

# Pedagogy of Art Education: A Comparison of Elementary Art Instruction in Japan and the U.S.

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小学校図画工作の授業風景：美術教授法の日米比較

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## 要 約

日米の小学校における美術教授法を比較するため、両国の公立小学校を見学した。日本では小学1年と5年の図画工作の授業を、アメリカでは幼稚園と小学5年の授業の様子をビデオ録画・音声録画し、両校の教員に美術教育の意義、目的、及び生徒の作品の評価に関する考え等についてインタビューを行った。観察データおよびインタビューの内容を分析した結果、両校の主な違いは美術の技術面の強調度、創作のプロセスにおける意識、創作活動と言語的表現の関係性、作品展示における単位の違い（集団対個人）などに見られた。こうした違いによって両校の暗黙（implicit）の教授法が文化的な価値観・信条に深く根ざされていることが示唆された。

キーワード：図画工作科、美術教授法、創作のプロセス、美術作品の評価法

**Key words:** Arts and crafts, pedagogy of art instruction, creative process, art work evaluation

## 1. Introduction

Comparisons of Japanese and U.S. educational systems have received much attention from researchers and educators over the past few decades. Most of the focus, however, has been on topics concerning math and science achievement (Becke, 1992; Bracey, 1997; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992), reading (Stevenson, Lucker, Lee, Stigler, Kitamura, & Hsu, 1987), and math instruction in the classroom (Stigler, Lee, & Stevenson, 1987). Art education, the subject with which this paper is concerned, is an area that has not been investigated extensively in a Japan-U.S. comparative context.

Interest in cross-cultural studies in art education exists among developmental psychologists interested in understanding the cultural influence on children's drawings in order to distinguish the influence of culture from the influence of cognitive development, which some consider to be universal. Development of spatial understanding in Japanese and American children's drawings was investigated and it was found that although Japanese children were able to draw impressive figures complete with exaggerated features, movement, and depth, conceptual understanding was markedly similar to children in the U.S. (Bleirker & Marra, 1993). Cultural psychologists found that when Japanese and American participants were asked to draw a simple landscape drawing that included a river, house, person, tree and a horizon, that Japanese, on average, drew the horizon 15% higher than that of the American participants, and because of that, were able to draw more objects and details in the drawing compared to Americans (Masuda, Gonzales, Kwan, & Nisbett, 2008), inferring that East Asians tend to exhibit a more holistic approach to cognition (e.g. attending more to the field rather than a single focal point), whereas North Americans applied a more analytic approach (e.g. attending to the focal object and ignoring the the surrounding field) (Masuda & Nisbett, 2001).

Western anthropologists, sociologists, and educators that conducted fieldwork in art classrooms in Japan in the past have praised the Japanese for their skill in drawing precisely (Benjamin, 1997), their advanced finger dexterity (Carson, 1981), their ability to draw pictures in developmental stages ahead of their American peers (Foster, 1990), the students' attainment of uniform levels of achievement in art (Rohlen, 1983), and their ability to work for extended periods of time on a single project (Jones & Davenport, 1996).

Although not directly related to Japan, some useful insights can be gained of American philosophies about teaching art, by comparing elementary art education in the U.S. and that of China. Gardner (1990), for example, observed dramatically different

conceptions of aesthetics in the two cultures. According to Gardner (1989), the Chinese define art as the beautiful and the good and link it to morality, the implication being that by being involved in the arts and making beautiful paintings the artist too can become a beautiful person. Americans, on the other hand, tend to espouse a view that art must be interesting, powerful, and compelling, allowing us to re-experience art in a new way (Gardner, 1989). Winner (1989) noted that the Chinese believe that one must have skill before one can be creative, whereas in the U.S., people believe that children demonstrate a great deal of creativity even with little skill.

