

**Teachers Know Best:  
Monolithic School Reform and the Threat to Ethnic Family Time**

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This presentation looks at why MEXT should take caution when proceeding with instituting its educational reforms for the threat of burdening further the attempts of ethnic groups to find time to raise their children in traditions other than Japanese. This begins with the recognition that foreign parents can play an active role in the education of Japan's children's education. Traditionally, school participation has sanctioned afterschool activities club activities as a means of training children excel physically and mentally (LeMay, 2014). The problem, says Kitaku, is that these extracurricular activity often dig into valuable family time foreign parents use to pass their culture down to their children (Kitaku, 2014). The time monopoly junior high schools and high schools have wielded over children in the past has made foreign parents anxious when considering more school reforms that increase course load by 10%, reinstate Saturday classes and start English as early as fifth- and sixth-grade elementary (Akihisa, 2015; Maruko, 2014).

Since 2011, Japanese schools have been involved in implementing steps to internationalize its curriculums in accordance with the educational ideas of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe who desires to sell the Japanese education system as a global competitor. This includes spending valuable national resources on producing thirty-seven "super global" universities that will compete on a global stage for elite foreign researchers (Kameda, 2013). Part of Abe's plan includes providing financial incentives to institutions willing to open new global centers where instruction is conducting entirely in English (Maruko, 2014).

Based on ethnographic research while conducting fieldwork on the

religious transition of Filipino-Japanese children this report critiques educational reforms for its inability to consider the diverse ethnic backgrounds of many of today's contemporary Japanese families. Interviews with numerous foreign parents in their 40-50s reveal how school and club weekend activities interfered with Filipino mother's attempts to teach their children about non-Japanese culture. Interviews with younger parents in their 30s show that pressure for children to succeed in a competitive world has only gotten worse over the years, a trend that has led more parents to enroll their children in club activities like piano lessons or swimming years before graduating from elementary school.

Given this history, it is no wonder why there exists a growing anxiety toward Japan's educational reforms, as it demands parents to sacrifice more of their weekend family time so children can spend time away from their families, only to be socialized by Japanese peers as they learn how to become Japanese. Parents fear that these new reforms are merely another way MEXT encourages a type of "race to the top" competition based on children's ability to memorize material that favors Japanese. In such a context, being born abroad or possessing non-Japanese heritage produces little reward.

What initially began as a means of rectifying the mistakes behind yutori education, MEXT reforms have set out to increase children's normative level of success by raising national test score averages (Novick, 2011). The problem behind this sentiment is that in today's world with its infinite range of information, "basic" skills are becoming harder to qualify. While these reforms increase the number of class time for subjects like math and science, they do so at the expense of elective classes that had once been designed to cater to children with varying understandings of life. While attempts at globalizing Japan is a slogan often voiced by the Abe Cabinet, the sense is that this globalization is a dialogue conducted between homogeneous Japan and the global world. The latent potential Japanese communities and international families in Japan have largely been absent from debate.

Without utilizing Japan's domestic diversity by first and foremost

providing family time to international families, MEXT threatens to suppress the very cultural diversity that has arose over the past three decades through a policy of educational reforms that requires students to spend long hours in the classroom and in sports activity learning to be Japanese at the expense of discarding their ethnic difference.

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