A Crisis of Confidence: One Japanese Educator's Pedagogical and Philosophical Struggle to Enact Ethical and Individualized Practices in Her Classroom and Beyond

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Abstract

This paper describes and theoretically interprets the difficulties experienced, and subsequent actions taken, by a veteran Japanese public elementary school teacher who was transferred to a small, rural elementary school with a large population of Japanese-Brazilian immigrant children. Using a combined methodology of narrative inquiry and portraiture, the article draws into focus the uncertainty and self-doubt she experienced upon entering the school where she struggled to establish professional and pedagogical relationships that fostered, rather than constrained, growth. Through reflective practice and ethical resistance to the disciplinary and normalizing practices of the school, she returned to the individualized teaching philosophy that she had been mentored in as a nascent teacher. Eventually, she became a change-agent and a mentor to other teachers who struggled alongside her. Together they developed an individualized curriculum and established a more inclusive and participatory culture throughout the school and in the classroom. A significant conclusion drawn from the study is that education students and practicing teachers should be provided more opportunities to develop and reflect upon their pedagogical philosophy and teaching practice early on, and throughout their careers. Doing so may allow them to better resist institutional and pedagogical practices that can limit both their own and their students' educational and personal growth.

Keywords: *immigrant education; language minority education; teacher education; reflective practice; ethical resistance and responsibility; pedagogical philosophy*

Introduction

The narrative in this article is adapted from one section of a doctoral dissertation study that used narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, 2000; Phillion, He & Connelly, 2005; Polkinghorne, 1998; van Manan, 1990) and portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman-Davis, 1997) to document the professional and personal histories of seven Japanese educators who initiated grassroots school change from 2005-2009 at Ishikawa Elementary School, Aichi Prefecture, Japan. Throughout the paper I use a combined term, *(im)migrant*, to signify that both *migrant* and *immigrant* are terms that can be applied when discussing Japanese-Brazilians in

Japan. Investment into the linguistic and sociocultural milieu of the school, and host community, vary significantly depending on both the perceived and actual status of migrants and immigrants as temporary or permanent residents in Japan. Often a migrant becomes an immigrant once a family becomes established within a community and lays down roots (Tsuda, 1999). With regard to the Japanese-Brazilian children, enrolled in Ishikawa Elementary School at the time of the study, the majority have only lived in Japan.

The group of educators who are portrayed in the original study took action to transform the school culture by initiating community building projects and events in tandem with radical curricular changes based on the individualized curriculum they designed to meet the specific needs of both the Japanese and Japanese-Brazilian student populations. These reforms altered conventional teacher-centered classrooms and conventional educational practices into individualized, engaging, and inclusive learning environments *for all*, which is all too rare in Japanese public schools. None of the teachers I interviewed had any experience teaching culturally or linguistically different students in the past, nor did they have any training in multicultural education or culturally responsive pedagogy. What they did all share was a strong belief in individualized education and a pedagogical philosophy based on ethical relationality and an ethics of care (Noddings, 2003, 2005; Todd, 2003, 2005)

The story of Takeishi-sensei, described in this paper, is of a seasoned educator who faced a series of professional and personal crises twenty years into her career. It was only by looking inward and questioning her fundamental stance as an educator that she found her way forward, eventually reaching the height of her teaching career. She did so after recognizing her inability to reach and engage the children in her classroom, and realizing the value of her original beliefs and practices in education. Only then, could she resist the oppressive teaching practices, and the negative discourse surrounding her students, created and told by the the teachers around her.

The Study

The educator portrait highlighted in this article was originally included in a study that was conducted in the course of two and a half years from September 2009—January 2011. The aim of the inquiry focused on piecing together the evolution behind the teacher-initiated grassroots change that took place at Ishikawa Elementary School, located in a rural, yet growing industrial area industrial south of Nagoya, the third largest city in Japan, between 2005-2009. The professional and personal histories of seven key educators were revealed through multiple, in-depth interviews, which uncovered the interwoven stories, past and present, of the educators who collectively envisioned and enacted a cultural and curricular shift at the school. The participants of the original study were: the acting principal during the reform period, 2005-2009, the curriculum coordinator for the school, the in-house head of research and head teacher of the 6th grade, Takeishi-sensei, (whose portrait is provided here), the superintendent of the district, (recently retired in 2014), and three foreign teaching/language assistants, one Brazilian and two Japanese-Brazilians.

