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Social Capital among School Children of Japanese-Filipino Marriages

Abstract The paper aims to explore the formation and deployment of social capital in the education of children of Japanese-Filipino marriages in Oita Prefecture, Japan. It is based on 32 key informant interviews involving children, their parents, and their homeroom teachers. Social capital, in the form of parental involvement and the positive relationships of children with their teachers and classmates, was seen to help develop a positive environment for learning in both home and school environments.

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Introduction

The school and the family are the two microsystems that play vital roles in the education and socialization of children (Brofenbrenner, 1998). But what happens when family members' (e.g., the parents) views and expectations regarding education clash with views of the school personnel (e.g., the teachers)? This is particularly true in the case of intercultural families in which, for example, the father is Japanese and the mother is Filipina. As has been observed, parental decisions regarding children's education are made through a "lens of at least two sets of status, values, and traditions" (Cheng and Powell, 2007, p.1045).

The Japanese educational system considers teacher-parent partnership important in promoting the well-being of children (Moorehead, 2007). However, problems can arise when the immigrant parents' culturally laden views and expectations are different from those of the school authorities. The contrasting perspectives of teachers and parents concerning education in general, and parental involvement in particular, affect teacher-parent interaction.

Literatures on the educational experiences of children of intercultural marriages are limited (e.g., Moorehead, 2010). Those that are available dwell more on identity issues (e.g., Rockquemore and Laszloffy, 2005) and/or bilingualism (e.g., Soto, 2008).

Specifically, studies on "Japanese-Filipino" children focus more on identity issues than on school experiences (e.g., Ito, 2011; Almonte-Acosta, 2008; Nuqui, 2008). Those that center on children's education depict difficult or negative educational experiences, which may not be the case with "Japanese-Filipino" schoolchildren in Japan. These research gaps inspired the idea for this study.

As a pioneering study on the educational experiences and academic outcomes of Japanese-Filipino children, this paper contributes to the still growing body of literature on the subject in at least two ways. First, it examines the formation of social capital in the educational experiences of the children. Second, it provides a theoretical background and context of the topic.

Social Capital

Social capital is defined in different ways and is contextualized in almost all facets of our social lives – education, business, health, and religion. Pierre Bourdieu popularized social capital in the 1980s (Burnheim, 2004) and its earlier application in the early 1900s (Nishide, 2009). Social capital refers to "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources, which are linked to a possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual recognition and acquaintance" (Bourdieu, 1986, p.248) James Coleman uses social capital in the context of education. However, as pointed out by Portes (1998), he does not refer to Bourdieu at all. For purposes of comparison, there is a need to examine Bourdieu's views and Coleman's on social capital in education.

Bourdieu addressed inequalities in education as well as viewed benefits and gains as a basis for solidarity and membership. He summarized social capital as the resources one derives from an established and recognized relationship. Coleman, however, looked at social capital in terms of functionality. He emphasized how networks, membership, or relationships maybe used to acquire resources to effect educational experiences. He focused on the

resources (which are the ultimate goals), the possessors, and the structures (Portes, 1998). For him, social capital was defined by "the structure of relations between and among actors and (that which) is defined by its function" (Portes, 1998, p.5). He identified three elements of social capital: (a) obligations and expectations; (b) information flow capability of the social structure; and (c) norms with attached sanctions" (Burnheim, 2004, p.3).

Japanese Elementary Education

Education in Japan involves six years of compulsory elementary education (Okano and Tsuchiya, 1999) and secondary education (Chitose, 2008). Following a trimester schedule, it observes a 200 school day calendar (Sato, 2004 p. 34). The first trimester runs from April to July, followed by a two-month summer break (end of July-end of August). The second trimester runs from September to December, with a short vacation at the end of the year. The last trimester runs from January to March.

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) determines the subjects and designs the lessons taught in elementary schools (Stevenson, 1991; Simmons, 1990). The subjects include moral education, Japanese language, social studies, mathematics, science, music, arts and handicrafts, home making, and physical education (Okano and Tsuchiya, 1999). In 2002, the MEXT added new subjects like integrated studies, life environment studies, special activities, and a period for integrated study (Ishii, 2003).

Japanese elementary education is a "complete" learning experience that includes extracurricular and co-curricular activities (Lewis, 1998a). Students spend about 20 hours in academic classes and 3 hours in non-academic classes such as moral education and club and homeroom activities. They also spend 17 hours in cleaning the classroom and 2.25 hours in assemblies, meetings, and reflections. Thus, they spend 36 hours in school in a week (Shimahara, 2002, p. 98).

The educational philosophy includes a discourse of self or personhood. It emphasizes the "holistic" concept of "self" (Sato, 2004; Shimahara, 2002; Lewis, 1998a; Lewis, 1995; Cummings, 1982) towards "completeness" or the totality of the emotional,social, mental, and cognitive needs of children (Cummings, 1980).

