Creating a Culture of Social Cohesion: Case Studies of Community Participation Projects at Japanese and Hong Kong Elementary Schools

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ABSTRACT

This article compares two learning units developed by elementary schools in Japan and Hong Kong to engage students in learning about and taking action to promote social cohesion through community participation. We choose two similar learning units for comparison, both focusing on issues related to older people in the community. Based on our analysis of their activity design and practices, we outline five directions for educational practitioners interested in promoting community participation for social cohesion in Hong Kong and Japan: practicing service-learning, promoting social cohesion, learning authentic skills, integrating community participation into the curriculum, and helping students become active members of society. This paper argues for the importance of developing such learning units to foster young citizens' contribution to their communities in post-industrial, ageing societies.

KEYWORDS

Social cohesion; community participation; social studies; citizenship; Japan; Hong Kong.

INTRODUCTION

This article aims at comparing two learning units developed by elementary schools in Japan and Hong Kong to engage students in learning about and taking action to promote social cohesion through community participation. To help identify subject arrangements and community participation activities that can be effectively implemented by schools in Hong Kong and Japan to support students' efforts to achieve social cohesion in their communities, we choose two similar learning units for comparison, both focusing on issues related to older people in the community. Based on our analysis of their activity design, learning outcomes and practices, we outline five directions for educational practitioners interested in promoting community participation for social cohesion in Hong Kong and Japan: practicing service-learning, promoting social cohesion, learning authentic skills, integrating community participation into the curriculum, and helping students become active members of society. This paper argues for the educational importance of developing learning units on social cohesion to foster young citizens' contribution to their communities in post-industrial, ageing societies, which include both Japan and Hong Kong.

Social contexts

This study aims at investigating what sort of activity design, learning outcomes and practices are conducive to promote social cohesion by providing community participation projects. The case study research method (Stake, 1995) was applied on two elementary schools chosen in both Japan and Hong Kong, which share similar needs of engaging students in community participation of knowing more about people living in the neighborhood.

In Japan, as in every society, people have different backgrounds, values, and perspectives. There exist generational gaps as well as a gap between older (or native) residents and new residents. As the rate of migration within Japan has increased in the last several decades, neighbors are often strangers to each other. In particular, during Japan's era of high economic growth period from the mid-1950s to the early 1970s, inter-prefecture migration increased sharply (Watanabe, 1985). Therefore, neighbors had also been changing frequently, it has become a social problem to be difficult to build communal ties. A serious emergent problem is that people may be reluctant to engage with their neighbors, perhaps expecting any new residents to move out in the near future or simply unwilling to make the effort to get to know strangers. These circumstances serve to diminish social ties and cohesion. On the other hand, the rural area had been getting depopulation and aging. At the same time, the number of nuclear families had increased, the number of old age persons living alone has been increasing, both in rural areas and in cities. And the Japanese society also see an increase in the proportion of old age persons. These had been one of the causes of serious problems such as lonely deaths and fraud cases targeting the old age persons, but in recent years, it becomes more serious concern in terms of declining disaster prevention capabilities (Policy Bureau, Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism; MLITT, 2021). However, with the high economic growth stalling, the total number of migrants turned to decline. But in recent years, there is also the

view that the younger generation has become more interested in moving to rural areas due to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic (Policy Bureau, MLITT, 2022). Therefore, migration of young people to rural areas where depopulation is seen as a problem has the potential to stop the aging of rural areas. Even in this case, it is necessary to build a new tie and cohesion between new residents and old age persons in the community in order to function as a safe and secure community for all.

Although Japan's social gaps may pale in comparison with those in Hong Kong, they may become a serious problem in Japan in the near future if no actions are taken to promote social cohesion. And also in recent years, the natural disaster beyond expectations occurs frequently in Japan, it is very important for people to help each other within community members. Therefore, promoting social cohesion within community as an educational initiative is increasingly necessary.

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of China is a cosmopolitan city in East Asia where Chinese culture meets Western culture. Hong Kong's dominant socio-economic ideology is market capitalism (Zhang et al., 2019). Based on the results of their Hong Kong Global Citizenship Survey, Cummings and Tang (2008) stated that Hong Kong should assume "a globally responsible external agenda" to promote such values as social cohesion and collective self-esteem. Although the city's population was once composed mainly of ethnic Chinese born in Hong Kong (91.6%), an increasing number of young people and their family members have migrated from mainland China and members of ethnic minorities have migrated from other parts of Asia and around the world. For example, the 2016 population by-census found (by way of self-identification) that there were 584,383 non-Chinese people in the Hong Kong SAR, representing about 8% of the population. In 2016, South Asians (e.g., Indians, Pakistanis, and Nepalese) formed the largest group of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong, making up 29% of the ethnic minority population (Research Office, 2016). White people took the second position, with a 22% share. Southeast Asians (comprising Filipinos, Indonesians, and Thais) took the third position, with a share of 14% (Research Office, 2016). In Hong Kong's increasingly diverse society, it is becoming ever more important to strengthen social ties and community cohesion. Population aging is also a concern for policymakers, as it can cause problems with social welfare. There were 1,163,153 older persons (people aged 65 and over) in Hong Kong in 2016 (Press Releases, 2016), out of a total of 7.34 million people. This has raised policy and practical concerns regarding how to integrate people of different ages and from different ethnic groups in Hong Kong society. This study contributes an educational design for social cohesion.

Challenges of teaching social cohesion in citizenship education: Japan and Hong Kong

Citizenship education and social cohesion

Citizenship is intimately linked to notions of individual rights and of attachment to a particular community (Kymlicka & Norman, 1994). Kennedy (2014) found that Asian and European states share similar views on the importance of preparing citizens through education to serve the purposes of the nation state, but with different focuses. While the Asian focus is on duty,

obligations, and civic virtues that contribute to the stability of the nation, Europe focuses more on rights guaranteeing the equitable treatment of citizens, participation, and engagement (Kennedy, 2014). Western conceptions also emphasize developing an understanding of the principles of the rule of law, the nature of representative democracy, and the powers of and restraints on the government, as well as some awareness of economic, social, and environmental policies, deeming such understanding necessary for the educated citizen. Therefore, these principles underpin active citizenship education in Western regions (Ross, 2012). Recently, academics' and educators' interest in citizenship in particular for the western world has been sparked by increasing voter apathy in elections, long-term welfare dependency, the resurgence of nationalist movements, the stresses created by increasingly multicultural and multiracial populations, a backlash against the welfare state, and the failure of environmental policies that rely on citizens' voluntary cooperation, among other factors (Kymlicka & Norman, 1994). There is a growing educational need to develop various relevant competencies, qualities, and attitudes in young people.