In the context of the philosophies behind art education in Japan and the U.S., some differences exist in the way art is practiced and valued in the two countries. In Japan, art is a valued part of the nationally-centralized elementary school curriculum, warranting as much time as science and social studies (National Institute for Educational Research, 1988). In the U.S., art is generally thought of as something extra to do if there is time left over from more traditionally academic subjects (Eisner, 1987; Winner, 1989; Gardner, 1989). In Japan, art is taught systematically through a series of graded textbooks (Wachowiak, 1984). In the U.S., art is rarely taught in any systematic manner and variation between classrooms is greater (Eisner, 1987; Winner, 1989). In Japan, as a rule, all elementary school teachers are expected to teach art like any other subject, although some districts do hire specialized art teachers. In Japan, the curriculum is controlled and dictated by the national government, specifically the MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology) and schools employ graded arts and crafts textbooks<sup>1</sup>. These colorful paperback handbooks were introduced into the school programs over 40 years ago and have been in and on the desks of the elementary and middle school art students since 1950 (Wachowiak, 1984).

My interest in comparing art education between Japan and the U.S. was first triggered by a comment made by a Japanese elementary school principal when I visited a school in Chiba Prefecture. The principal was giving me a tour of the school and pointed to a wall full of art work by American children which were sent as a part of a U.S.-Japan sister school exchange (See Figures 1 and 2). "The art works by American children tend to be 'childish,'" the principal said in a hushed tone, and I sensed disappointment in his voice as if he were thinking "Surely they could do better."<sup>2</sup> What about the American art work did he consider childish? Did he have a clear standard of what was childish or not? Some of the art work by American children were collages using paper plates, or pre-drawn figures that were colored in by students. I remember feeling contradicting emotions. On the one hand, I understood what the principal meant by "childish" art work. In my own observations, the drawings and art work by Japanese children seemed more developmentally advanced, using more complex shapes and postures to depict, for



Figure 1

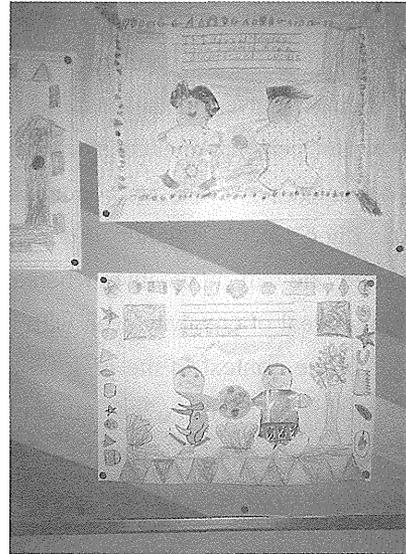


Figure 2

example, a human body, whereas, drawings of a human body by American children of the same age used more stick-like figures. Yet, on the other hand, I felt that art is not only about the finished product but also about the process. Was it the goal of American art education to have the children produce “mature” drawings in the first place? This led me to wonder whether American art educators tend to place less emphasis on the end product compared to Japanese art educators. I became interested in how art skills were taught (or not taught) in the two countries and the underlying cultural values about what constitutes a successful art classroom. These were the research questions with which I began my observational study.

## 2. Methods

I undertook an observational study in public elementary schools in both Japan and the U.S. I observed first and fifth grade art classes in Chiba, Japan<sup>3</sup> and kindergarten and fifth grade art classes in a New England public elementary school<sup>4</sup> in the U.S. I interviewed art teachers from both schools about their goals in art education, their pedagogical values on teaching art, and how they measure success. I audio-taped the art class for the American school and video-taped art classes for the Japanese school. Both audio-tapes and video-tapes were transcribed for data analysis. I took an ethnographic approach because I was particularly curious about the “implicit cultural logic” of why teachers teach the way they do. Tobin, Hsueh, and Karasawa (2009) talk about how “teachers rarely think of their pedagogical beliefs and practices as cultural” (p. 20) and yet what emerges from ethnography is the “folk pedagogy” which are “taken-for-granted practices that

emerge from embedded cultural beliefs about how children learn and how teachers should teach” (Bruner, 1996, p. 46).

### 3. Findings

I will first describe classroom interactions between teacher and students in the American kindergarten class, followed by the Japanese first grade art class. For the purposes of this paper, I will focus more on the kindergarten and first grade classrooms than the fifth grade classes.

