchange will be extended to Asia and Africa in the future.

Case 2
a) Grade and features:
   3rd and 4th grades of elementary school
   Exchange activities with Korean people
b) Aims of instruction:
   To foster children who can respect others, have an open-mind and express
   their own ideas through the opportunities of having direct contact with people
   with different cultures, customs and languages.
c) Class contents:
   The class welcomed 24 Korean people and learned about Korean games,
   school life, food and clothes, songs, etc. By making small groups and asking
   questions on various topics, children had the opportunity to experience customs
   and cultures different from their own and in doing so tried to understand and
   accept them. At the same time, through the discussions they developed their
   abilities of expressing their opinions to others.
d) Class development
   * Discussion on class activities: exchange activities with a neighbouring
     country, Korea
   * Division of groups by theme: what are children interested to know
     and find out
   * Discussion on their findings: encourage children's interest and
     concern in foreign countries
   * Welcome activities for visitors: introduction of Korean ethnic
     costumes and daily life
   * Free discussion in small groups: communication of children's one's
     own ideas and feelings
   * Exchange of impressions of the activities
e) Results and assessment for the future:
   Since the number of children who are interested in finding out about
   foreign countries on their own accord has increased, this activity can be seen to
   have developed children's willingness and interest to learn. It is necessary to
   consider how to combine such knowledge and direct human exchange
   effectively from now on.

Case 3
a) Grade and features:
   5th grade of elementary school
   Cross curricular and integrated study in a "barrier-free" educational
   environment.
b) Aims of instruction
To understand that there are various cultures and customs in the world and each of them should be respected, and also that it is important for people in the world to help each other as partners.

c) Class contents:
To find out about lifestyles and cultures in Asian countries which have close relations with Japan, and to foster the attitude of thinking and judging from an international viewpoint.

d) Class development:
* To find out about the main trade partners of Japan: Korea, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia
* Make groups for specific countries: exchange opinions on what to look up
* Research activity, information-sharing activity, exchange activity: 15 hours' learning plan
* Presentation: presentations given by each country group
* Exchange of opinions: relations between Japan and Asian countries

e) Results and assessment for the future
Children understood the importance of cooperation with Asian countries. Children felt the importance of human relations as the basis of international society through those activities. Children are interested to know about other countries outside Asia.

Case 4
a) Grade and features:
6th grade of elementary school
"We, people of the earth", cross-curricular and integrated study

b) Aims of instruction:
To develop an open mind to become engaged actively with foreigners and foreign cultures and the ability to solve problems independently through research on foreign countries and actual exchange activities with people from different countries.

c) Class contents
To carry out learning activities throughout the year with a focus on international understanding. The three themes based on children's interests/concerns were a) exchange with foreign countries b) world music c) play in English! (English conversation). Various sizes of groups were made according to the contents of activities.

d) Class development
(Example of "Exchange with foreign countries")
* Do research on countries with close relations with Japan
  e.g. America, China, Russia, Brazil, Britain etc.
* Choose one's area of research and make preparations for an International Fair, gathering interesting information from books and the Internet
* Have an exchange session with people from the selected country
  (Cooperation of 13 foreign helpers)
* Summarize information from the session
* Provide information at International Fair
  posters, pamphlets, quiz, games, model toys, pictures, and so on

e) Results and assessment for the future:
  Children became active in expressing themselves and acted independently through the cross-cultural and integrated study. The reasons for this were: the tasks were relevant to the children's own lives, many experience-based activities were utilized, and various learning styles were used for problem-solving activities.

  It is necessary to take into account the children's actual situations, the contents of instruction, the characteristics of the children's local area, social changes and so on for the development of new integrated learning units.

2 Policy suggestions for the future of ACEIU

When we received your request for comments on the report of the feasibility study, we made the following comments in April, 1999.

"We warmly welcome the proposal of the Korean National Commission for UNESCO to establish a center in the Republic of Korea with a view to promoting education for international understanding in the region. In order to ensure that the center will conduct programs effectively in the region, we would appreciate it if you could consider the following points:

1 To treat the concept of "education for international understanding", the field of the center, as broadly as possible.
2 To avoid duplication/overlap of activities related to education for international understanding of UNESCO PROAP and other regional offices.
3 To make plans for concrete programs on the basis of the opinions of countries in the region.
4 To carry out programs paying full attention to circumstances/situations of each country in the region.
5 To rely on voluntary contributions in the case of raising funds from countries in the region.

I would like to add a little further explanation on the present situation in Japan concerning the first point.
Education for international understanding in Japan is a rather broad concept. It generally refers to obtaining information on different cultures and to various activities and exchange programs. It is not limited to these areas, but it emphasizes the acceptance of people with different ideas and coexistence with them. We think that having our own culture understood by others is an important part of education for international understanding. Also, foreign language education is indispensable in communication and understanding different cultures and is, therefore, a part of education for international understanding.

Since various activities are being conducted in the name of education for international understanding, we think that it is not desirable or realistic to restrict it to particular approaches and activities.

Next I would like to mention what considerations we should make on management of the center.

Sharing information and human exchange is indispensable. It is, therefore, very important to make a plan as to how, and at what level, such programs will be conducted.

It is also necessary to consider what language is to be used in actual activities. Should one common language be specified as a means of communication, or will multiple languages be permitted? The costs will be higher if multilingualism is desirable and employed.

We expect the center to play an active role in promoting mutual understanding in this area.