I first visited Ishikawa Elementary School in September 2009, and then again in November, to attend professional development workshops on the newly designed Japanese as Second Language (JSL) program and the individualized curriculum (designed by the principal and head of in-house research, Takeishi-sensei, the subject of this narrative). At these workshops I

heard the educators speak about the chaotic and oppressive environment at the school before the reforms took place; the isolation of the Japanese-Brazilian students, the conflict between the students and their teachers and peers, the seeming malaise of the Japanese-Brazilian parents with regard to their children's schooling, and, most importantly the insurmountable cultural and language gap the Japanese-Brazilian students and their teachers faced. Prior to the reforms, a dismal reputation cast a shadow over everyone at the school.

The enthusiasm I witnessed at the workshop was much different from what the teachers described pre-reforms. This change sparked my interest in the story of school-wide transformation and the professional and personal histories of the educators who brought about the cultural and curricular shifts at the school. Through the use of narrative inquiry and portraiture I sought to make sense of the contradictions, complications, challenges, and subsequent changes that took place at Ishikawa Elementary School. This writing examines the history of transformation that occurred at the school by looking at the professional life of Takeishi-sensei, one of the educators who brought about change.

Framing the Study

This paper uses Gunzenhauser's (2012) active/ethical resistance and responsibility framework, to interpret Takeishi-sensei's narrative. Gunzenhauser's framework is particularly helpful to consider Takeishi-sensei's story. The framework hinges on the combined effect of enacting responsible, ethical resistance toward the purpose of sustaining and caring for one's self as a professional educator concerned with a pedagogical project focused on self/other empowerment and ethical relationality. Gunzenhauser (2012) defines his framework as such,

> The "active" part is a call for educators to actively develop and assert a philosophy of education based on possibility (rather than normalization, which...needs to be resisted). In order to facilitate possibility, the "ethical" part [is] a call for educators to cultivate relations of responsibility...The relations of responsibility are intrapersonal (the responsibility an educator has toward herself or himself), relational (responsibilities an educator has toward proximal others), and public (responsibilities educators have toward all others). (p. 8)

Gunzenhauser's three-part framework illustrates how an active/ethical philosophical stance of responsibility is contingent on acts of ethical resistance. Gunzenhauser's (2012) theoretical framework is supported by the work of several other theorists, particularly, Nel Nodding's (2003, 2005) ethic of care and response-ability, and Sharon Todd's (2003, 2005) ethics of relationality. They provide significant concepts used to support the theoretical interpretations following each narrative section.

The narrative of Takeishi-sensei exemplifies one teacher's struggle to resist the normalizing practices occurring around her with which she felt compelled to comply. Initially, upon entering this unfamiliar educational climate, Takeishi-sensei disregarded her pedagogical philosophy rooted in an individualized, student-centered, self-empowering philosophy. This ultimately led her to a "crisis of the self" (Gunzenhauser, 2012 p.12), both as a professional and as an individual. Through self-reflective and purposeful practice she was able to transform a once dissonant and distressing teaching-learning experience into one based on ethical relations of

care and responsibility (Noddings, 2003: Todd, 2003). This allowed her to draw out the good-ness in her once defiant students—the goodness she initially was unable to see.

The School & Community

Ishikawa Elementary School is located in one of the seven residential areas that make up Urata Township. Urata village, in the northeastern region of the Chita peninsula, is a rural area with a population of 516,063 residents. New industries, mostly related to automobile man-ufacturing, particularly a large Toyota plant, brought the Japanese-Brazilian (im)migrants to the peninsula in the mid-1990s. In Urata Township, the largest group of foreign residents is made up of the 938 registered South American residents, with Brazilians making up sixty percent of that total or 871 individuals. The most striking feature of this breakdown is that 85 percent of the Brazilian population residing in Urata township live in the subsidized housing complex lo-cated across from Ishikawa Elementary school.

