



## How should we teach diverse students?

### Cross-cultural comparison of diversity issues in K-12 schools in Japan and the US

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#### **Abstract**

Increasing student diversity in K-12 schools has gained attention in Japan and the US. In the US, racial diversity has historically shaped inequity in educational access and teacher quality. In Japan, regardless of its reputation for cultural homogeneity among its residents, issues surrounding student diversity have gained attention because of the increasing number of returnees—Japanese students raised overseas because of their parents' expatriation. This paper compares and contrasts the diversity issues in K-12 school settings in both countries, and explores potential approaches to improve the accommodation of diversity in K-12 schools.

**KeyWords:** K-12, Diversity; Multicultural Education; Japanese Returnees; Structural Racism; Intercultural Communication

#### **Introduction**

Given the increasing proportion of racial and cultural minority groups among school-aged children, issues surrounding student diversity have gained attention in educational settings in both the US and Japan. For instance, in K-12 schools in the US, some scholars have noted a trend toward increased diversity of students' racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds (Zeichner, 1996; Sleeter, 2001 & 2008; Villegas, 2008). The proportion of racial minority students attending K-12 schools in the US currently stands at more than 40% and it is reported that the number has almost doubled within the past four decades (Villegas, 2008). This trend of increasing diversity is expected to continue: it is estimated that more than half of the student populations in K-12 schools will come from racial minorities by the year 2035 (Villegas, 2008; Zeichner & Melnick, 1996).

Similarly, regardless of its reputation for racial and cultural homogeneity, studies have noted an increasing trend toward cultural diversity in educational settings in Japan. For instance, studies have pointed out the increasing numbers of returnees: students who were born in Japan but raised overseas due to their parents' work, and have now returned to Japan (Kanno, 2003). Because these students tend to have multicultural identities developed in relation to the cultures of their host countries, their cultural

identities, mannerisms, and reasoning tend to be different from those born and raised in Japan without living overseas (Kano Podolsky, 2004; Kanno, 2003). Given the presence of returnees since the 1980s and the mistreatment that returnees have tended to experience in school settings, it appears that the K-12 schools in Japan are challenged by the issues surrounding student diversity.

This paper, therefore, compares and contrasts issues surrounding student diversity in K-12 schools in the US and Japan. The paper identifies commonalities and differences in issues surrounding student diversity in K-12 schools as well as the approaches to the issues in both countries.

### ***Diversity Issues in US K-12 Schools: Racialization of Students of Color***

Racial diversity has been present in US K-12 schools since the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court case in 1954 legally mandated the racial desegregation of K-12 schools (Chism, 2004; Clotfelter, 2004). Some analyses highlight that there has been an increasing trend toward racial minority students attending schools (Clotfelter, 2004; Villegas, 2008). It is also reported that the ratio of racial minority students in K-12 schools has doubled in the last four decades, and currently, non-White students make up more than 40% of the K-12 student population (Villegas, 2008). This increasing trend toward student diversity is expected to continue and it is estimated that racial minority students will be the numerical majority by 2035 (Villegas, 2008; Zeichner & Melnick, 1996).

Regardless of this increasing trend toward student diversity, teaching forces, as well as the K-12 school system, mostly remain racially and culturally homogeneous. Some authors have noted that the vast majority of pre-service teachers entering teacher education programs are from White middle-class families, and tend to have neither international nor domestic cross-cultural experiences: most pre-service teachers have not even entered communities where non-White residents predominate (Bayle-Boise & McIntyre, 2008; Sleeter 2001 & 2008; Villegas, 2008). Scholars have expressed concern that this means that pre-service teachers will start teaching racial minority students in their future classrooms without the opportunities to familiarize themselves with the sociocultural realities in which the students live and with which they identify (Bayle-Boise & McIntyre, 2008; Murrell, 2001; Sleeter, 2008; Villegas, 2008). What is even worse is that both pre-service and in-service teachers still tend to have negative racial beliefs about racial minority students' academic achievement (Boyle-Baise & McIntyre, 2008; Pollock, 2004, 2008; Sleeter, 2008). In other words, most teachers start their careers without understanding some students to the same degree with the other students, and with negative stereotypes that students from the particular racial backgrounds are not as academically capable as other students.