#### Art Class in a U.S. Elementary School

Ms. Wendy Jones (pseudonym)<sup>5</sup> is the only art teacher for this particular elementary school. The kindergarten students receive 30 minutes of art instruction per week and first grade through fifth grade classes receive one hour of art instruction per week. On the day I observed Ms. Jones teach a kindergarten class of about 15 students, she had prepared a lesson on the topic “reflections.” During the previous week, she had done a lesson on “shadows” and had the class discuss what a shadow is, go outside to observe each other’s shadows, and draw them. At the beginning of class, it is customary for children to sit on a rug and form a circle and to await Ms. Jones’ instructions.

Ms. Jones: Today, we’re going to pick up on what Sam said [last class] that “shadows are like a black reflection.” We’re going to talk about reflections. What do you know about reflections? What’s a reflection?

Sam: Sometimes when you look into a pond, you see yourself.

Ms. Jones: Yes. Sometimes you see yourself in the pond. Billy, what can you tell me about reflections?

Billy: When your face is in the pond, your face is the same color. Everything is the same color.

Ms. Jones: Good. Where else can you see reflections?

Sarah: In a mirror.

David: In a shiny paper.

Cindy: [points to the kiln] Here.

Ms. Jones: Yes, in metal things<sup>6</sup>.

Bobby: In a door knob.

After encouraging the students to think about where they can see a reflection, Ms. Jones talked about how some things make you look blurry or funny or different from reality. Ms. Jones brought to class various objects such as a stainless steel ladle, spoons, an ice-cream scoop, and shiny paper, so that children could experience seeing their own

reflections. She told the class that the big shiny papers were big enough so two people can share and that they could stand on them to make a reflection of their whole body or look down into it as if they were looking into a pond. The instructions to the students were to look and make a drawing of themselves and their reflections.

Ms. Jones: Does anybody have any questions?

Teresa: Well, how can you draw your reflection?

Ms. Jones: How can you draw your reflection? Anybody have any ideas?

Roger: Draw the same thing this way and if it's this way draw it that way.

Ms. Jones: Okay, so if you drew yourself this way, you draw your reflection that way, you're suggesting. Sam do you have an idea of a way to draw your reflection?

Sam: Draw one of you, and then another of you.

Ms. Jones: Okay, draw one of you, and then another of you right next to you. Okay. There is going to be two of you in the picture just like there was one of you and a shadow in the picture last time. And look closely, remember last week we looked and we said "Notice where the shadow's feet are compared to your feet?" If you're feet are in the picture, notice where your reflection's feet are compared to your feet and if you're feet aren't in the picture, notice where is the top of your head compared to the head in your reflection.

The children spent about 15 minutes drawing using colored magic markers (see Figure 3) and were then called back into a circle on the carpet for sharing time. Children were encouraged to talk about their work to their classmates. After students shared their work, Ms. Jones made comments such as "How skinny you made yourself," "And look how



Figure 3

Elizabeth, who saw her reflection in a door knob, her face is all wide,” and “Did some of you notice how your reflection was kind of blurry?”

#### First Grade Art Class in a Japanese School

Ms. Kazuko Morita (pseudonym) teaches first grade and, like all elementary school teachers in Japan, she teaches the main subjects of Japanese language, arithmetic, social studies, art, music, moral education, and physical education. Thus, she is not a specialized art teacher like Ms. Jones in the U.S. school. Each grade receives 90 minutes of art instruction per week.

The art lesson for the 35-student first grade class was titled “I caught it. I caught it. (つれた つれた)” referring to catching fish or other marine life with a fishing rod. The lesson appears in the first grade art textbook which all children receive for free. About half of the children had their textbooks open to that particular lesson on p. 15. Ms. Morita, after putting up several colored paper cut outs of the fish on the blackboard, spoke to the class.

Ms. Morita: When you look at these, do you notice that the colors are different? What about the shapes? The shapes are all the same, right? How was I able to make these all the same shape? Does anybody have any questions?

Boy 1: If you put one sheet of paper over the other and cut it the same way, you get the same shape.

Girl 1: [Calls out an answer, inaudible]

Ms. Morita: Yes, you understand very well. Today we are going to make fish by placing the paper on top of each other and cutting them together.