Ishikawa Elementary School, encircled by gentle sloping hillsides covered with Japa-nese cedar trees, is almost hidden from the main road that runs alongside it. The school building is a large, plain, concrete two-story structure. It shares a similar design and feel to most Japa-nese public elementary and junior high schools. In fact, the defining characteristic of most Japanese public schools is the bland architecture and nondescript nature of the buildings and interior. All preconceptions that Ishikawa Elementary School would be like any other are swept away from the first step into the entry way, where bilingual signs in Portuguese, Japanese, and Tagalog, greet visitors. Large photo posters draw attention to the community events and activ-ities that have taken place intended to bridge the gap between the Japanese-Brazilian and Japa-nese student populations, and the now growing Filipino population.

Facing a New Future: The Unprecedented Need for
Immigration in an Underprepared Nation

In the late 1980s, Japanese government officials sought to address the declining birthrate, growing labor shortage and calls for cheap labor in blue-collar industries. One plan of action was to "call home" second and third generation South American descendants of Jap-anese who had emigrated from Japan to South America over a century before, (referred to as *Nikkeijin* in Japanese). The Immigration and Refugee Control Act was revised in 1989, allow-ing *Nikkeijin* and their families to enter Japan on renewable three-year visas. This resulted in a steady stream of *Nikkei* South Americans in the early 1990s, with Japanese-Brazilians eventu-ally making up the third largest (im)migrant group in Japan. However, they have since been replaced in this ranking by the increasing stream of Filipinos since the early-mid 2000s. The Japanese Ministry of Justice's 2012 statistics cite the highest number of registered foreign na-tionals as: 652,555 Chinese; 530,046 North and South Koreans; 202,974 Filipinos; and 190,581 Brazilians. In total there are approximately 207 million registered foreigners in Japan.

Paralleling this wave of immigration, the enrollment of Japanese-Brazilian students at Ishikawa Elementary School increased from nine students in 1993 to approximately 60 students in 2001, and grew to 83 students, or 30% of the 253-student population in 2009 through 2011. Across Japan, the administrators and educators received these children into their schools and

classrooms with little to no support or experience on how to teach non-Japanese speaking students.

MEXT, (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology), reported that there were 27,013 foreign national students requiring language support enrolled in Japanese public schools in 2010. "Foreign national students" is an aggregate category, which consists of all children not naturalized as Japanese citizens. By far, the largest numbers of foreign national students in Japanese public schools are enrolled in elementary schools, 17,154, followed by 7,558 foreign national students enrolled in junior high schools (MEXT, 2010). This number represents a fourfold increase since MEXT began compiling statistics in 1995 (Tsuneyoshi, Okano & Boocock, 2011) making clear that, despite the relatively low number of (im)migrants living in Japan, there has been a steady and steep increase in foreign families arriving over the past two and half decades. The following groups make up the largest numbers of foreign national students in the public school system: the children of displaced Japanese "returnees" from China; South American *Nikkeijin* children; and Filipino children (many from Japanese-Filipina marriages). Portuguese and Spanish speaking children, 11,385 or 39.8% of students, make up the largest portion of students requiring language support, which comes mostly in the form of JSL pullout programs (Tsuneyoshi, Okano & Boocock, 2011).

The Japanese government generally ignores the challenges Japanese educators face, leaving the work of meeting the linguistic and cultural needs of the foreign national children and their parents to local schools, governments, regional districts, and local NGOs (Gordon, 2006; Okano & Tsuchiya, 1999; Tsuneyoshi, Okano & Boocock, 2011). The government states that, while public schools will accept registered foreign national children, they will be expected to manage their schooling as equals alongside their Japanese national peers.