Citizenship education, therefore, has been designed and implemented to instill a sense of civic identity and cultivate nationalism and patriotism in the younger generations (Green, 1990). The conception of citizenship education, however, has changed over time, representing two types of citizenship: minimal citizenship and maximal citizenship (McLaughlin, 1992), and they have got some implications for our broader understanding on western and eastern societies regarding their citizenship, though specific elements can still be found across societies. Minimal citizenship, reflecting the historical conception of citizenship education and often described in exclusive or elitist terms, is mainly concerned with obedience and loyalty to the state government, whereas maximal citizenship, as McLaughlin (1992) argued, stresses critical thinking on all civic matters and active questioning of the government. Education for maximal citizenship is conducted through critical pedagogies and considers critical democratic citizens and justice-oriented citizens to embody the ideal forms of citizenship because they strive for social justice and societal improvement. Johnson and Morris (2010) presented and defined the traits of good citizens in a call for the development of school citizenship curricula that foster forms of criticality.

Despite these theoretical arguments, civic education in practice is usually reactive, addressing short-term, current civic issues; thus, there is much room to enhance civic participation (Fairbrother & Kennedy, 2011). Furthermore, there is a need to equip teachers to overcome their own preconceived ideas about these matters and to handle such difficult issues in a positive and even-handed way (Cappelle, 2011). After all, teachers' perceptions have an impact on their teaching practices (Long et al., 2021). Teaching involves individualized deliberation and delivery processes as well as selection from the teacher's personal experience and understanding (Fullan, 1989; Branson, 2003). A recent review of over 100 published articles reporting secondary analyses of IEA civic education study data identified four themes that are especially salient for citizenship educators: an open classroom climate, teaching and learning

approaches, student identity, and profiles of citizenship norms and attitudes (Knowles, Torney-Purta, & Barber, 2018). Hence, a social participation learning unit like these two school cases can provide lessons to learning about engaging students in the community.

On fostering social cohesion, Green et al. (2006, p. 1) argued that "how to promote and maintain social cohesion in the face of rapid globalization has become one of the key policy challenges of the new millennium." UNESCO (1996), the OECD (1997), the Council of Europe (2005), and the World Bank (Roberts-Schweitzer, Greaney & Duer [eds.], 2006) have all emphasized the importance of social cohesion, which, in simple terms, means living together amid diversity. In particular, the Council of Europe (2005) outlined key concepts (e.g., community bonds, shared values, sense of belonging, ability to work together) and strategic areas (e.g., territorial cohesion, social capital, quality of life, access to rights) related to social cohesion, and it endorsed the understanding of social cohesion as an objective, as a process, and as an acquisition in learning. Meanwhile, experiential learning, such as via participation in social services, can expose students to elements of deprivation or inequalities in their society of which they were initially unaware, thus expanding their perspectives (Haste & Hogan, 2006) and providing them with opportunities to transfer their knowledge of being good citizens into action by helping others, and this shall aid in achieving social cohesion. In addition, Avery (1997), Annette (2008), and Schwarz (2011) found that experiential learning was linked with service-learning as an educational initiative, as providing local community support enhanced youth engagement. This is also what the two school cases want to achieve. Furthermore, Conrad and Hedin's (1989) oft-cited review of community involvement research in K-12 educational settings provided evidence that such educational community programs are associated with students' civic-related learning outcomes—notably self-esteem, appreciation for diversity, responsibility toward the community, political efficacy, understanding of socio-historical contexts, and willingness to volunteer in the future. Finally, youths' active engagement in the local community has been hypothesized to have a "trickle-up" effect, whereby students' experiences of community involvement are generalized into a greater sense of duty to their national and global communities (Condor & Gibson, 2007). Such findings on experiential or service learning can shed light on what to do about social cohesion.

Japanese citizenship education

Since the Second World War, Japan has gradually developed into a democratic country, adopting the Western style of party politics and elections. In education, the Course of Study was developed as a manual for teachers to develop school curricula (Nakano, 2013). The Course of Study was strengthened as a national standard in 1958, such that teachers could only develop curricula within its framework (Nakano, 2013). In response, teachers and researchers in Japan initiated the "Lesson Study" movement, which questions the value of educational content for the future, both in terms of the students and society at large, and seeks to build better teaching practice methods (Nakano, 2013). Ueda (1988, 1997), recognized as a leader in Lesson Study

reform, developed a method for developing curricula that has circulated among many Japanese teachers and is recognized as one of the main child-centered approaches in Japan.

The development of school teaching materials in Japan from the 1960s to the present day has proceeded in two main directions. The first is the educational content–teaching materials process, whereby materials are developed via what Fujioka (1991, pp. 37–38) labeled a "top-down route," translating educational content into teaching materials. In other words, the direction is to first set the content to be taught, and then consider methods and teaching materials to effectively teach that content. The second direction is the source materials–teaching materials process, whereby teaching materials are created from any data or information via a "bottom-up route" (Ikeno, 2013). In other words, the direction is to set the content and materials to be educated from the real society and the current situation surrounding children, rather than having the content to be educated first. The Japanese school case adopts this second direction. Meanwhile, Japanese school textbooks usually begin with problems, not methods, and this structure supports the problem-solving approach to subject teaching (Fukazawa, 2013). The refinement of lesson planning is just one goal of Lesson Study (NASEM, 2013); it may have various other goals, including developing teachers' learning communities and school culture, school-wide reform, spreading a new instructional philosophy such as problem-solving based lessons, testing new teaching materials, developing teachers' professional knowledge, and enabling teachers to experience the child-care setting through the eyes of a particular student (Lewis, 2013).

In present-day Japan's education system, teaching citizenship education or social studies is a difficult task due to increasing community mobility which makes citizens become much more diverse. Community members have a high turnover rate, and this presents a problem in teaching students social cohesion, while the old age persons may cluster in certain districts. In the broad Japanese social context, citizenship education has shifted emphasis from "education for (community) citizens" and "teaching students social science disciplines concerned with building the Japanese nation" to, most recently, "citizenship education for all citizens." In practice, teaching civic education and fostering citizenship has been a difficult task in the Japanese education system for a long time. From 1958 to the present, systematic education and knowledge-oriented education have been deeply rooted. This is because citizenship education especially social studies in Japan have become trivialized as "providing students with knowledge of the social sciences." However, since 2000, the importance of fostering citizenship has gradually been recognized again, and recently various citizenship education approaches have been researched, developed, and practiced.