Ms. Morita went up to the blackboard and asked the class, “What would you like to catch today?” The children shouted out different names of fish, such as squid, sole, salmon, sea bream, jellyfish, crab, seal, and clam, and the teacher wrote them on the blackboard.

Then as the class watched, Ms. Morita stapled together two identical fish cutouts and stuffed a piece of yarn inside to give the fish some depth. A child called out “It doesn’t look like a fish without eyes” to which Ms. Morita responded, “Then you put in the eyes. Use your crayons and colored paper to make patterns for the rest of the fish, too.”

Ms. Morita then demonstrated the actual cutting of fish by folding a colored sheet of paper in half. “Everyone watch me.” She said as she cut out a fish, using as much of the paper as possible. The end result was two fish attached to each other at the fins. “See how the fish are holding hands? If you cut it like this, the fishes will be attached. If you cut it this way,” she demonstrates cutting again, “the fish will be separate. Now I want you to try

out different ways of cutting the fish to see how they can be holding hands or be separate.” Ms. Morita also demonstrated a way to make a squid using a cardboard tube from a roll of toilet paper and attaching a triangular piece for the head and several strands of paper for the tentacles. Ms. Morita skipped the demonstration on how to make the fishing rod from a wooden chopstick since two examples were provided in the textbook, and the children seemed to pick up on how to do so by watching their classmates. Some students have looked at the textbook before class.

The students worked on making the fish and the fishing rod for about an hour (See Figure 4). Those who were done tried to see if they could catch the fish they made using their fishing rods. In the last 10 minutes of class Ms. Morita had the students move their desks to one side of the room to create an open space in the back of the classroom and used blue tape to make two circular outlines for make-believe ponds. Children fished together, placing their fish in the pond, trying to catch the fish with their fishing rods (See Figure 5).

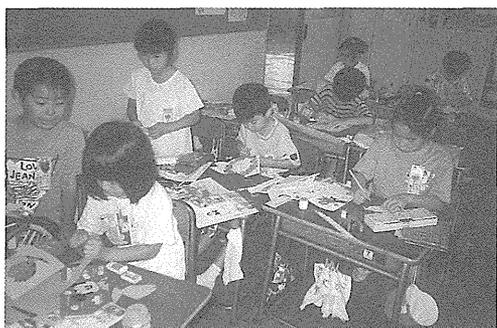


Figure 4

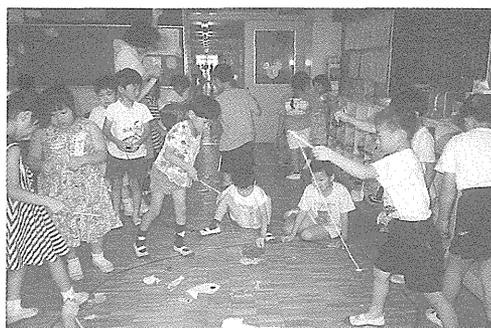


Figure 5

#### 4. Discussion

##### To Impart or Not Impart “Skills”

By describing a typical art class in both Japan and the U.S., my aim is to illuminate some cultural differences in pedagogical values on how art should be taught. One of the areas that differed between the two classrooms is whether the teacher actually demonstrated what she expected the students to do for the class such as providing an example. Ms. Morita had the class watch while she demonstrated making fish cut-outs. But even if she had not, the students had the textbook to offer examples of student work, suggesting that “modeling” existing examples was embedded in the pedagogy.

When Teresa, an American kindergarten student asked the teacher “Well, how can you draw your reflection?” Ms. Jones did not respond to the question by demonstrating ways to draw. Instead, she asked for suggestions from the class, explained that there

should be two persons in the picture, and told the students to notice the positioning of the body in a reflection. Whether intentionally or not, instructing on how to draw was avoided. Ms. Jones also did not, for example, prepare or show any of her own drawings as examples for children to follow. Children were left on their own to delve into the topic without being taught the technical skills of how to draw a human figure, for example.

In a follow-up interview, I asked Ms. Jones if she ever teaches how to draw, for example, by conducting a drawing lesson on “perspectives.”