Given that most K-12 schools (which have been racially integrated since the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court case decision in 1954) were primarily for White students, the school curriculum and teaching methods were designed based on the assumption that "all" students are from White families (Chism, 2004; Clotfelter, 2004). It is therefore not surprising to observe White cultural practices embedded and perpetuated in the system, and the subsequent cultural gaps between the schools and their racial minority students.

This cultural gap between racially diverse student bodies and the schools and teachers has not been well addressed. For instance, Ladson-Billings (1994) points out that it tends to be problematic that teachers' expectations for racial minority students are based on cultural assimilation. Ladson-Billings (1994) explains that the term "assimilationist teachers" refers to those with a perspective that invalidates African-American culture, which could lead to assimilationist teaching, "a teaching style that operates without regard to the students' particular cultural characteristics. According to the assimilationist perspective, the teacher's role is to ensure that students fit into society" (p. 22). Given the societal inclination to invalidate the cultural practices of racial minority groups, these assimilationist teachers could perpetuate dysconscious racism, not being racist in conventional ways or intentionally disadvantaging some

students. However, they are also unconscious about some students being advantaged in the classroom, while others are disadvantaged due to cultural incongruence (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Sleeter, 2001, 2008). Accordingly, they teach all students with the pedagogies that work well with certain students and expect all students to achieve academically by working hard, rather than considering how cultural differences influence teaching and learning in their classrooms.

This results in stark disparities in students' academic performances. Achievement patterns tend to be racially skewed because of the cultural influences upon learning (Ladson-Billings, 1994) and the way in which the school system itself functions as a racialized social system (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Pollock, 2008). Regarding cultural influences upon teaching and learning, some scholars have noted that learning is socially situated: to learn something, learners must know how to participate in and identify with the practices in which they are situated (Vygotsky, 1978; Ladson-Billings, 1994). In other words, as Ladson-Billings (1994) and Villegas (2008) point out, if learning settings and pedagogical practices are not culturally responsive, learners are more likely to disengage from learning because they are not familiar with how to participate in the practices. Given the history of racial integration and the fact that most US K-12 schools were designed for White students, it could be assumed that cultural diversity among students needs to be better incorporated into pedagogical practices to assure equitable learning settings for ALL students (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Pollock, 2008; Villegas, 2008).

Studies have also pointed out how racialization practices—the societal practices of sorting actors based on race labels—privilege some students while disadvantaging others. Pollock (2008) presents some examples of racialization in schools: racially disproportionate special education placements, racial patterns among students in gifted classes, and high school tracking that often leads to the overrepresentation of White students in higher tracks with access to Advanced Placement (AP) and experienced teachers in resource-rich classrooms, while racial minority students tend to be in the lower tracks without access to advanced course contents such as AP, with unskilled and inexperienced teachers in under-resourced classrooms. Bonilla-Silva (2001) further clarifies that the school system functions as a racialized social system, in which economic, political, social, and ideological levels are partially structured by the placement of actors in racial categories or races...the placement of actors in racial categories involves some form of hierarchy that produces definite social relations among the races...[t]he totality of these racialized social relations and practices constitutes the racial structure (p. 37).

In other words, it can be assumed, as Pollock (2008) states, that through the abovementioned racialization practices students are constantly categorized as race group members within schools. These practices produce and reproduce race relations as well as subsequent structural racial inequity within schools.

To address the issue of racialization and ameliorate institutional racial discrimination, colorblind policies, such as Proposition 209 in California, which does not allow individuals in the educational field to refer to a student's race in public, have been embedded (Pollock, 2004). As a result, inside the school, people have stopped discussing race when others are around. Nevertheless, the racialization practices in the actors' mindsets have not changed. As a result, people tend to resist talking about their students' race labels within the school buildings, but racialization practices are deeply embedded and influence the ways in which they see their students. According to Pollock (2004),

People at Columbus [FS: the name of an US K-12 institution] seemed socialized to frame one another daily at race-group members...they also tended to resist this very socialization. Calls for "colorblindness", for proceeding as if we do not see people in racialized terms, have for over a century been a key trope in American equality discourse, and colormuteness—active resistance to describing people as racial—was as central to daily race practice at Columbus as was the act of framing people racially (p. 44).