Hong Kong citizenship education

In Hong Kong, citizenship education, commonly referred to as "civic education," is important because the number of people migrating from mainland China to join family members in Hong Kong has continuously increased since the resumption of Chinese sovereignty in 1997. In terms of education, school curricula are mostly textbook-based (Adamson & Morris, 2007). There is a

need to integrate native Hong Kongers and those from mainland China in schools, in addition to the challenges of building a Chinese national identity (author, 2013; Tse & Fung, 2017). Research has found that citizenship education in Hong Kong placed more emphasis on moral education in the 1980s–1990s, during the de-politicization projects of the British colonial government (Leung & Yuen, 2009; Ngai, Leung, & Yuen, 2014). The British colonial regime, preoccupied with countering threats to its legitimacy and with preserving stability, controlled school subjects, textbooks, and teaching materials and political activities on school grounds (Morris & Chan, 1997). However, patriotism, as a unifying ideology, has been instrumental to the national construction of the People's Republic of China, especially since the early 1980s (Fairbrother, 2003). During the late decolonization period, there was a call for nationalistic civic education to prepare Hong Kong students to join Chinese national life after 1997 (Curriculum Development Council, CDC, 1996), as well as a call to impart rights awareness and democratic ideals to Hong Kong students to support democracy during the SAR's return to China (Lee & Sweeting, 2001; author, 2018).

After 1997, the Hong Kong SAR government considered the development of national identification and patriotism to be a top priority of citizenship education (Leung & Yuen, 2009; Morris & Morris, 1999). However, Yuen (2009) pointed out that in general, Hong Kongers tend to hold typically Western rather than Chinese beliefs about national identity and patriotism and that they value liberty, human rights, freedom, and democracy, though Hong Kong's civic education has found to be 'action poor' (Leung, 2008). Interestingly, Shi et al. (2019) found in the citizenship education curriculum guidelines elements of both active citizenship and global citizenship, such as participation in the community and understanding the world, thus forming local, national, and global identities alongside an emphasis on enhancing national citizenship in Hong Kong. Education to establish a Chinese national identity met with societal opposition when the Hong Kong SAR government promulgated the *Moral and National Education Curriculum Guide* (*Primary1–Secondary 3*) (CDC, 2012) in 2012. This publication immediately triggered a series of social protests opposing this mandatory curriculum on the grounds that the government-sponsored teaching materials were biased, with an exclusive focus on Chinese national identity. Furthermore, the Umbrella Movement in 2014 elicited negative responses from the Chinese government, which indicated that a boundary had been crossed by the protesters in the eyes of Beijing authorities (Ortmann, 2015), this is also a complicated issue involving questions of identity, rights, and participation that is relevant to citizenship education in Hong Kong.

In Hong Kong's elementary schools (for students of about 6 to 11 years of age), General Studies (GS) is the formal curriculum that teaches personal, social, humanities, health, and scientific and technological knowledge, although schools usually also provide a short informal course on moral and civic education. Civic education take the form of extra-curricular activity, and the study of community participation and social cohesion can be categorized as civic education (Leung & Yuen, 2019).

National identity is one of the main emphases of education in Hong Kong, because an educational system is expected to provide a national education program to teach students to belong to a nation (Mathews, Ma, & Lui, 2007; Leung & Yuen, 2009) after the resumption of Chinese sovereignty in 1997. However, a mixed-methods study (Tse & Fung, 2017) exploring the multiple identities and their origins and the associated social values of teachers, conducted in Hong Kong Catholic elementary schools, found that the concept of multiple identities was integrated with the conception of citizenship in school curricula and that certain religious elements were incorporated into the teaching of multiple identities, representing the spiritual and transcendental dimension of learning about oneself. Thus, identity education should embrace both rationality and sentiment and that learning through experience can help students to construct their own identities. Meanwhile, study tours can provide a chance for students to reflect on their identities (Cheng & Szeto, 2019) and learn about global citizenship (Davies et al., 2018). Also, student councils help elementary school students to develop leadership and communication skills (Chong, Yuen, & Leung, 2018). Another recent study (Tang, Chong, & Yuen, 2019) found that Catholic Diocesan schools in Hong Kong, instead of applying a school-based national education curriculum in resistance to the government's proposed curriculum, could develop a school-based curriculum in the form of a "school-based implementation" program. This could address Catholic schools' need to provide students with opportunities to examine social and national issues alongside Catholic ethics, which has clear connections with many cherished universal values.

As described above, Japan and Hong Kong have different social situations and educational policies. Yet they have common concerns, such as ageing populations and the need to enhance social cohesion. In particular for the two schools chosen in respective societies, ageing populations, community participation, and social cohesion are just key considerations when planning any experiential and service learning. Therefore, this study compares the community participation projects practiced at these two elementary schools and examines common features that promote social cohesion. This study would give rise to both educational policy and curricular implications.

CASE STUDY: CURRICULA OF SCHOOL A AND SCHOOL B

Two similar schools in terms of their adoption of social participation unit and ageing community background are chosen for case analysis with an aim to arrive at some educational and curriculum suggestions for developing social cohesion learning units in schools. The methodology adopted is case study (Stake, 1995) which investigates the illuminative aspects of the cases chosen for analysis. The first school chosen (School A) is a public school located in a rural area of Sendai city, Miyagi Prefecture, Japan. School A is located in an area that has been rapidly developed as a sub-center of Sendai city in recent years; thus, residents have high mobility and represent various cultures and hold various values (Nanakita Elementary School, 2011). As a consequence, community membership is subject to frequent change. Similar to the

recent trend in Japan, interaction between locals (who are usually elderly) and newly arrived young families is decreasing as previously mentioned. School A was assigned by the government (the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology) to develop a new academic subject (unit) and curriculum in 2009–2011 to foster students' ability to live alongside others and build a better society. School A named the new unit "Chiiki-Kyosei-Ka." "Chiiki" means "community," "Kyosei" means "living together," and "Ka" means "subject."

School A exhibits several strengths. First, it has many learning-support volunteers. University students are often available to assist the young students in their learning. Many of these student assistants hope to become teachers in the future. Second, School A's teachers have a strong understanding of community learning resources, as a conference on social studies education was held just prior to the implementation of the Chiiki-Kyosei-Ka unit. Thirdly, the school has established a Community Council for School Support, consisting of about 10 people who are generally involved in education, including staff members of the Sendai community center, representatives of volunteer organizations, and members of the Children's Parents' Association. These people introduce connections and intermediate valuable learning resources which includes people and institutions to the school. This council also helps teachers to plan and put valuable lessons into use. Last, through the Community Council for School Support, School A's cooperation with the ward Learning Network is enhanced. The ward Learning Network is an organization whose aims are to foster relationships between community organizations that "support children's healthy growth" and to foster children's communication skills by providing them with opportunities for social participation and play. The members of the ward Learning Network are a variety of community groups, non-profit organizations, other elementary and junior high schools, Parent–Teacher Association of school A, the Children's Parents' Society, and the Council for Social Education. All these connections with the community make School A a valid candidate for this social cohesion experiment.