In 2003, MEXT established a national Japanese as a Second Language curriculum and set up designated model JSL schools. Ishikawa Elementary School was chosen as a model school. The following narrative of Takeishi-sensei's struggles and successes illuminates the often less considered, but nonetheless powerful, intangible resources needed to sustain and promote ethical, caring, and equitable teaching practices. These resources include an ethical/active pedagogical philosophy, empowering mentorships, and a connected, supportive professional community.

Takeishi-sensei's Narrative & Conceptual Interpretation

The Early Years

At the time of research, Takeishi-sensei had been working as a public elementary school teacher in the district for 28 years. She had been at Ishikawa Elementary School for eight years when I met her. There are a total of seven elementary schools in this small rural district, of these two were designed as open-structure schools in the 1980s based on U.S. models where individualized learning and practitioner research programs were instituted. She accepted her first teaching position, fresh out of university, at the first open-structure elementary school in the area, Sakanoue Elementary, where she stayed for ten years. She was then moved to another open-structure elementary school, Nishikawa Elementary, for 10 years, and ultimately transferred to Ishikawa Elementary School in 2001.

During Takeishi-sensei's early years at Sakanoue Elementary she was introduced to individualized education, (*koseika kyoiku*), where she crystallized her philosophical and pedagogical stance. She spoke of the tremendous influence the principal had on her as a nascent educator. He spoke to her of the importance of developing a personal philosophical position grounded in ethical pedagogical relationships and responsibility. He supported her in seeking a humanistic and individualized teaching philosophy rather than blindly complying with the curricular mandates of the national education system, widely accepted teaching practices and textbook guidelines. Takeishi-sensei was given opportunities to experiment with the individualized curriculum, and learned the importance of reflective practice in helping to shape her pedagogical philosophy beyond accepted norms. She recalled the importance of mentors affirming her pedagogical skills during those early teaching years. These were further enhanced by the positive teaching experiences and pedagogical relationships she had fostered in her classroom. Takeishi-sensei's early professional experiences made a lasting impression and she continued to draw on them throughout her professional career. Unfortunately, in her first year of teaching at Ishikawa Elementary, she found little affirmation from those around her, and even less to praise in the children she confronted each day in her classroom. For the first time in her career she felt at a loss and unprepared to teach the population of students she saw seated before her.

Disruptions: A Crisis of Confidence & Conflict in the Classroom—The Narrative

Soon after hearing of her transfer to Ishikawa Elementary, Takeishi-sensei was overcome with a sense of dismay. The school had a reputation as being a troubled school with low-income, defiant students and depressed teachers. In addition, Japanese-Brazilian families were seen as invading the school, lowering its already dismal image. Takeishi-sensei had little experience working at a traditionally designed school; neither the physical space of the school, with its closed off classrooms, nor the traditional teacher-centered, uniform approach. Takeishi-sensei was unfamiliar with teaching practices centered on strict discipline and adherence to national curricular guidelines. She spoke about undergoing a crisis of confidence, feeling isolated in her pedagogical philosophy and practices, while suffering the harsh reality of educating disengaged, disruptive, and rebellious students. She faced many challenges, not the least of which was to teach the many Japanese-Brazilian students in her class who were either unable to speak Japanese, or unwilling to take part in the lessons.

Takeishi-sensei also encountered a radically different student population from the middle-to-upper class Japanese students she had taught previously. She felt that the professional knowledge and individualized practice she had developed in the open-structure schools was not transferable to this new population or atmosphere. As she put it,

> When I first came here, Ishikawa Elementary was fairly ordinary. I mean, I don't have anything against *issei shido* (teacher-centered, uniform instruction), I thought I could cope either way. Everything I had been doing over the past 20 years didn't work at this school. I soon realized I couldn't carry out *koseika* education (individualized instruction) in the first place, which is why I thought applying the *issei* system—a system that focused on order, and disciplining the children, was so important. I mean it's not that I don't think that's important now, but…when this concept of discipline clashed with the children, it made me realize how inexperienced I was as a teacher. Even though

I had gained some confidence over the past 20 years…it was a big blow. Especially the first two to three months, I struggled with that. I couldn't feel any affection towards the children, and I think they saw that. I knew it in my head…if I don't open up to them, they won't open up to me. But, I just couldn't feel affection towards them.