Pollock (2004) points out that actors in the K-12 educational system tend to frequently engage in racialization practices; however, they resist them when it does not seem appropriate or when there is risk

of being labeled as racist. These colorblind/colormute teachers, who claim they do not see the differences among their students and ignore racial and cultural diversity existing in the classroom, tend to racialize their students behind the closed doors when equality discourse does not matter (Pollock, 2004). This implies that embedding colorblind policy is more likely to perpetuate racism through racialization practices behind the closed doors rather than disrupt it. Accordingly, to educate diverse students, teachers need to be able to step out of the assimilationist view, see the racial and cultural differences among students, and choose the most effective pedagogical approaches to all students in their classrooms.

In sum, racial diversity has remained present inside US K-12 schools following the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court case decision. However, most White teachers are not familiar with the sociocultural practices of racial minority groups that influence their students' learning styles and mannerisms. Accordingly, they expect racial minority students to behave and learn in ways similar to their White counterparts, without considering how to acknowledge and respect cultural diversity and address diverse learning needs.

In addition to teachers' ignorance, it has become clear that the societal inclination to invalidate particular cultural practices of racial minority groups influences teachers' perception of racial minority students and their academic achievement as well as the ways in which the school system is organized. As a result, some students are privileged in the current school structure and institutional and pedagogical practices, while others are disadvantaged. To minimize the inequality and better accommodate diversity, it is necessary to provide opportunities for teachers to become familiar with the sociocultural realities and practices of racial minority groups, which could potentially help them change the ways they perceive and teach racial minority students and become allies to minimize structural and pedagogical inequality in the US K-12 system. The next section explores the steps taken in US K-12 schools to address diversity issues.

### ***Measures to Better Accommodate Diversity in US K-12 Schools***

After racial desegregation was mandated in 1954 by the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court case, racial diversity has been present in US K-12 classrooms (Chism, 2004; Clotfelter, 2004). As the achievement gap had been an issue for many years, in 1979, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) mandated multicultural education coursework for all candidates attending university-based teacher education programs (James, 1978). This attempt was aimed to prepare future teachers with the necessary skill sets and knowledge to teach racially diverse students.

Nevertheless, as some authors have noted, it has not been clearly proven that multicultural education coursework promotes pre-service teachers' efficiency in developing the necessary skills to teach diverse students (Sleeter, 2001 & 2008). In addition, it has also been reported that multicultural education coursework tends to be sidetracked in teacher education programs without a connection to the course content of other methodology classes (Bayle-Boise & McIntyre, 2008; Sleeter, 2001 & 2008; Villegas, 2008). As a result, many teachers are likely to face difficulty in incorporating their learning from multicultural education coursework into their pedagogical practices in the classroom (Bayle-Boise & McIntyre, 2008; Sleeter, 2001 & 2008; Villegas, 2008).

To address this limitation of the "multicultural education coursework only" approach to diversity issues, a few university-based teacher education programs in the US have started to incorporate community-based field placements. The field placement is considered helpful as it sends pre-service teachers, as a part of the required placement, to volunteer in communities predominantly occupied by racial minority groups, and helps them become more familiar with the sociocultural realities and practices of these communities by spending time and socializing with local students, parents, and residents (Boyle-Baise, 2002; Boyle-Baise & McIntyre, 2008; Sleeter, 2008).

Some studies, nonetheless, also note that community-based field placements alone carry the potential risk of reinforcing negative stereotypes among pre-service teachers, as cross-cultural experiences in the communities, full of unfamiliar incidents, may confuse them, and they could be challenged in properly understanding what they have experienced (Boyle-Baise & McIntyre, 2008; Murrell, 2001; Sleeter, 2008). To assure that community-based field placement are effective in helping pre-service teachers to learn about racial and cultural differences, some scholars have pointed out the importance of mediation of community experiences (Boyle-Baise & McIntyre, 2008; Murrell, 2001; Sleeter, 2008). As pre-service teachers could experiences extensive cultural shocks or confusions during their field placements, guidance and information from community-culture experts can help them assign meanings to their community experiences in a culturally sensitive manner and “digest” what they have experienced (Murrell, 2001; Sleeter, 2008).