The chosen school in Hong Kong (School B) is a Catholic school that is supported financially by the government. The sponsoring body is the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong, which is the largest single provider of education services across school levels in the region. Teachers of moral and religious education plan their instruction with reference to the universalistic framework of Catholic social ethics. Thus, with regard to moral and religious education, Catholic social ethics exert an influence on School B's pedagogical and curriculum development. Somewhat different from the rural area where School A is situated, School B is located in a developed public housing estate in Kowloon. The local population has a high percentage of middle-aged and single older persons. However, there are also young arrivals from mainland China and relatives of local ethnic minority residents who have migrated (especially from South Asia) to the area, meaning that the community is relatively diverse.

As at all government-aided schools in Hong Kong, GS is a required subject at School B. GS provides students with opportunities to integrate knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes across the key learning areas of personal, social, and humanities education, science education, and

technology education (Education Bureau [EDB], 2019). All schools are legally required to have an incorporated management committee for the betterment of the overall management and advising of school governance. This committee includes representatives from the school's sponsoring body, unaffiliated parties, teachers, parents, and alumni. In recent years School B has developed a reputation for its special education needs (SEN) program, which caters to deaf and hard-of-hearing students, who attend regular classes. The SEN program organizers collaborate with a university to provide assistants for these students, and all of the other students must learn basic sign language to communicate with them. Therefore, this school has fostered a school ethos of helping each other and encouraging social inclusion among its students. Furthermore, School B has developed a social cohesion and participation unit called Positive Life and Treasuring Elderly in the Family for students in Grades 5 and 6. This unit comprises eight classes and is taken by about 200 students. Numerous single older people live in the school's neighborhood. Many of these people have dementia and face difficulties in managing their daily lives. Therefore, School B's teachers offer a service-learning program that promotes social cohesion through community participation; students learn how to use knowledge and skills gained in GS and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) classes, along with virtual reality (VR), to create products that can help the elderly function in their daily lives.

Following the ideas of investigating the aim and contents in the learning of Social Studies (Moriwake 2001), a comparative framework is provided below for understanding the comparison adopted in this study (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Unit Themes and Aims in School A
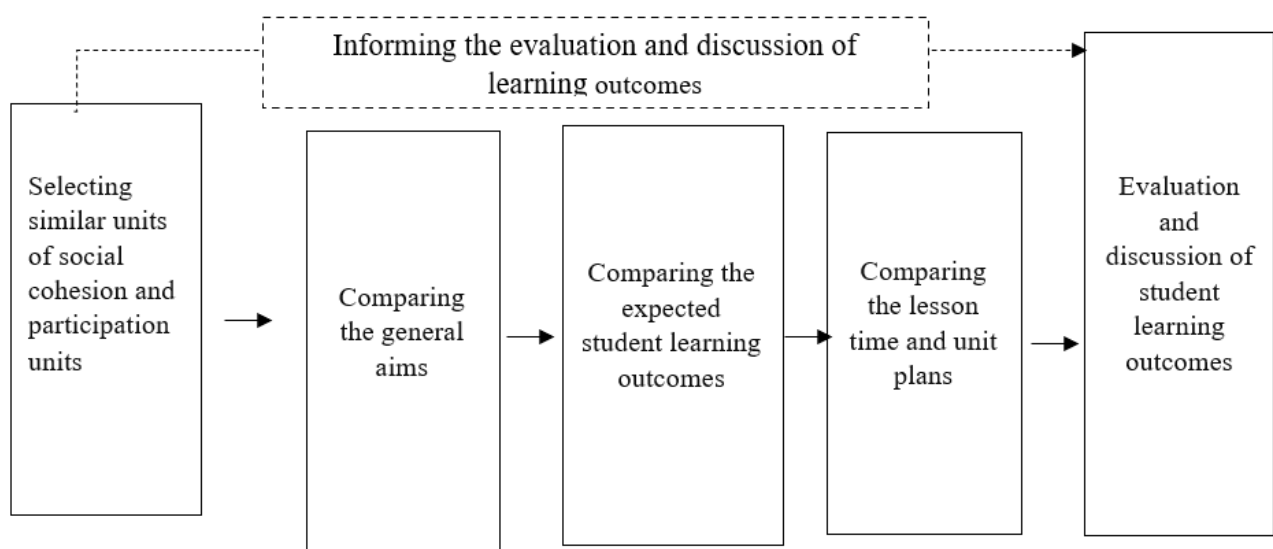
General aims of social cohesion and participation units

The selected schools display a similar emphasis on knowledge, skills, and attitude learning with regard to their students' learning about the community, thus reflecting similar educational orientations. The general aim of the Chiiki-Kyosei-Ka course at the Japanese School A is to foster students' ability to live more harmoniously in society and build a better society. It also aims at improving students' social contributions, increasing their thoughtfulness, and improving their knowledge and skills. Therefore, Chiiki-Kyosei-Ka emphasizes "learning and experience-based activities" through which students can become deeply involved in their community (Nanakita Elementary School, 2011, p. 13). Through Chiiki-Kyosei-Ka, the students are expected to get to know their community, specifically its members—what they do and what they think. Moreover, it allows people in the community to develop relationships with the students and teachers, such that community members take part in the process of nurturing the children. The specific learning aims of School A can be summarized as follows. First, to enable students through research to not only express their own thoughts but also share the ideas, feelings, and thoughts of people representing local shops and institutions. Second, to allow young students to work with university students. Finally, to encourage students to notice what more they can do; for example, by identifying what is lacking in their community. The research methodology applied depends on the purpose of the research; it should increase the students' appetite for progression in their work. Therefore, an operational question for this unit is "How can we train young citizens to promote social cohesion and to live harmoniously in society?"

The aims of the GS subject at Hong Kong's School B are to integrate students' learning experiences and promote their life-long learning. GS is designed with the notion that students' learning experiences should be connected and not compartmentalized, enabling them to develop a holistic view of themselves as individuals in the community, their place in the natural world, and the interaction of human beings with the environment (EDB, 2019). The specific learning aim of the Positive Life and Treasuring Elderly in the Family unit at School B is to enhance Grade 5 students' positive attitudes toward the difficulties and pressures faced by the older people and promote Grade 6 students' creativity through hands-on and minds-on learning experiences and problem-solving. Because this social cohesion and participation unit is about designing products for the elderly living in the neighborhood, Computer Studies teachers are also involved in helping students attain knowledge and skills related to STEM and VR. Furthermore, as School B is a Catholic school, the teachers emphasize the development of a caring attitude and respect for different people, such as single seniors, during the learning processes of this unit. This unit also emphasizes student enquiry and development of the skills required for "learning to learn." Specifically, the service-learning activities aim to train students to develop tools to help the elderly living in the community. The learning processes and outcomes are largely positive, and they will be discussed further in the evaluation sections.