We do a lot of observational drawings. Perspective, developmentally, I think it’s really more appropriate for middle school and it’s very confusing for elementary school students, so instead of really teaching them perspective, we do more things where we’re observing distance and trying to get them to notice some of the different things that happen when things are further away—things get smaller, things in front overlap other things and paths seem to get narrower and things like that. So we do it more from an observational point of view rather than “draw this cube this way.” Although my third graders are very impressed that I can draw three-dimensional looking buildings!

Ms. Jones thus feels that it is important for children to observe and to understand how perspective works through observation but she feels that children may not be fully developmentally ready to be taught to master perspective drawing skills at this stage.

Ms. Jones also explained that her art lesson on reflections was not meant to teach the children how to draw but to observe the world around them. Her aim was to have the children to notice something familiar in a new way. Ms. Jones voiced her expectations of what her students will learn in her art class.

[The children learn] problem-solving skills. A lot of specific things about art. Sometimes they learn about themselves because they are expressing ideas about their lives. Making a lot of discoveries about the world like the kind of things I was doing today with the kindergartners. I think it’s a big part of my job to slow them down and make them look at things they take for granted all the time. We just walk by a lot of things without stopping to really look. So I like to make them stop and look. It was kind of neat to see them trying to figure out about the shadows. First they were saying how shadows are in front of you but after they ran around in circles, they realized that shadows can be in back of you as well, that they figured out it had something to do with where the sun was.

What was notable was that she mentioned “problem-solving skills” as what children learn in art class. Problem-solving skills refers to a higher mental process that involves integrating prior knowledge, existing rules, and cognitive strategies to creatively provide a solution to a problem (Sternberg & Frensch, 1991). Eisner (2002) applied problem solving skills to the realm of art education and described it as a process whereby students identify a problem, organize these qualities and express them through a particular medium. The emphasis on observation of the world around them is a big part of the lesson goals, which suggests the underlying pedagogy of having students observe the world around them on their own and to develop their own problems to solve. Ms. Jones’ lack of guidance to her students in “how to draw” appears to be consistent with the following observation of American art educators by Winner (1989).

“In American art classes at their best, teachers do not give children the answers, but rather let them try to solve problems for themselves (including visual ones). So, for example, in an art class for kindergarten children, the Western teacher never explains how to draw something and rarely even suggests what should be drawn. When I explained this to Chinese teachers, they worried that the classroom would be chaotic, that children would never “learn,” and that the teacher would have no role.” (p. 57–58)

There appears to be little emphasis on the part of American teachers to impart technical skill, or to teach children to create “beautiful” works (Gardner, 1990). Winner (1989) also wrote:

In the West, influenced by the writings of Dewey (1933) and Piaget (1970), we value childhood as a special time that should not be rushed. Children are believed to have their own understanding of the world, and this understanding (although “wrong” by adult standards) has its own logic. Children, we believe, should be allowed to see the world in their own way. The aim of the educator is not to mold children in the image of the adult, but rather to pose challenging problems so that children will eventually discover for themselves more cognitively advanced ways of understanding. (p. 60)

When I observed a fifth grade art class in the same American school, I overheard a comment made by one girl concerning drawing. She said, “I can’t draw a sailboat. Does anyone know how to draw a sailboat?” She was addressing four other girls working at the same table. One girl answered, “Yeah, I can.” I was a bit surprised that the girl did not know how to draw a sailboat, which at the simplest level can be made by combining two

triangular shapes, but what surprised me even more was that the girl who volunteered that she can draw then proceeded to draw it for her. To me, the idea that some else's work would appear as your own and the complete resignation that she "cannot draw" was somewhat disturbing. Having her classmate draw it for her seemed to be a most natural solution in the world, not requiring a second's thought.

The notion of "I can't draw" appears to be a common American response and was expressed by Gail Benjamin (1997), an American anthropologist who lived in Japan with her family for a year to study Japanese elementary schools as both a scholar and as a parent of two elementary school-aged children. She observed the following about drawing skills of the Japanese.