As she spoke I was curious about why she felt disconnected to this group of children and what made her feel it was necessary to teach them in the traditional *issei shido* style, which ran counter to her deepest pedagogical beliefs of individualizing instruction. She provided a comparison between the students she had grown accustomed to teaching at the two open-structured schools with her students at Ishikawa Elementary School. She contrasted their family backgrounds, overall demeanor, behavior, academic engagement, and participation of both parents and children within the life of the school. The children at the open-structure elementary schools were well-behaved, well-groomed, well-spoken, and academically oriented, all of which seemed to enable her to provide more freedom for them to engage in the student-directed learning associated with the individualized curriculum. She spoke about the overall highly educated parent population and the attentiveness and eager participation of the parents from those schools. On the other hand, Takeishi-sensei's first impression of the children at Ishikawa Elementary School was that they came from culturally impoverished homes, as evidenced by their undisciplined behavior, low academic skills, lack of parental support, and general apathy toward school. Her early perception of the children, and her peers' strong focus on discipline and control, limited her ability to recognize any of the students' positive attributes. Takeishi-sensei was confronted with a cultural deficit view of her students for the first time in her professional career.

Takeishi-sensei's inability to create caring relationships with the children narrowed her vision of them to only seeing, and responding to, the unruly and non-compliant behavior she witnessed in her classroom. This denied the students the opportunity to open up themselves to her, and she, in turn, to them. She spoke of her early struggles to feel "affection towards her students." Takeishi-sensei said, "I was not able to see the goodness in the children and therefore I could not come to like them. If you think about it from the opposite perspective, there were children who opposed me because I couldn't see any goodness in them. That was the toughest thing." It was this realization that prompted her to turn her gaze back on to herself, and to begin the self-reflective work required to take necessary action. This is what led her to resist and triumph over her self-imposed normalizing practice and cultural deficit view of the children.

Disruptions: A Crisis of Confidence & Conflict in the Classroom—Theoretical Reflection

From the first day Takeishi-sensei entered the world of Ishikawa Elementary School, she was met with both personal and professional dissonance. She quickly discovered that her pedagogical style and philosophy were in conflict with the culture of teaching at the school and the coercive relationships she had so far created with her students. She experienced a crisis of professional identity and lost confidence in her pedagogical skills and philosophical beliefs; she was adrift, unable to anchor herself to anything that felt familiar or comfortable. Feeling em-

battled, Takeishi-sensei reached a breaking point. The coercive nature of teaching in this manner forged a barrier between her students and herself, leaving all of them feeling exasperated, disengaged, and antagonistic toward one another.

Takeishi-sensei recognized that her negative perceptions were being reflected back to her, and the that students, in turn, were responding in kind. Foucault (2005) claims that we can only attend to ourselves by truly seeing ourselves via an identical nature, or a reflection of the self. "The eye does not see itself in the eye. The eye sees itself in the source of vision. That is to say, the act of vision, which allows the eye to grasp itself, can only be carried out in another act of vision, the act we find in the other's eye" (p.69). Takeishi-sensei had come to a clearer vision of herself via the reflection of herself in her students' gaze, and recognized how she limited her own and her students' potential to act freely. Takeishi-sensei sought out *goodness* in the children knowing that if she could not respond positively to them, she would not be able to teach them.

Coercive relationships are understood here as the unethical enforcement of power by one individual over another, ultimately diminishing that individual's ability to act freely. The pedagogical relationship under these conditions becomes defined by the institutionalized nature of that relationship, which sanctifies the enactment of the teacher's power over her students, as an agent of the state. Noddings (2003) asks, "Can one be really happy working to promote products or practices that are injurious to others?" (p. 230). Her subsequent answer brings with it a call for action that seeks to alleviate the disillusionment and contradictions one experiences when personal convictions are pitted against the demands of an institution. "When people feel that they are forced by circumstances to promote products or activities they find morally abhorrent, they may become deeply unhappy. …They may lose entirely that part of happiness derived from self-respect and inner contentment" (p.230). Todd (2003) similarly describes this tension in terms of, "teacher as an institutional figure" and "teacher as a compassionate person" (p. 26), whereby the institution creates a normalized relation between the teacher and student by constraining their communication to "embodied performances of a sterile script" (Todd, 2003, p. 42).