Expected student learning outcomes

In School A, the specific expected student learning outcomes from the school documents (Nanakita Elementaly School, 2011) can be summarized as follows:

- Grade 1 students are expected to take part in a community festival as an introduction to Chiiki-Kyosei-Ka. The students are expected to learn about the community surrounding them and to consider what they can do to entertain the community and make it more active.

- Grade 2 students are expected to take care of kindergarten students. They go to kindergarten classes and learn how to relate to the younger children. They think of ways to entertain the younger children and ensure that they have fun.

- Grade 3 students are expected to interact with elderly people by interviewing them, playing games with them, etc. The students and elderly people have lessons together to enrich each other's lives and grow together.

- Grade 4 students are expected to identify the positive qualities of their hometown by exploring the way of life and people's lives in the community in the past and by tracing historical links. They are expected to share their findings with the community and highlight their most important and interesting findings by performing an original play.

- Grade 5 students are expected to start to take actions to improve the community.

- Grade 6 students are expected to research community issues and contribute to making an active community with the help of established knowledge, while cooperating with various related institutes and organizations.

- Suisen Street projects: To invigorate Suisen Street, the school carries out 11 projects. ("Suisen" is the Japanese word for a narcissus flower. Suisen Street is a walkway near School A that the students pass through on their way to school.)

    Table 1 below illustrates the various themes and aims of the Chiiki-Kosei-Ka unit. The overall aim is to involve students in activities that require them to communicate with people who are active in the community and to deepen their ties with the community.

Table 1. *Themes and aims of the Chiiki-Kyosei-Ka unit at School A*

Grade	Theme of the Unit	Aims	Levels of learning
1	Festival in Nanakita Empower the community with children's power	be taken care of ⇒take care of	Learn about how to live together
2	Show our Ability! Let's make the town full of smiles	・younger people and elderly people ・enrich together	
3	Elderly people and us Let's laugh and learn together	・find adults in the community ・discover histories in the community	
4	I like Nanakita! Let's discover our hometown and share what we found	・find adults in the community ・discover histories in the community	
5	Imagine a Better Future Let's make ourselves and the community nicer	・Histories of community ⇒ explore the community and the people at the present time	Develop abilities to make decisions in order to live together
6	Make "Nanakita" a Comfortable Town to Live in Let's connect with our town!	⇒building community independently	
Special Needs	Our Town Let's get along with people in the community!		

There are similar elements of reaching out to the community and meeting the elderly as that of School A in School B. Both schools emphasized on arranging their elementary students to meet the community residents and use their knowledge and skills to do something for the purposes of social cohesion. Especially School A's Grade1 students have their first opportunity to meet the community, and then Grade3 students meet and understand the various needs and wants of elder people in the community, lastly Grade6 students develop and execute their own plans to contribute to the community. It depends on what students find want to contribute for,

but at least one group in this year planned and held "Discon"[1] Project which is the game tournament anybody including elderly people and elementary school students can compete equally. While School B's Grade 5 students have their first opportunity to meet and understand the various needs of older people and people with visual impairments and other disabilities in the community, Grade 6 students gain more experience and confidence while developing independent living aids (or living tools) for the elderly in the community through STEM lessons and VR education. Specifically, Grade 5 students are expected to conduct an exploration of various people living in the community under a cross-curricular theme. They learn how to serve people in need through service activities, which teaches them to love and care about different people. Grade 6 students are expected to develop user-friendly living aids for the elderly in the community. They are also expected to play a leading role in a booth exhibition of their designed living aids on Community Service-Learning Day. Table 2, below, presents the themes and aims of the Positive Life and Treasuring Elderly in the Family unit.

Table 2. Themes and aims of the learning unit at School B

Grade	Theme of the Unit	Aims	Levels of learning
5	Positive Life	• understand the meaning of life and build up positive attitude towards difficulties and pressures in life • serve people with different needs in the community	Learn about how to live in a positive way and cope with pressures in life
6	Treasuring Elderly in Family	• understand the needs of elderly and apply skills learnt in STEM and VR education in designing living tools for the elderly • apply knowledge and skills through service-learning for the elderly	Develop abilities to make living tools for the elderly in the community

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[1] "Discon" is a new sport born in Japan, which was conceived in 1997 at the Okayama Municipal Children's Nature House, inspired by craft coasters made from thinned cedar and cypress wood.It was named "DISCON" by synthesizing the disk control from the operation (control) of the disk. It is a simple sport in which teams are divided into two teams, red and blue, and each team throws six discs to see which team gets closer to the point. Also, everyone from children to the old age persons can compete regardless of like an age, sex or physical strength.