The "self" denotes individuality (Cave, 2007), which is paradoxical (Goodman, 2003). Individuality can mean cooperation and group orientation on the one hand, and autonomy and discipline on the other. The popular view espouses interdependence and group orientation, which predisposes teachers to promote the children's full participation in school and class activities (Okano and Tsuchiya, 1999). Group activities allow students to establish relationships with their classmates and teachers, which maybe expressed in *nakama* or good relationships with classmates (Cave, 2007; Okano and Tsuchiya, 1999). Japanese teachers encourage students to give schoolwork their best because the individual is part of a group, not apart from it.

Another concept is role perfection. This encourages an individual to give his/her best as a means to assert the "self" in relation to identity (Sato, 1998, p. 122). This educational philosophy, according to Sato (1998), instructs teachers to put greater emphasis on standardized testing, looks into how students behave in relation to others, and examines the processes and means they employ to achieve desired academic outcomes. This compels students to work hard to achieve the best, if not to be perfect (*kanpeki*)—a compound of *kan* (completeness) and *peki* (ball).

Japanese pedagogy, which is student-centered, process- oriented, and emphasizes individuality and cooperation, helps develop the notion of "self" (Shimahara, 2002; Tanabe, 2000; Okano and Tsuchiya, 1999). *Hansei* or critical reflection mirrors this (Sato, 2004; Lewis, 1998a; Sato, 1998; Benjamin, 1997; Lewis, 1995). It inspires children to think autonomously, to solve problems, to carry out school activities, and to decipher what is right and wrong (Simmons, 1990).

The "self" is a product of social interaction. Japanese educational philosophy helps develop this by emphasizing group interaction and discussion to promote learning (Cave, 2007). It rests on the idea of "interpersonalism" (Shimahara, 2002, p. 126), which refers to how an individual's relationships with others shape his/her concept of "self", which, in turn, shapes the relationships (Cave, 2007).

Socio-cultural learning entails the attachment of an individual to a group (Lewis, 1998b; Peak, 1993). Group life refers to a "community of inquiry" (Cave, 2007, p.47). The concept of *kokoro*, which cultivates the quality of relations necessary to achieve an enhanced learning process (Sato, 2004, p.3), is necessary in group life. *Kizuna* is the philosophical foundation of *kokoro* (Shimahara, 2002). It refers to "the intimate interpersonal relationship that fosters empathy, characterized as the touching of the hearts and is a band marked by shared feelings of trust and inclusiveness between children and teachers" (Okano and Tsuchiya, 1999, p. 173).

The process plays a critical role in elementary education as the number of non-Japanese and "minority" students increased fast. This has led to the notion that Japanese society is slowly becoming multi-ethnic (Okano and Tsuneyoshi, 2011). However, multi-ethnicity has been an ongoing process since the arrival of "old comers" (i.e., the *burakumin*) like the Koreans and the Chinese (Okano and Tsuneyoshi, 2011). The *burakumin* and the *konketsuji* or mixed-heritage children (Beauchamp, 1998; Benjamin, 1997) are new elements of cultural diversity since the influx of migrant labor beginning in the mid-1980s (Okano and Tsuchiya, 1999; Ishii, 2003).

Cultural diversity in the classroom results in a dilemma, between egalitarianism and cultural tolerance. Egalitarianism dictates suppression of the different cultural backgrounds of "minority" students in at least two ways. First, teachers tend to dissimulate the background of Korean students by treating them like the Japanese (Okano and Tsuchiya, 1999). Second, despite the presence of the *burakumin* and *konketsuji*, the curriculum only addresses the needs of Japanese students

(Okano and Tsuchiya, 1999). In the process, "foreign" students "mask" their ethnic background in order to blend with mainstream society (Okano, 2011).

Method

My dissertation, "The Educational Outcomes of Japanese- Filipino Children in Oita Prefecture, Japan," is the basis of this paper. It focuses on the various factors in the family and school that have influenced the children's educational outcomes in the intercultural marriage context. However, for this article, I have only highlighted the role of the school in mobilizing social capital. I have used the case study approach (Yin, 2003). There are 8 case studies, each involving school children, the parents, and the teachers to determine similarities and contrasts. The approach shows that "the comparison of cases (i.e., multiple case study design) – in terms of similarities and differences – will help build a clear picture of whether or not there is a 'fit' between the data and existing resources" (Mason, 2002, p. 7)

I conducted in-depth interviews with 8 Japanese children (four boys and four girls), their Filipino mothers, their Japanese fathers, and their Japanese homeroom teachers. The children, aged 10-12, were born and raised in Japan, enrolled in public elementary school, with levels ranging from Grade 4 to First Year High School, and lived with their parents at the time of the interviews. These criteria ensured uniformity in personal backgrounds. I conducted the interviews from March to November 2010, using 4 different interview guides, with questions for the specific group of informants. The interviews were conducted in English, Filipino, Cebuano, or Japanese, depending on the informant's linguistic competence. Two themes emerged from the data: (a) parental involvement (family capital); and (2) positive relationships involving students and teachers and those among students (school capital).