When friends in Japan needed to explain a word to me, or ask for a word in English, they often drew a picture. I can't draw, so I was denied this useful technique. Addresses in Japan only get you to the general neighborhood, so people draw maps to help one another quite frequently. I was always impressed with their neatness, accuracy, and pleasant appearance. I myself could barely produce an intelligible map of how to get to our house from the train station. At some point I began to wonder why everyone in Japan could draw and I couldn't. Of course, I'd known since about second grade that I wasn't good at art, and I hadn't drawn anything since then. I had only vague memories of any art classes in school, though I enjoyed wood carving, weaving, and some other crafts in seventh grade. (p. 155-156)

In Japan, there is a sense that art and artistic skills must be taught, similar to the Chinese way of thinking that children will never learn if teachers didn't explain how to draw. "I cannot draw" would be unacceptable to a Chinese or Japanese, evoking a reply such as "It's too bad that no one taught you to draw" (Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). In higher grades, such as in junior and senior high school, precise imitation of the master is given priority (Mason, 1994).

In the Japanese school, Ms. Morita, when asked about how she would direct students in a drawing, responded, "I feel that filling up the page with the drawing is better than leaving large blank spaces, and so I would advise students to use the paper dimension to the fullest. Also, lines are more interesting if they are drawn slowly, and so I tell students to slow down when they draw. For example, a line drawn using a ruler is less interesting than a hand-drawn line." When asked about how she directs students in a painting project, she said, "The more variety of color used, the better. And of course, painting straight out of a tube of paint would be considered unoriginal and so I encourage students to mix colors and to create different shades and complex colors as much as possible." She also

added, "Spending more time is better than doing it quickly, and so I encourage students to take their time and not rush their work." Some Japanese teachers adhere to the Sakai Method (Sakai, 1989) of guiding elementary school children on how to draw and paint. What is interesting about the Sakai Method is that Sakai has certain principles of drawing which are quite specific, such as suggesting that one draw from the inside to the outside than the other way around or to draw obliquely, avoiding straight vertical or horizontal lines (Sakai, 1989). The Sakai Method also specifies the order in which part of the drawing is drawn first. For example, if the drawing was "a person blowing bubbles" the instruction would be to draw the bubble first (and paint it in interesting colors), draw the straw where the bubble is coming out of, then the hand holding the straw (requires observation) and then drawing the lips that is blowing the straw, and then the face, and finally the body and hands (Sakai, 1989). By taking a painting step by step, students benefit of creating an art work that is carefully and painstakingly created but also has a composition that is complex and sophisticated. My sense is that this kind of heavily teacher-guided method would be considered too heavy-handed an approach by American art teachers.

According to one Japanese art educator, the way something is done is afforded an aesthetic quality in Japanese life; doing something very carefully and paying exquisite attention to detail are attributes of a good person (Mason, 1994). The Chinese believe that art education should function to inculcate "the morally correct idea of beauty" and that the notion that an artist would want to paint squalor, use muddy or clashing colors, or create an unbalanced composition is incomprehensible to them (Winner, 1989). This rings true to some extent to the Japanese where aesthetics is closely linked to morality. In addition, Hendry (1971) described Japanese childhood patterns of learning and social interactions as characterized by ritual which emphasizes training in habits, not just rules.<sup>7</sup>

Young children are taught things in steps, each one of which is considered very important and eminently desirable. The Japanese art education occurs in small increments, ensuring that the students have mastered a certain skill before moving on to more complex tasks. Woodblock carving is introduced as early as third grade (Wachowiak, 1984), and by the end of sixth grade, all students' levels are advanced enough to produce a graduation project in wood.

### Measuring Success and Self-Expression

How teachers evaluate student performance in art class sheds light on the implicit cultural and pedagogical values of the teacher. I asked Ms. Jones how she measures the success of her students in her art class. She responded:

Mostly based on the discussions I'm having with the students as I walk around about how much they understand what it is I was teaching them. And I think that just to look at their work doesn't necessarily tell you what they understand—some kids might really understand it—if you look at it in their work it might not look like they were trying to use it but they actually were if you had them explain it. So I think it's important to talk to the students to be able to determine success, but mostly I base the success on whether they are understanding what it is that I was trying to teach them.