Lesson time and unit plan

This social cohesion unit was implemented for three years at School A, from 2009 to 2011. When the project period had ended, the curriculum and lessons from this subject were used in the Period of Integrated Study classes for several years. For example, Grade 6 students were required to research community issues and contribute to building an active community with the help of established knowledge, while cooperating with various related institutes and organizations. By carrying out their own projects to address community issues, the students came to understand the significance of living together within the community. Some of the projects that the students planned were aimed at developing Suisen Street. Some projects aimed at contributing to solutions for problems in the community, while others aimed at entertaining people in the community. The students, working in groups, planned each project themselves. There were also adjustments to the curricula and lessons to accommodate Chiiki-Kyosei-Ka. Figure 2, below, shows the cycle of this project for each grade in School A. For example, in Grades 1 and 2, Living Environment Studies was reduced by 50 learning hours, and in Grades 3–6, the Period for Integrated Studies was reduced by 70 learning hours to make room for Chiiki-Kyosei-Ka instruction.
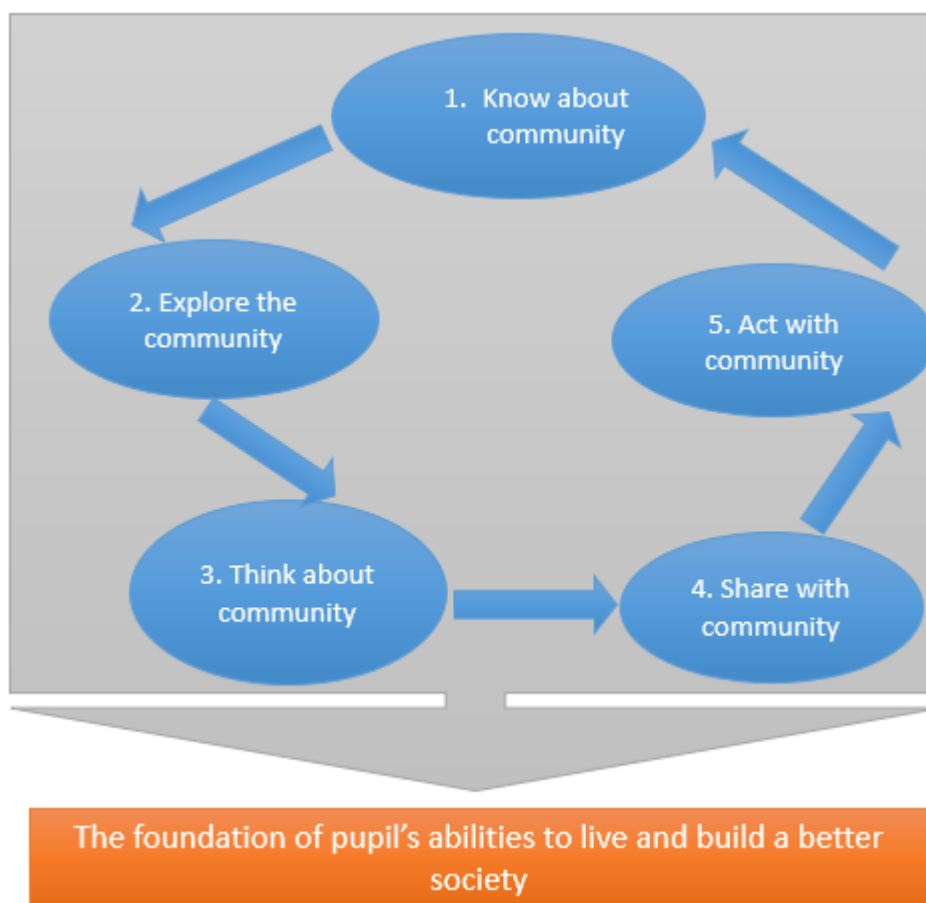

Figure 2. *School A cycle of learning*

School B in Hong Kong is monitored by the government and required to allocate around 12–15% of teaching time to the learning of GS (EDB, 2019). Its Positive Life and Treasuring Elderly in the Family unit takes place within this allotted time in the latter half of the school year, and it has been implemented since 2016. The aims of this social cohesion unit from the relevant school documents are as follows. First, to strengthen independent learning in GS through community and service-learning activities and the use of information technology for interactive learning such as making living aids for the old people. Second, to foster students' lifelong learning and provide hands-on learning experiences to promote social cohesion. Finally, to enable students to use learning resources to develop solutions, such as designing daily living aids by applying knowledge and skills learned in STEM classes, which are beyond those attained from conventional textbooks. This aligns with the government's expectations of the GS subject (EDB, 2019). In each school year, students in Grades 5 and 6 are briefed by social workers on the needs of elderly in their daily lives. Then, the students interview some single elderly people about the sorts of living aids or walking aids that might help them. After that, students begin their design process, applying the knowledge and skills that they have learned in various school subjects. As this is a religious school, the students are encouraged to design their tools with as caring a mindset as possible. Figure 3, below, presents School B's teaching plan.
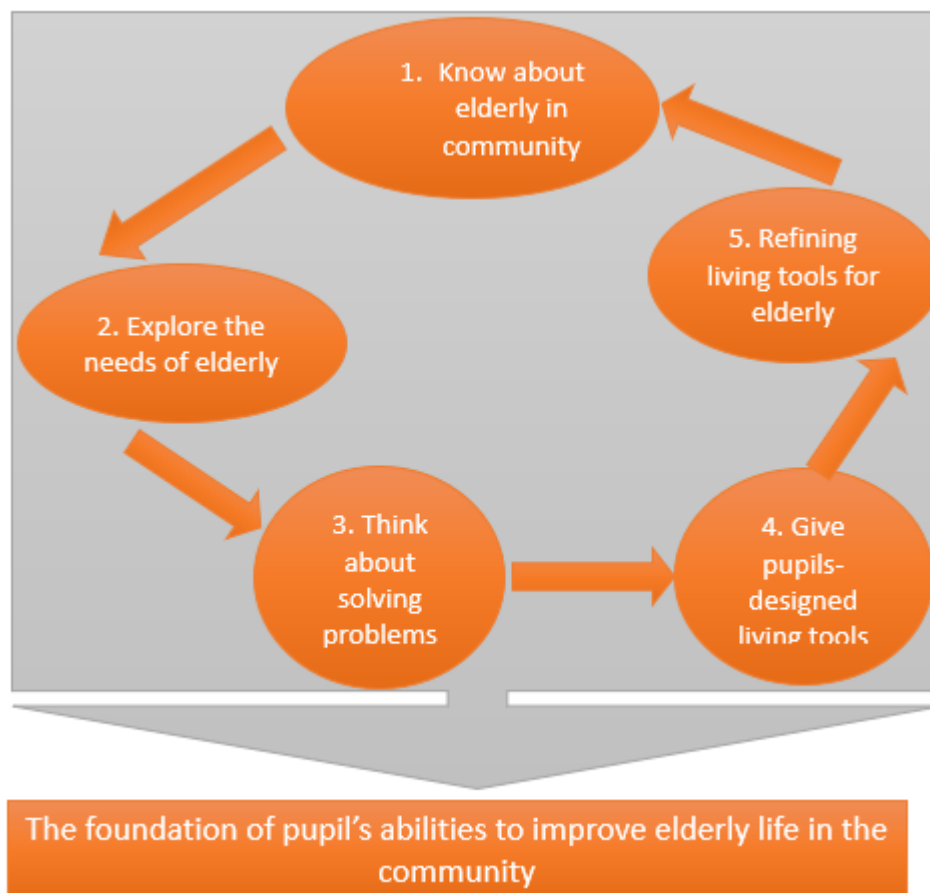

Figure 3. *School B cycle of learning*

Evaluation and discussion of student learning outcomes

School A's student reflection survey revealed many remarkable outcomes of Chiiki-Kyosei-Ka (Nanakita Elementary School, 2011). Three key student outcomes are presented here. First, the percentage of students who thought that "relationships with people" are important was higher in the sixth survey, conducted in November 2011, compared with the first survey in July 2008 (before the Chiiki-Kyosei-Ka project was implemented). In the first survey, most of the students (52%) responded to the question "What do you want to do to make the community better?" with "Keep the environment clean." Other answers included "Protect nature" (15%) and "Form relationships with people" (10%). In the sixth survey, "Keep the environment clean" (33%) was still the most common answer; however, the percentage of students who replied "Form relationships with people" (30%) had increased significantly. Moreover, the percentage of students who thought that "the pride of this community is good relationships between people" increased from 25% to 43% between the first and sixth surveys.