This mediation is also helpful because it can provide pre-service teachers with opportunities to understand their own cultural backgrounds that have led them to assign meanings to their community experiences in particular ways. Given that various authors have noted the importance of developing awareness of teachers’ own cultural backgrounds for the development of capacities to understand different races and cultures (Boyle-Baise & McIntyre, 2008; Murrell, 2001; Page, 1993; Ryde, 2009; Shimomura, 2013; Sleeter, 2008), this mediation should be helpful in raising awareness of what influences pre-service teachers’ own meaning-making processes. Awareness of their own cultural identities also helps pre-service teachers become more aware of the cultural practices they identify with, which in many cases normalize the unequal power distribution among the racial or cultural groups, and accordingly, could justify the perpetuation of particular forms of inequities including sexism, racism, and xenophobia (Ryde, 2009; Sleeter, 2008). Accordingly, it is possible to claim that community-based field placement and the subsequent mediation have great potential to help pre-service teachers step out of cultural encapsulation and the assimilationist perspective by providing them with opportunities to experience different cultures, properly understand these differences, and raise awareness of their own cultural backgrounds.

### ***Diversity Issues in Japan’s K-12 Schools: Returnees’ Cultural Struggles***

Studies have pointed out that the homogeneity myth—Japan is a nation that is completely monoracial and monocultural, where Japanese nationals without any overseas experiences or influences make up the entire national population—is still highly prevalent in Japanese society, regardless of the increasing racial and cultural diversity represented by groups such as Ainu, Okinawans, Japanese returnees, or Japanese Brazilians residing in Japan (Murphy-Shigematsu, 1993; Burgess, 2007, 2010). This prevalent homogeneity myth has led the nation to very exclusive sets of standards and expectations for cultural conformity and assimilation. Accordingly, the society tends to exclude those who do not meet these standards or expectations as “others” (Dale, 1986; Pelto, 1968; Triandis, 1995; White, 1988; Kidder, 1992).

This societal inclination to be exclusive to “others” is also frequently observed in school settings. Some authors have noted that returnees are more likely to be excluded by their peers or teachers because their cultural differences tend to make them stand out as they often deviate from the mainstream cultural norms (Osawa, 1986; Kidder, 1992; Kanno, 2003; Yoshida et al., 2009). Osawa (1986) further describes some anecdotes of her returnee son Tatsuya, who moved back to Japan in the late 1980s and experienced a series of incidents of discrimination and harassment in his Japanese K-12 school. Osawa (1986) concluded that some subtle differences in communication styles, such as grammatically incorrect spoken Japanese, some “too American” gestures, too “westernized” and “ladies first” mannerisms, and excessive mixing of the two languages, made her son a target for bullying. Due to the societal intolerance of cultural differences, Tatsuya’s different mannerisms triggered verbal and physical harassment against him (his

peers put pencil shavings in his lunch, sent anonymous mails telling him to die, and poked him with umbrellas), which resulted in him developing a duodenal ulcer. This case illustrates that differences in communication styles could be a trigger for the exclusion of returnees, and also the extreme degree of standards or expectations for cultural homogeneity and assimilation in Japanese society.

Kidder (1992) further clarifies the details of what are considered to be the markers of “differences” from the “pure Japanese” cultural standards or expectations. Her interview data highlight three types of marks of cultural differences: physical, behavioral, and interpersonal marks. Physical marks involve physical appearance such as the ways we dress, behavioral marks including nonverbal communication behaviors such as body language as represented by direct eye contact, and interpersonal marks refer to verbal communication patterns such as straightforward speech styles (Kidder, 1992).

From her interview data, Kidder (1992) reports on a returnee girl from New Jersey who was being judged through interpersonal marks in her communication style. Her interviewee reflected on how she was immediately after her return to Japan: “maybe the way I said things is not that nice...too forward...too straight. Saying things straight is kind of ‘kitsui’ (FS: too hurtful). They always say things around” (p. 387). In this case, this girl found how to “say things around” to fit in, but if she failed to do so she could be labeled as the “others” and experience bullying or harassment. Through these three aspects, those not from the mainstream tend to be judged, and once labeled as “others,” they tend to become targets for bullying, harassment, or discrimination.

