

CONFERENCE REPORT

Report on the 2021 Symposium for the Japanese Educational Research

Association for the Social Studies

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Background of the Symposium

The symposium for the 70th Annual Meeting of the Japanese Educational Research Association for the Social Studies was held on 23 October 2021. The symposium raised the following issues. Who should social studies care for in the increasingly fragmented society? Is there a danger that social studies practices and research may cause further societal division? Are we creating barriers between the ideals we expect as social studies practice, evaluation, and research and the reality of students' learning? The symposium's title was "Learning Assessment, Practice, and Research in Social Studies to Create the Possibility of Diversity and Inclusion." At the symposium, three speakers gave presentations under this title.

Review of Each Report and Brief Critique

The first speaker gave a presentation titled "A Study of Classroom Practice on 'Social Inclusion and Exclusion' in Elementary School Social Studies: Focusing on 'Inclusion of the Socially Vulnerable,' 'Inclusion without Knowing,' and 'Exclusion by Majority Rule'." He defined social exclusion as the loss of status and qualifications of its members in various spheres of society, such as the welfare system and the labor market. Moreover, he deliberated on the inclusion of various topics on "immigrants," "indigenous people," "irregular workers," "LGBTQ," and "the physically disabled" within this theme. The goal of the class was for students to consider not only the majority who create the rules and mechanisms of society but also minority positions such as victims and opponents. He suggested the following line of questioning (as a perspective to consider "exclusion"): 1. Who is in trouble, and with what? Why are they in trouble? What kind of problem is this? 2. What was the situation before this problem occurred? 3. Why did we pull out support? (What is the logic of those who excluded it?), and 4. What are the priorities that give rise to exclusion? As a perspective to consider "inclusion," he suggested the following: 1. Who should be considered for inclusion? 2. Who invests such effort? 3. What is the purpose of inclusion? 4. What are the multifaceted added values other than activities? 5. What are the social inclusion mechanisms? What are institutions, and how do we interact with them? He then presented concrete practices that applied these steps.

The second speaker gave a presentation titled "Development and Practice of Legal Education Classes Based on 'Diversity' and 'Inclusion'." He defined "respect for the individual" as the idea underlying "diversity" and "inclusion" and reported on the results of his attempts to promote "respect for the individual" in the

classroom. His analysis revealed that children often focus on “moral judgments” and “the interests of the many” and have a vague sense of anxiety that is not based on facts, which hinders the establishment of respect for the individual. To establish “respect for the individual,” he suggests that classes should recognize the individual’s existence based on “legal thinking,” which uses conflicts as examples and assumes the protection of minority rights. He also suggests that it is necessary to understand the individual’s background and work with them to recognize the individual’s existence.

The third presenter gave a presentation titled “The Possibility of Diversity and Inclusion in the Light of the Limitations of Learning Assessment in Social Studies: From the Practice of Learning Assessment in Social Studies.” She quoted Gert Biesta and pointed out the difficulty faced by teachers while translating “a good education (students’ ability to develop)” into “measurable evidence (shareable ability).” In social studies, a variety of pedagogies comprise good education, such as “social studies to nurture children’s thinking,” “social studies to help children understand the explanatory framework of social phenomena,” and “social studies to help children evaluate their way of life based on the structure of society.” In addition, it was noted that there are three layers of measurable evidence: “learning outcomes expected of children/students,” “learning outcomes expected in individual classes,” and “actual learning outcomes of children/students.” She then showed that teachers evaluated learning by circulating through these three layers and provided concrete examples of how learning evaluation should be conducted. The presentation concluded by saying: “In learning evaluation, it is important to collect evidence based on the purpose of the evaluation and make a judgment based on the actual learning situation of the students and the context of the class while referring to the evidence. This method of learning assessment, practice, and research in social studies can create the possibility of diversity and inclusion.”

At the symposium, every speaker considered “diversity and inclusion” a fundamental concept of social studies, although there were some differences in their opinions. This is a critical aspect of both change and development. However, as one of the audiences at the symposium pointed out, most of the presenters treated “diversity and inclusion” as a concept to analyze social events outside the classroom. No presentations directly addressed how diversity appeared in the classroom and how to promote learning through inclusion. The symposium was a significant step forward for social studies educators in Japan, who are seriously considering this area and an inspiration for future research.