Second, the percentage of students who were aware that people differ and have different thoughts and values increased. For example, the percentage of students who thought that "people around [them] have various opinions and thoughts" increased from 86% (Strongly agree: 53% + Slightly agree: 33%) to 94% (62% + 32%) between the first and sixth surveys, respectively.

Third, the percentage of students who thought that listening to others and cooperating with them are important increased. For example, the percentage of students who thought that "listening carefully until someone is finished, even if their opinions are different from [their] own," is important increased from 92% (Strongly agree: 49% + Slightly agree: 43%) to 94% (64% + 30%). Agreement with the importance of "being able to carefully listen to others with different opinions from [their] own, to choose the best way," increased from 78% (Strongly agree: 33% + Slightly agree: 45%) to 89% (51% + 38%). Furthermore, agreement that it is important to "cooperate with people who have different opinions" increased from 89% (Strongly agree: 50 % + Slightly agree: 39%) to 93% (60% + 33%).

Specifically, the learning outcomes for the respective grades from the reflection were as follows:

- The Grade 1 students successfully took part in a festival in the community. The students considered what they should do to build excitement and decided to go out into the community with a portable shrine that they had built.
- The Grade 2 students went to kindergarten classes and learned about relationships with younger children. The students thought about what they could do for the younger children to make school fun and put their ideas into action.
- The Grade 3 students had a chance to understand old age persons by communicating with them, interviewing them, etc. They had a class together to learn and grow together and enrich each other's lives.

- The Grade 4 students learned to appreciate the positive attributes of their hometown by exploring the life of the community in the past and tracing historical links. Then, they shared with the community the attractions of the town in an original play.
- The Grade 5 students learned about the lives and hopes of people who support and contribute to their community. They transmitted what they had understood and learned to the community through radio broadcasts. The students discussed what they could do to make the community better and took appropriate actions.
- The Grade 6 students investigated community issues and contributed to making an active community, cooperating with various related institutes and organizations. By carrying out projects addressing community matters, the students came to understand the significance of living together within the community.
- In the Suisen Street invigoration projects, the students achieved the following:
  1. Developed a new restaurant menu
  2. Cleaned and planted flowers[2]
  3. Completed a sports project
  4. Created store and school mascots
  5. Took part in a community festival
  6. Found a pet owner
  7. Promoted a store
  8. Developed new products for the cake shop "JAMIN"
  9. Created a magazine about community history
  10. Completed the "Discon" project
  11. Completed a community art project

Examining the implementation of the Chiiki-Kyosei-Ka unit reveals three important learning points. First, Chiiki-Kyosei-Ka provides opportunities for students to feel like actual members of the community and included in the community. Children are often excluded from the process of building their community and from decision-making involving it, even though they are members of the community. In the Chiiki-Kyosei-Ka program, because the students contribute to the community, they feel included within it and appreciated. Moreover, because the students' opinions are respected by people in the community, they develop a sense of belonging to that community, which is the foundation of social cohesion (Jenson, 1998). Second, Chiiki-Kyosei-Ka provides opportunities for the students and their community to create or strengthen the community's social cohesion. Meeting and working with a variety of people in

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[2] The purpose of this project, the members want to make the street clean and bright through activities such as cleaning the Suisen Street and planting flowers. And this project include activities below; In order to collect Narcissus bulbs, this project gathers information from newspapers and websites, then secures bulbs by sending e-mails to collaborators, and discusses with the park section of the ward office to decide where to plant flowers, and apply to the ward office for permission. etc.

the community offer substantial opportunities to create meaningful bonds. As previously mentioned, it depends on what students find want to contribute for, but for example, if we focus on the problem of an aging society, at least one group in this year planned and held "Discon" Project which is the game tournament anybody including elderly people and elementary school students can compete equally. Because of these plans are all student's idea, this is the result of students' willingness to care for and please the elderly people, and in this way, it also made an opportunity for children and elderly people in the community to get closer to each other and create social cohesion. The students' parents, in turn, are connected to the community through their children. These connections make community bonds, or social cohesion, stronger and more active. Finally, Chiiki-Kyosei-Ka exposes the students to a variety of opinions, points of view, needs, etc., and the students learn which of these they should incorporate into their plans to make the projects useful. They are expected to practice "accommodating" different people in the community, including themselves. Accommodation is one of the most important aspects of promoting social cohesion in a diverse and democratic society (Tsubota, 2009). These three features of the program build a strong foundation for citizenship and for promoting social cohesion. However, they only form the foundation; it is also necessary to have a consistent curriculum from elementary school through high school, or at least junior high school. The Chiiki-Kyosei-Ka approach is especially useful in helping students to adapt to established societies, which is an important process. However, it is only the beginning. Through Chiiki-Kyosei-Ka, students experience a new approach to exploring and contributing to their community, and accessing their community shows them that they can also contribute to it.

In the case of Hong Kong's School B, all of our quantitative post-activity survey evaluations of the Grade 6 students (n = 102) yielded positive scores (with an average of over 3 on a 5-point Likert scale), such as regarding their satisfaction with their learning (mean = 4.3) and with their designed living aids (mean = 4.2). Furthermore, judging from on-site observations, many of the students took pride in the living aids they had designed for the elderly, and they were eager to improve the designs upon receiving comments from their peers or teachers. This experience fostered peer learning in the school.

On Community Service-Learning Day, the elderly living in the neighborhood received the student-designed living aids. About verbal comments received on-site, the seniors were very satisfied with the tools. Verbal records, which were collected and written by teachers during the student visits to the older people, showed that they told the students that the tools had greatly increased their ease of movement, their ability to pick things up at home, and their ability to walk around in the community. For exerting impacts to the wider society on social cohesion, mass media reported in a very positive way on the service-learning activities and on the students' having designed the living aids, as this project connected the students and older people living within the community. Praise also came from the students' parents, who showed appreciation for their children's new knowledge and skills and for the caring attitude toward

seniors that their children had developed. Written notes of praise from the parents such as "This is a meaningful activity!", "my children learnt a lot during the services!" and "my children learnt how to respect others!" were read out at a meeting of the school's incorporated management committee.