Ms. Jones explains that she does not expect students' output to necessarily represent what the students learned or understood. It is through conversing with the students and hearing what they say that she understands whether they learned the lesson. Ms. Jones also incorporates class discussions at the beginning and then a "sharing time" at the end of class. During sharing time, students are encouraged to verbally express what they had done in the class. "In our department here, we believe very strongly in doing that because we feel like you need that discussion time first to get the kids talking about the idea and eliciting what they know about it, building their knowledge at it with others, and at the end have that opportunity to think back what it is that they're learning." We see here again the strong connection between verbal expression and art.

The goal of the fishing lesson for the Japanese art class adheres strictly to the curriculum guide for first graders of "thinking of a form to make and the way of making it" and "using familiar, easy-to-handle objects such as paper, paste or tape, and scissors, and to have an interest in handling them properly." Thus, the goal of Ms. Morita's lesson was to have children acquire the skill to make a form, in this case fish and other marine creatures, using paper and scissors. It would be misleading, however, to conclude that the Japanese do not emphasize process. Nakamura (1980), for example, explained that "in fine arts, the outcome of a child's learning activity takes the form of an actual product. But in promoting children's creative activities, the learning process becomes a more important part than a final output." The lesson, too, also has a social component where students "fish together" in a collective activity.

In Japanese elementary schools, a letter grade is generally employed in grading art just like other subjects (Wachowiak, 1984). Recently, there has been a major change in the grading system in Japanese schools. The criteria of "effort" has been moved up above "ability" in importance. Therefore, in art, there is increased recognition for students who put in a lot of "effort" into their assignment. When asked about evaluating her students, one Japanese teacher, however, spoke with some hesitation. "How does one grade children's art work? Based on what criteria? It is not easy. Some kids work really hard but

the result is mediocre, some kids spend minimal time, yet the result shows real talent. It is not easy to come up with a standard that fits everyone.”

In measuring success in art in Japanese elementary schools, there seems to be a greater weight placed on the output than in the American schools. The emphasis on output can be observed from a different angle—the role of the teacher. When someone does something extremely well in Japan, the first question usually asked is: who is your teacher? (Wachowiak, 1984). This appears to be true in the case of art. The success of the students depends on how skilled the teacher is, and a skilled teacher is able to bring out the best in the child in the final output. When I showed photographs of a sixth grade art project (see Figure 6) to a former Japanese art teacher, she immediately said, “To have an idea to do this art project is one thing. To be able to provide good instructions and bring the student’s level up to this height is another. I can tell that whatever teacher that was in charge of this project had a lot of experience and is a good art teacher. A novice art teacher may give poor instructions and it would show in a big project like this one.”

The “display” of art work in the classroom hall was a place I found some interesting contrasts. Each Japanese classroom used the wall outside of their class as “Their Class Wall” where art work of the entire class was posted side by side (see Figure 7). The unit of the art display was the class. The American school displayed the child’s work quite differently. Ms. Jones had students choose their representative art work from the past year (or sometimes over several years) and put the art work together with the students name and posted with a student’s essay and student photo on their reflections about their art work (see Figure 8). Parents and visitors to the school can walk around and see these displays. Therefore, the unit of display seemed to be more group-based for the Japanese, and individual-based for the U.S. school. The portfolio-based teaching is a popular trend in the U.S., and could be seen in U.S. preschools where teachers take photos of student art work, ask about the work to the child, and as the child narrates a description, which is then copied down by the teacher (Tobin et. al, 2009). This then becomes part of a