Unquestioned, sanctioned, and coercive teacher-student relationships do not allow for the open, interpersonal, and compassionate relations that are required of an ethical and responsible pedagogical relationship. Takeishi-sensei had strayed from her professional position as an educator who claimed responsibility for the subjectivity of her students. This caused her to feel lost in her practice because she had failed to develop the caring and ethical relationships that had guided her past pedagogical vision. Takeishi-sensei's narrative of her early experiences at Ishikawa Elementary School are defined by her discomfort at the coercive pedagogical relationship she felt compelled to inflict on students as she struggled with her responsibilities of "teacher as an institutional figure," which overrode her ethical professional responsibilities of "teacher as a compassionate person." Gunzenhauser's (2012) thoughts on ethical professional responsibility provides additional insight into Takeishi-sensei's disrupted professional experience.

> For those educators who believe firmly in their professional responsibility for children, the most significant relation is between the teacher and the student. This is a relation over which they believe they have some control, and it is a relation which they believe needs to be protected. (p.67)

Takeishi-sensei eventually found the source of her discontent by turning her gaze back to the children, forcing her to reconsider the teaching style and conditions of their learning experiences. She recognized that to have any success in this new environment, and to grow to care for these children, she would have to seek out their goodness. Takeishi-sensei realized she would need to create opportunities for students to release that goodness into the world.

A Place to Shine: Building Trust & Coming to See the Child—The Narrative

Takeishi-sensei eventually found a way to connect with the children. She recounted the experience that enabled her to "see them anew." She realized the need to engage with the students beyond the constraints of a conventional learning environment, that limited their ability to fully express themselves and engage with each other. She set her sights on an annual school event to organize an activity that would help her form the bonds of trust she believed necessary to move forward. Events such as this are integrated into the national school calendar. Typically students perform short plays for the school community to enjoy. Rather than an oral performance, Takeishi-sensei believed that she would have greater success with the children through a physical activity. She turned to a colleague from Sakanoue Elementary to aid her in her efforts. At first, the Kid's Dance Salon, as she named it, did not take off, nor did it have the impact Takeishi-sensei had hoped it would. However, by the fourth practice the children were responding positively to the dance instructor's directions. This marked the turning point when Takeishi-sensei began to engage with the children in the positive and responsive manner she had been accustomed to in the past. As it turned out, the dance performance altered her view of the children, transformed the relationships she had with them, and changed their image within the school. Here is how Takeishi-sensei described it:

> The first change came when we did the *Soran Bushido* dance at the Fall event in 2002. We connected a little then. The students here are kind of *Yankee*, or rebellious. This kind of dancing made them look cool, and really showed their strengths. This has now become a school tradition. First, the students disapproved of the dancing—about half of them didn't want to do it. So, I asked the dance teacher at Sakanoue Elementary to teach them. Now that person choreographs for our all of our festivals. She's a professional choreographer and is brilliant with the children. They seemed to enjoy it. In the beginning there were some students lying down on the corner of gym, not wanting to do the dance. It really happened one by one, with me and the dance teacher coaxing each child to join, and eventually they all joined. In the end, all of them danced. Students who were unwilling to dance at first, danced with attitude. The practice was tough, but they were confident in themselves the moment the curtain rose. They were applauded and admired by the teachers even though they had a bad reputation. I felt I could bring out the best in them and they also thought that they could trust me. And also, their parents opened up to me a little. They gradually started to trust me after that. So we connected then. I had a difficult time trying to find something where they could really shine. I used to force them into things they weren't good at, and we wouldn't get along, but with this, I felt I had found them a place where they could really shine.