Overall, the Grade 6 students at School B developed a sense that they were part of the community, and their sense of belonging increased. This effect lasted well beyond the unit, as observed by the teachers. The older people who received tools felt less isolated after the students had paid them several visits. Some of the elderly even asked whether the school could provide them with extra help in their daily lives, such as delivering cooked meals and supplements for them

This service-learning unit has significant implications for other schools learning about community participation and social cohesion. First, even people as young as elementary school students can be trusted and given the chance to develop something helpful for the community. Second, an interdisciplinary curriculum in elementary school provides a foundation for service-learning activities to take place, especially as experiences of community participation and service require schools to create learning space outside the classroom and combine different types of knowledge, such as personal, social, humanities, and IT knowledge. In summary, through service-learning activities, students experience integrated learning and come to know more about the cohesion needs of their community.

DISCUSSION

Practicing service-learning

School A is an ordinary school, whereas School B is a religious school. But this difference does not affect their intention to engage their elementary school students in community projects for social cohesion. Despite this difference, the schools' educational aims, learning themes, and service activities have important things in common. First, both schools try to practice service-learning. Although School A does not use the term "service-learning," it offers the same experience, in that its students learn through activities geared toward improving others' lives and the community. The service practices at School B are not just a religious mission but an effort to improve students' ability to coexist with different people and contribute to society in cross-curricular approach. Thus, the practices of these two schools can be described as service-learning for young students to promote social change, as suggested by Karaki (2010) on how education instruction and assessment can change from a focus on students assimilating content knowledge to develop their habits that make them adaptable to the changing world and empower them to become change agents (Sibanda & Marongwe (2022).

Promoting social cohesion

At both of the examined schools, enhancing the community's social cohesion is an important theme. Our study of two Asian schools thus provides insight into how to promote active citizenship (Janoski, 1998): civic education must foster proactive engagement, such as citizens'

participation in their communities (Kymlicka & Norman, 1994; Johnson and Morris, 2010). Similarly, both of the schools create opportunities for students to assess their communities' needs and overcome challenges to work out solutions. Thus, both schools exhibit citizenship linked to ideas of individual rights of freedom to live and of attachment to a particular community (Kymlicka & Norman, 1994). Using community projects to promote social cohesion can be too challenging for elementary school students. However, accommodating challenges and conflict are crucial to building social cohesion (Bickmore, 2006), community belonging (Ritter, 2020) and both schools have used various learning activities at outlined in previous sections. The Japanese and Hong Kong schools examined here place similar emphases on child-centered education, problem-solving, group-based projects, developing caring and respectful attitudes, and interacting with different people in community participation.

Learning authentic skills

Both the Japanese and Hong Kong schools are required to teach their students competencies such as "the values, skills, and attitudes that they need to take an active part in governing themselves" (Finkel, 2003, p. 137). This can be achieved by equipping students with the necessary generic skills, values, and attitudes to face major changes in local, regional, and global landscapes and maintain their competitiveness (CDC, 2017; EDB, 2019). Along these policy lines, during the community participation processes at both Schools A and B, the students are given chances to learn how to apply problem-solving skills in organizing activities, use creativity in designing materials or tools, develop positive and caring attitudes toward the older people, and share what they have learned with their own community, in particular with those in need. These elements further strengthen the students' sense of belonging to, care for, and commitment to their community, thus building a foundation for them to become good and engaged citizens in the future.

Adopting community participation in school curricula

From the school cases above, we argue that a consistent whole-school curriculum that includes community participation from elementary to (junior) high school is crucial to the advancement of social cohesion. In the context of population ageing and the other particular needs of their communities, both the Japanese school and the Hong Kong school we observed recognize the importance of engaging young citizens in contributing to their community. Schools A and B believe that their students can play an active role in achieving social cohesion through social services and community participation, which in turn contributes to the development of a diverse and democratic society. Indeed, community-centered service-learning should progress from "doing for someone" to "doing with someone" (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2000), creating more opportunities for student engagement. The authors therefore recommend developing community participation projects (Ritter, 2020) to help school students promote social cohesion. Elementary school educators should be aware that community projects for social cohesion benefit schools, by improving their service-learning curricula; students, by improving their knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes; and community members (such as the elderly).

Student participation to become active members of society

With rapid globalization and the development of an information-oriented culture that brings about social challenges such as social cohesion, the ways that citizens create their own societies and engage with society have changed. Education and school curricula worldwide have incorporated more elements related to global citizenship in response to globalization (Shi et al., 2019). Citizens can now easily obtain and send information via digital media and social networks. Our two school cases have significant implications for efforts to engage young students in becoming active members of society. Based on our observations of community participation, we argue that it is important for students to realize, through their own social experiences, that they are valuable members of their communities. Similar service-related experiences with the aim of social cohesion may provide a solution to what has been described as a "crisis" in citizenship among young people nowadays, including their ignorance of basic civic knowledge, lack of political participation, and skepticism regarding the values of democratic citizenship (Schwarz, 2011).

Limitations

This study has got some limitations. First, the case analysis focuses on only two schools. Case study can illuminate some aspects to be learnt but the generalization is another issue. Of course, the programs examined in this study have benefited these two schools, which continue to implement them. However, more important than the pervasiveness of service activities for social cohesion is how such social cohesion activities can be integrated into school learning for other schools. Integrating services in community into the academic curriculum is necessary for effective service-learning (Karaki, 2010); the experience of community participation alone is not sufficient. In other words, when experience is integrated into the learning of school subjects and linked to the knowledge, values, skills, and attitudes learned from those subjects, learning is deepened. For example, Nanakita Elementary School (2011, p. 22) stated that "social studies lead students to be aware they are members of the community; Chiiki-Kyosei-Ka leads students to feel it." This implies that more efforts can spent on enabling students to reflect on their community participation by integrating social studies learning with these experiences substantially deepens their learning.

CONCLUSION

Our findings show that by integrating academic learning with personal experiences in the community, community participation units enable students to discover the significance and value of their community participation and of social studies learning. In fact, doing citizenship in social studies can contribute to looking at the communities of shared fate changes and how we think about belonging and our responsibilities to one another in our shared world (Ritter, 2020). This learning process enhances students' innate motivation and encourages them to more proactively pursue civic engagement in the future. In short, this study found that doing community participation projects can promote active citizenship (Janoski, 1998) for social

cohesion, thus having a positive impact on linking up education and public policy. It is also an imperative for schools to provide civic education that can foster proactive engagement for their students' participation in their communities (Kymlicka & Norman, 1994). After all, schools shall teach the values, skills, and attitudes that students need to take an active part in governing themselves in the future (Finkel, 2003).

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