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8

scrapbook that they bring home at the end of the year. The idea of verbal self-expression is seen in Ms. Jones' pedagogy. For example, Ms. Jones sends out a letter to the parents with questions that the parents can ask about the children about their art work, suggesting the importance of adult-student prompting so that children are able to verbalize what they tried to achieve in the work. Linking verbal self-expression and the art classroom was something that I did not see in the Japanese school.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper aimed to focus on one aspect of art instruction—the implicit pedagogical assumption behind its method and emphasis. I found that the American art teacher tended to emphasize process over output and was resistant to imparting technical facility. In the U.S., I believe that there is a tendency to undervalue teaching of technique and skill. In a talk<sup>8</sup> by two authors of the book *Creating Meaning Through Art: Teacher as Choice Maker* (Simpson, Delaney, Carroll, Hamilton, Kerlarage, Olson, & Kay, 1997), the authors mentioned how children don't need to be taught to draw and the authors, art teachers themselves, were almost reluctant of judging a child's art work and felt that the child should be the one to judge his or her art work<sup>9</sup>. I almost sensed an underlying Rousseauian philosophy of the child as producing work uncontaminated by adult influence.

I found that Japanese art education, based on a centralized curriculum, imparted more technical skills which were then built up for use in higher grades, and output was considered an important aspect of art even though process was emphasized as well. Teacher's involvement and guidance is considered necessary to bring out the best in the children's abilities. An additional difference was how verbal expression was emphasized or not emphasized in the two schools, and how the unit of display differed in terms of the individual vs. the group.

There are some limitations in comparing the above classrooms in Japan and the U.S. One limitation is that I was unable to observe the same grades in the two schools. It would

have been better to get a matching first grade in the U.S. school so that the students would have been at a comparable developmental stage. Another limitation is that of generalizability. Education policy in the U.S. is set at the local level, so there is greater diversity and less uniformity of the type of art instruction one gets to observe (National Endowment for the Arts, 1988). In addition, Ms. Jones was recommended to me by a college professor who referred to her as “the best as you can get” in the area for an elementary school art teacher, so therefore, she may be considered a highly rated art teacher and may not be representative. In Japan, because of the centralized curriculum and uniform textbooks, generalizing does not appear to pose as much problem.

Future research should attempt to compare similar assignments (such as observational drawings) on both sides for an accurate assessment of differences and similarities. Also, how artistic skill and ability to draw are valued in society should be studied as well. Japan, for example, has a large comic book culture, and children—both boys and girls—start to copy and model line drawings from their favorite comic books at a young age, which may be one reason why they get much more exposure to line and pencil drawing. Also the effect of art education must be observed within the context of the larger education system as well. What is practiced in elementary school may not directly reflect how art is taught in higher grades. Also society’s emphasis on different values such as effort, tending to detail, patience, and self-reflection, as well as how society values art are important to take into consideration.

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- 1 These textbooks, which may vary in length from 32 to 38 pages, are given by the government to every school child in grades one through nine. In Japan's elementary schools, where the classroom teachers have a limited college preparation in art, these guidebooks are a vital source of motivation for the children (Wachowiak, 1984).
- 2 He probably would not have made this remark if I were an American.
- 3 The public elementary school in Chiba had a student population of roughly 700. Located right outside of Tokyo, the area is considered both residential and urban. I observed two fifth grade art classes and one first grade art class.
- 4 The school in the U.S. was in a suburban district and had a student population of approximately 300.
- 5 All the names have been changed to pseudonyms to protect participant privacy. Ms. Jones had M.A. in art education, and came highly recommended to me by a developmental psychology professor as "the best that you can get" in the area for an elementary school art teacher.
- 6 The teacher-student prompting we observe Ms. Jones doing here is fairly typical of U.S. preschools and elementary school teachers where children "are encouraged to use words to describe, evaluate, and name objects in their worlds." (Tobin, Wu, & Davidson, 1989, p. 148). In American preschools, for example, teachers extend a great deal of energy to model, correct, and prompt children's speech, unlike in Japanese or Chinese preschools (Tobin, et. Al, 1989).
- 7 The teaching of calligraphy, a required part of the elementary school curriculum, can be considered such type of learning, in which students are shown the proper posture and mindset along with technique and skill.
- 8 The talk, a discussion by the authors of their new book, *Creating Meaning Through Art: Teacher as Choice Maker*, was held on January 29, 1998 at Barnes & Noble at Boston University.
- 9 When I asked the authors where technique fits into art education, one author commented that technique is important, but there are six criteria that need to be addressed and technique is only one of them. My sense from the way she answered my question was that it is not considered a priority area.

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