Parental Involvement

The parents resorted to different strategies in responding to their children's educational outcomes and experiences. Some of the children

confirmed such participation. The Filipina mothers participated more than the Japanese fathers, which the fathers confirmed. The father of Sachika said,

Her mother is more involved. She goes to the PTA and is involved in school activities. However, I teach her more than my wife. She does what she wants for her daughter. She does many things for our family so that our kids can do well in their studies.

The mothers performed multiple tasks. These tasks included the following: taking care of their children's needs; monitoring and/or checking their homework; motivating their children to study; checking their contact notebooks; providing them comfort; driving them to and picking them up from school; talking about school experiences; listening to their children while reading; taking part in school events; attending PTA meetings; holding PTA positions; and talking to their teachers.

The participation of the fathers involved the following: attending school activities; holding PTA positions; talking to teachers about their children; helping their children accomplish homework; monitoring their assignments; checking their test scores; working hard to send their children to school; signing school letters; and managing family finances. They assumed these tasks because of the incompetence of Filipina mothers in the Japanese language. The mother of Taka admitted that her husband helped their son with his assignments. She said,

My husband always checks the contact notebook of my son because he can read Kanji. If they are written in Hiragana and Katana I can read, but when it comes to Kanji, it is all his. More or less, it is my husband who signs. I only sign when the assignment is in Math and the rest will be my husband.

Like Taka's mother, the other mothers admitted that language was a major concern despite their self-perceived competence in Japanese. They found some tasks to be more difficult such as homework, participation in school activities, and school correspondence because of the language problem. This, however, did not deter them from trying

to perform such tasks. The mothers thought that the teachers gave the children too many assignments. The mother of Shino (not her real name) complained about this. She said,

They are given too many assignments everyday and even during long vacations. I remember my daughter asking me if we also have homework back in the Philippines. I told her we do but not too many. In the Philippines, no assignments are given during summer breaks. My daughter feels bad.

Two mothers expressed the same sentiment, especially the mother of Yuichiro. She said,

I do not like their way. Even during summer breaks, they have homework. Even during winter breaks, they have homework. This is what I do not like. They are supposedly to be breaks from school but children keep on worrying about their homework. How can they enjoy themselves?

Despite all these, the mothers regarded the Japanese educational system positively. One mother said,

In the Philippines, we do not have the opportunity to stay for at least an hour in our child's classroom to observe. Here, you are given the chance to have a glimpse of your child's classroom activities. Before the PTA meeting, you will stay in your child's classroom for one hour followed by a general assembly. After that, you will go back to the classroom for the PTA meeting.

A mother talked about a practice in Japanese schools called *renrakumou* (literally, contact network). It gathered the contact information of all the students in each class. The teachers used the Contact Network for announcements, such as cancellation of classes, things needed in school etc. One mother said:

There is a Contact Network among the parents. But once the children reach grades five and six, they will have to do the contacting themselves. The parents will be less involved. Children will call each other up. They will call our house and they will ask, "Is Yuichiro around?" Then the person calling will instruct my son what to bring to class.

Another school practice in Japan that the mothers found promising was *undoukai* (sports fest). Sachika's mother said that her

daughter liked the idea that she attended her school activity. She recalled that:

I attend the *undoukai* to motivate my daughter and my other children to do well. This will encourage them. My presence is a strong moral support to them.

The mothers also praised how the Japanese schools organize the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA). One parent said,

Here in Japan, whether you are Japanese or a foreigner, when it comes to elementary education, all parents should be able to experience being a PTA officer. When it comes to PTA, parents are required to be an officer at least once.

There were other school practices that promote parental involvement, such as *shinnyuugaku jidou setsumeikai* (school orientation), *kateihoumon* (homevisit), and *nomikai* (banquet or drinking party). Shinnyuugaku jidou setsumeikai is an orientation for parents of incoming Grade 1 students. It aims to inform the parents about school activities, policies, and the things they need to prepare prior to the opening of the school year in January or February.

Kateihoumon enhanced teacher-parent relationships. It provided parents with ways for better participation in their children's education. One mother described what happened during a home visit by her child's homeroom teacher. She said,

I entertained his teacher. Teacher told me about Kenji's attitude in the classroom, how he relates with his classmates and his performance. The teacher also asked me if I have questions about my child.