Similarly, Kanno (2003) notes that differences in communication styles could be markers of differences from the “pure Japanese” and could trigger discrimination or harassment against cultural “others.” Her ethnographic study clarifies that returnees sometimes use English words in Japanese sentences simply because they do not know the Japanese word. However, this mixture of language could be misconstrued as if the returnees were “showing off” their English ability. Kanno further describes the details of how one of her interviewees, Sawako, was excluded by her peers. Once labeled as “others,” her exclusion became worse and her peers started accusing her of being “too self-centered, too direct, too childish...of being ignorant of Japanese common sense,” and misusing honorific expressions (FS: keigo) (Kanno, 2003, p. 40). After this series of incidents of discrimination and exclusion, Sawako left her band group. This case illustrates how differences in verbal communication may trigger exclusion against “others” such as returnees.

These three authors clarify the strength of the Japanese expectation of cultural conformity and assimilation, and how it has worked against returnees. In addition, the expectation of a high degree of cultural conformity makes it unnecessarily challenging for returnees to socialize in school. It is noteworthy that Osawa (1986), Kidder (1992), and Kanno (2003) all highlight that peers tend to misunderstand returnees because of their different verbal communication styles, for example, they were too straightforward or hurtful, which ultimately leads them to exclude or harass returnees.

What also is surprising and noteworthy is that many returnees tend to have assimilationist teachers in Japanese K-12 schools who consider returnees as “problem kids” because they do not conform to the norms and behave in “unexpected” and “inappropriate” ways (Kobayashi, 1991). Many teachers used to work hard to “peel off returnees’ foreignness,” which tended to result in negative effects on returnees’ mental health (Kobayashi, 1991; Minami, 2000). The perspective that returnees should completely forget their cultural identity and fit into the norms of Japanese nationals without any overseas experiences and work hard to fit into those norms, resembles the logic of assimilationist teachers in the US who expect racial minority students to learn and behave in the exact same way as their White counterparts, without considering cultural differences. In the worst case, it has also been reported that these assimilationist teachers participated in bullying or harassment of returnees (Osawa, 1986; Kobayashi, 1991; Yoshida, et al., 2009).

In sum, partly because of the prevalent homogeneity myth and subsequent societal intolerance of cultural differences, returnees tend to have a hard time adjusting to the sociocultural practices in Japanese K-12 schools. Interestingly, both Japan and the US, regardless of differences in the length of their history of dealing with diversity issues in K-12 schools, have similar issues surrounding assimilationist teachers and their approaches to student diversity. Given the increasing trend toward diversity of students in Japanese classrooms, it is obvious that K-12 schools should be able to better accommodate those students that are not from the mainstream culture. The next section explores measures adopted and ought to be adopted in the future to ameliorate the situation in Japan.

### ***Measures to Improve Diversity Accommodation in Japanese K-12 Schools***

Given the increasing number of returnees in the classroom and the reported cultural issues surrounding them, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology compiled a teachers' handbook, "Yori-yoi-deai-no-tame-ni [For better encounters with returnees]," of how to teach returnees and includes the following three major themes: 1) how to set up schools for returnees, with examples of returnee-accepting model schools 2) curricula that have worked well with returnees, such as project-based coursework in which students are asked to research Japanese culture and give a presentation on their findings, and 3) types of support that have been helpful for returnees experiencing difficulty in getting used to their lives in Japan, such as counselors, and returnee hotlines offered by the city (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 1999). The handbook also provides brief notes on what teachers need to do to make the classroom inclusive of cultural diversity: teachers need to be able to respect individual differences among students (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 1999).

The handbook sheds light on practical aspects of returnee education and what could be done in K-12 schools to improve the accommodation of student diversity. However, some researchers have stated that the handbook does not sufficiently clarify certain aspects of diversity issues that need to be addressed, such as 1) within-group diversity 2) the influence of race on diversity issues, and 3) necessary changes for teacher preparation. Regarding within-group diversity among returnees, Shibuya (2001) expressed concern that returnees are conceptualized in the handbook in a monolithic manner, making it difficult to understand the diversity among returnees. A variety of factors that influence returnees, such as their length of expatriation, the types of schools attended in their host countries, and their participation in extracurricular activities in the host countries, should be taken more into consideration when preparing schools to better accommodate diversity.