Parental involvement enhances parent-parent relationships. *Nomikai* (roughly translated as drinking party) boosted parent-teacher relationships. One parent described it in the following words:

Also, the good thing was we had a parents' gathering outside of school. We knew each other through this event. We paid 3,500 yen and all the parents went out for *nomikai*. The teacher was also there. We talked about our children. One parent said "sorry" to me because her child brought Yuichiro's eraser

home. The parent also expressed her appreciation because I let her son play in our house with Yuichiro.

Positive Relationships

Besides parental involvement, two other relationships-teacher-student and student-student- were also important. In teacher- student relationships, the children viewed their teachers positively. Many of them described their teacher as being kind, whereas teachers described their students as being obedient and mature. One teacher positively described one child, saying,

> In our class, one student is a special child, Yuichiro treated this child very well, and he cared a lot for the child (his mother cited this in an interview as one of his achievements in school)…. He is good in human relations…. He is popular among his classmates. I think everyone likes him.

Only a few of the children reported that they experienced disciplinary action. The teachers reported that they provided the children with rewards when they performed well in class or in school in general. Rewards were given in the form of praises, reducing or not assigning homework for a day, and pasting a seal/mark on the students' notebook.

The children had good relationships with each other. They reported that they had kind-hearted classmates. One child described how a classmate helped him in school. He said, "He helps me with my assignment and we play together and we go to school together. He lives near our house." None of the children reported that they were bullied or discriminated as "half" or because of his/her "intercultural" background.

The teachers corroborated the claims of the children. The children had their own set of friends, and they got along well with each other in school. "He is very popular with his friends. He plays with both boys and girls, especially ball games," a teacher said about a student.

Discussion

Parental involvement played a vital role in the children's educational experiences and outcomes. The parents employed various strategies to respond to their children's educational needs. They played different roles, such as that of being a teacher at home (Greenwood and Hickman's typology, 1991), by helping their children in their homework. They were more like organic intellectuals, people who transmit knowledge outside the school environment (Salinas, 2007).

The Japanese philosophy of education influenced the participation of the parents in their children's education. Kokoro promoted the holistic development of the "self" (Sato, 2004), which required teacher-parent involvement. Japanese teachers believed that family life and the environment motivated children to study (Okano and Tsuchiya, 1999).

The involvement of parents in their children's education seems to improve their children's outlook on education (Buchel and Duncan, 1998). Gestures such as volunteering in school activities, attending PTA meetings, holding PTA positions, and talking to teachers must have positively influenced their children's academic outcomes. Bempechat (1992) posited that parents who established communication with the school will have children with relatively higher academic achievements. Parents who were frequently involved in their children's education most likely had positive attitudes toward their children's teachers.

Parents shared the responsibilities over the education of their children. However, the Filipino mothers usually experienced culture-related problems, such as incompetence in the Japanese language, which limited their capacity to assist their children in their homework in Japanese. When this happened, it was the fathers who helped the children. The fathers were more involved in their children's education than may be presumed. They acted as "language brokers" by reading and explaining school communication to their wives in the language that they knew.

Despite contrasting views, expectations, and ideas about education that were culture-bound, Filipino mothers viewed Japanese elementary education in a positive light. The students described their teachers positively, and vice-versa. Positive teacher- student relationships were crucial to educational experiences and academic outcomes (Vu, 2009; Topor, 2007). The children had good nakama. They had their own sets of friends, they described their classmates as being kind-hearted, and conflicts between classmates were few and isolated. Positive peer relationships helped create a friendly environment in school.

The favorable relationships between teachers and the children as well as between the children and their classmates encouraged positive school experiences. These relationships reflected the Japanese educational philosophy of interpersonalism. Thisphilosophy gave importance to building relations with others in achieving a desired self-concept (Cave, 2007; Sato, 2004, Shimahara, 2002) and the concept of kizuna or the teacher-student bond (Shimahara, 2002 p. 21; Okano and Tsuchiya, 1999; Lewis, 1998a, p. 85). *Kaki (*positive relationships), which is characterized by a sense of belongingness and acceptance, motivated play and study (Benjamin, 2007).

Conclusion

Children, parents, and teachers mediated educational experiences and the formation of social capital. Parents played various roles as they participated in their children's education at home and in school. Japanese educational philosophy gave importance to this. There were mechanisms that fostered positive relationships between teachers and parents and between the parents themselves. These relationships improved educational experiences and outcomes.

Despite the language barrier and their differing stance about homework, Filipino mothers were actively involved in their children's education. They were quite positive and affirming of the Japanese educational system, despite differences in experiences and cultural and educational backgrounds.

Notwithstanding their intercultural backgrounds, the children had positive educational experiences and academic outcomes. These outcomes could have been due to, among other reasons, social capital in the form of positive relationships, interactions, and expectations. Social capital was seen to influence the children's education, even as they maintained favorable relationships with their peers and teachers.

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