Furthermore, regarding the influence of race on diversity issues in Japan, Shibuya (2001) expressed concern about race issues in relation to assimilationist teachers and student diversity. Shibuya found in her interview data that most returnees look racially like those from the mainstream, and therefore, are more likely to receive expectations of cultural assimilation than those who look racially more "others." For instance, Shibuya (2001) quotes her interviewee, Maiko, a returnee from the UK, who said that my classmates teased me that the way I dress does not look cool for the Japanese standards. They and even my teacher expect me to live, behave, and think in the way they do just because I'm Japanese and I look like them. Every time they find something different in me they say, 'You know, you're Japanese. You are not British.' (FS: Translated by the author) (p. 64)

This case illuminates that race influences the way "others" experience exclusion or harassment for their "differences" or "deviations from the norm." Maiko's comment highlights that assimilationist expectations could be more severe and demanding for those who look racially like those from the mainstream, Japanese nationals who were born and raised their whole lives in Japan (Shibuya, 2001). Those who appear bi-racial or are more racially identified as "others" would experience a lower expectation of cultural homogeneity or assimilation compared to returnees who look identical to those

from the mainstream, and yet are culturally very different (Shibuya, 2001). Accordingly, it is possible to claim that racial factors influence the way in which cultural “others” are treated.

Regarding teacher preparation to improve the accommodation of diversity, the handbook barely provides any information about raising teacher quality. Given that both Osawa (1986) and Yoshida et al. (2009) identify teachers’ involvement in mistreating or excluding returnees in educational settings through cultural assimilationist expectations, it seems an important issue in Japanese education to prepare teachers in a way that helps them step out of the assimilationist perspective and relate better to students from diverse backgrounds. As Osawa (1986) identified the negative influence of assimilationist teachers in the late 1980s, while Yoshida et al. (2009) found teachers relating similarly to returnees and mistreating them in the late 2000s, it can be claimed that the quality of teachers has not improved over more than three decades.

Regarding teacher quality, Shibuya (2001) also noted that, although the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology claims in the handbook that K-12 teachers should gear themselves toward respecting the advantages of returnees, the Ministry does not explain how teachers should respect their advantages in educational settings. Given that assimilationist teachers could do harm to cultural minority students such as returnees by not fully understanding what it means to be culturally different, and teaching them in a way that works well only with mainstream students (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Pollock, 2008), finding practical solutions to raise teacher quality and prepare teachers who know how to acknowledge and respect returnees’ cultural advantages is an important issue for K-12 schools.

### ***Conclusion: What Should We Do to Better Accommodate Diversity in K-12?***

A comparison of diversity issues between the US and Japan illuminates interesting commonalities and differences in the ways the issues have been approached. Commonalities include issues such as the presence of assimilationist teachers and their negative influences on racially and culturally diverse students, including their engagement in the exclusion of returnee students or racialization of non-White students. This commonality clearly indicates a need for improvement of teacher quality in both countries to assure educational settings where diversity is better accommodated. As the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (1999) notes, returnees’ advantage in being multicultural should be acknowledged and respected to assure that their cultural advantage could enrich classrooms and fully blossom in the future. Similarly, in the US, cultural differences that racial minority students bring into the classroom should be more positively perceived, given that this could help students from mainstream backgrounds to understand diverse cultures, perspectives, and lifestyles. Therefore, developing practical solutions to prepare K-12 teachers who know how to respect diversity and modify their teaching practices in accordance with diverse students’ needs is an important issue for both Japan and the US.

The comparison also highlights differences between these two countries. While a review of ethnographic studies of returnees highlights the societal inclination to exclude returnees as “others,” they do not identify that there is a school structure that disadvantages “others” in terms of limiting access to advanced course contents, experienced teachers, and resource-rich classrooms. On the other hand, the comparison clearly illustrates that US K-12 schools function as a racialized social system, in which students are categorized by race labels to determine their placement within the social hierarchy. Accordingly, some students are sufficiently privileged to have access to advanced course content, seasoned teachers, and resource-rich classrooms, while other students do not have access to the same privileges. This racialization is clearly embedded and remains a dominant practice inside K-12 schools. To disrupt this racialization practice that perpetuates structural inequity against racial minority students, some states, including California, have embedded colorblind policies such as Proposition 209, which requires all faculty members in educational institutions to not refer to students’ race inside the school and treat all students equally without considering their cultural differences (Pollock, 2004).



Given that assimilationist teachers have done harm to racial or cultural minority students by not properly acknowledging and respecting racial and cultural differences, it is possible to claim that the colorblind policy does not appropriately address diversity issues. In fact, Pollock (2004) identifies that the policy has simply created circumstances in which teachers become “colormute,” not talking about their students’ race labels in the presence of outsiders. In other words, in the US, there is a school system that advantages students from particular racial backgrounds. The colorblind policy, which seemingly disrupts the structural inequity, in fact perpetuates it by helping those inside the school to avoid looking at the factors that perpetuate structural inequity. As Ladson-Billings (1994) and Pollock (2004) note, teachers need to be able to identify how the system advantages some students while disadvantaging others, and must serve as allies to minimize the structural inequity by adjusting their pedagogical practices. To do so, teachers need to know more about the sociocultural practices and realities in which their racial and cultural minority students live and with which they identify.

This also highlights the need for teachers to be prepared differently, as well as the need to transform the school system to assure that all students are treated equally and have access to quality education. Given the increasing trend of racial minority students attending US K-12 schools (Villegas, 2008), the need to prepare teachers for diverse students should be immediately addressed. In the US, to better address this teacher quality issue, university-based teacher education programs have already begun offering community based field placements with mediation. It also should be noted that, as the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (1999) acknowledges the importance of teacher–community relationships to better accommodate students diversity, community-based fieldwork with mediation could be a potential future approach in Japan to prepare teachers for its increasingly diverse K-12 students.

Because it provides teachers with opportunities to familiarize themselves with sociocultural practices and realities and reflect on their own cultural biases through mediation, community-based teacher preparation seems to have great potential to help pre-service teachers step out of the cultural assimilationist perspective and prepare efficient teachers for diverse students (Boyle-Baise & McIntyre, 2008; Shimomura, 2013; Sleeter 2001, 2008). Given that the quality of mediation of community experience influences learning from community fieldwork, asking how mediation coursework is helpful in this regard and the types of changes that need to be embedded to make the placement more productive is a further avenue for investigation.

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**Appendix: Comparison of Diversity Issues in K-12 between US and Japan**

Diversity issues in US K-12 schools	Diversity issues in Japanese K-12 schools
<p>*Assimilationist teachers and their negative influences on racial minority students</p> <p>*Racialized educational system in which some students are structurally privileged while others do not have access to the same privilege</p> <p>*Teachers' engagement in racialization of students</p> <p>*Colorblind policy masks structural inequality by making all actors look away from the racial privileges</p>	<p>*Assimilationist teachers and their negative influences on returnees</p> <p>*Peer bullying originated from the societal intolerance for cultural "others"</p> <p>*Teachers' engagement in returnee exclusion</p> <p>* Differences in communication styles make returnees stand out negatively</p> <p>*Race influences the degree of expectation for "others" to culturally assimilate to the mainstream</p>
Approaches to diversity in US K-12 schools	Approaches to diversity in Japanese K-12 schools
<p>*Multicultural education coursework was mandated for pre-service teachers; however, it did not work well as it was sidetracked and not connected well to other courses.</p> <p>*Community-based field placement has been embedded in several teacher education programs to prepare teachers for diverse students; however, some authors note the potential risk of reinforcing negative racial stereotypes.</p> <p>*Mediation of community-based field experiences has begun in a couple of teacher education programs to maximize the benefits of the field placements</p>	<p>*The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology published a handbook called "Yori-yoi-deai-no-tame-ni [For better encounters with returnees]," which describes curricula and a school system that are helpful for accommodating returnees</p>

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