Takeishi-sensei saw both the struggle and success of the dance performance as the beginning of her own shift in consciousness toward these students, a shift, which was simultaneously met by a shift in theirs toward her. She had become so overwhelmed with her daily existence and malaise that she had lost sight of the individual children and was unable to see the positive qualities they possessed. She said that she remembers "seeing the children anew" and thinking, "this child really is very clever, and has been all along, but my teaching method until now has not brought this aspect of the child out." This experience affirmed her belief in the children and provided the incentive she needed to reevaluate her pedagogical practice and relational stance to the children in her class.

A Place to Shine: Building Trust & Coming to See the Child—Theoretical Reflection

Regardless of the past, Takeishi-sensei knew her students had many stories to tell and that the only way for her to hear their stories, and *see* the children more fully, was to push beyond the boundaries of the negative pedagogical relationship in which they had been confined, thus "foreclosing opportunities for student self-constitution" (Gunzenhauser, 2012 p. 83). as well as her own. In this sense, the work of self-critique renewed her vision both of herself and her students.

The first step Takeishi-sensei took was to find a way for the children to reveal more of themselves, "to find a place to shine" as she put it, which created the opportunity to see "[the] goodness in the children" that she longed for. When she suggested they work on the *Soran-bushido* dance for the fall festival she initially experienced resistance from the children. She was once again faced with having to coerce them. Yet, this coercion was not due to compliance with the normalizing and disciplinary practices that had pitted them against each other, but rather it was based on a desire to see the children succeed by using their overlooked talents. Soon cracks in the hard exterior of the children began to reveal a lightness and joy that Takeishi-sensei had not seen before. Noddings (2003) claims that "coercion always damages caring relationships," yet recognizes that at times there is little choice but to coerce a child to act. "If a need can be met without it, it is better to avoid coercion. If not, then the act of coercion must be followed by explanation, discussion, and perhaps consolidation" (p. 67).

In this instance, Takeishi-sensei balanced her need for the children's trust, with the damage that was possible by, again, forcing children to do something they appeared not to want to do. The students might fail and further erode the trust that she was fostering. There was a risk here. Takeishi-sensei was trying to develop a foundation of trust that would nurture a deeper connection, leading to a more trusting, caring and ethical pedagogical relationship. Returning to Gunzenhauser (2012),

> Applied to education, taking a risk may be as simple as trusting a student or a colleague, or experimenting with something new…or spending time on something interesting that is not aligned with a standard or a test. An ethical decision is often a risk, but it is also for Foucault an exercise of power that opens up possibilities of new institutional practices and social arrangements. (p. 158)

Taking the risk and pushing the children to work hard for her, and ultimately themselves, proved worthwhile. The dance performance was hailed as a great success. The children had

bravely put themselves into the spotlight, danced defiantly and felt a great sense of pride, which Takeishi-sensei shared with them. There is no question that this was a hard-won success, which marked the beginning of an ongoing transformation between Takeishi-sensei and her students. The risk she took opened up further educational possibilities and revealed the children's desire to actively participate within the school community, and in her classroom.

Reaching Higher: Challenging the Children & Exceeding Expectations—The Narrative

When Takeishi-sensei spoke about the shift in her relationships with the children after the dance performance she revealed the pedagogical stance she had been cultivating for two decades. Her objective was to introduce her students to the success that comes from challenging themselves by trying tasks they perceived as beyond their reach. She was cognizant that pushing the students too hard might crumble the fragile foundation of trust she had just begun to build, or worse, threaten to undermine the belief the children began to have in themselves. To keep their energy and engagement from waning, it was imperative that the students experience incremental moments of success, while being challenged to learn content matter they had not previously been taught. Below, Takeishi-sensei speaks about these early experiences when she and the children started to push themselves further academically:

> I think my classes are a little difficult for the children. It's not that I want the children to understand everything in my classes—it's that I want them to *try* and understand. That's my main priority. I made my students read difficult poems and memorize the whole of the Constitution of Japan when they were fifth graders. It is pretty difficult. They often said, "I don't want to memorize." "It's too difficult." Or, "I can't memorize this." However, I always made them do only an amount that they can manage. I made them stop saying, "I can't do this" before they even started at something. That was a kind of a promise we made to each other. I always say, "I won't make you do things you can't do. I only make you do things you can do. I believe in you. How can I say this…it's about thinking that one particular piece of work is more interesting than another, because it is a little bit more difficult or involves more effort, you know? I don't want the students to simply choose the easy way out or make decisions for their studies based on which problems are the easiest to solve, but rather choose things that interest them or they want to learn regardless of the level of difficulty…I think that is why they have improved...I really do believe that. Growth and motivation have to do with really connecting with something or someone, being involved—and if you can find something you're confident in doing. I think a successful class is about the students thinking, "I tried hard" or, "I'm great at this."

Before Takeishi-sensei would be able to fully incorporate aspects of the individualized curriculum, she needed to build on the trust she had established during the dance sessions. This would help her to push the children toward more advanced and challenging learning activities. She understood the need to incite confidence and chose an oral language activity that would help the children exceed their own expectations. The task involved using a complicated and rich language exercise for a lesson required by the national curriculum. This was particularly difficult for the Japanese-Brazilian children who lacked the academic language necessary to become

fully involved in the activity. Many of the Japanese-Brazilian children could not read the complex Japanese required of the lesson. To involve the children, she asked them to orally repeat the course texts. Had Takeishi-sensei chosen to focus exclusively on the academic development of her Japanese students, she could have sent the Japanese-Brazilian children to the JSL room as teachers around her tended to do. However, doing so would have disrupted the trust she had forged and the growing sense of community in the classroom.

Reaching Higher: Challenging the Children & Exceeding Expectations—Theoretical Reflection

After Takeishi-sensei had established a positive, trusting, and caring relationship, the children were more open to accepting the challenges she continued to present to them. Through their shared struggles and successes, they built a foundation of trust that allowed both Takeishi-sensei and the children to push the boundaries of their relationship further. Noddings (2003) defines the foundation of an ethical pedagogical relation as one based on a renewed understanding of "response-ability," which she defines as, "the ability to respond positively to others and not just fulfill assigned duties" (p.35). This is reminiscent of Todd's (2005) conflicted pedagogical identity of "teacher as institutional being" and "teacher as compassionate being" (p.26).

These split positions need not be considered dichotomous. In fact, an ethical teacher is called upon to embrace both of these roles dialogically, sometimes alternating between them simultaneously when weighing decisions for the good of both self and student. The problem arises when one position shuts the other out, specifically when the voice of the compassionate teacher becomes silenced by the institutional teacher voice. Takeishi-sensei takes her job as an educator seriously, claiming her responsibility to fulfill her duty "to teach" the children according to the mandates of her job as a public servant, as well as her ethical "reponse-ability" to fully nurture her students in their *becoming* free and fulfilled human beings (Noddings, 2003). To perform both of these response(abilities), Takeishi-sensei had to push the children to reach higher and to experience success in and out of the classroom.

When Takeishi-sensei started to introduce the children to more challenging material, she did so in a way that would meet the needs of both the Japanese-Brazilian and the Japanese students. She included all students by straddling the gap between them. She focused on building community and increasing confidence in the same way she had prepared them for the dance performance, by leading them one-by-one through a community-creating activity fostering success for all. Takeishi-sensei established the conditions of trust whereby she could exert her pedagogical authority as legitimate, a necessary condition to enact ethical relationships across "non-reciprocal moral relationships (such as those between teacher and student)" (Gunzenhauser, 2012, referring to Bauman, p. 73). Gunzenhauser (2012) states, "The pedagogical relation is a rather significant human relation, particularly since it's not reciprocal…it is an unequal human relation in the very significant sense that the teacher is responsible for the student, but the student is not responsible for the teacher" (p. 73). Takeishi-sensei claimed her authority precisely because she did not relinquish her responsibility for the students in her classroom, instead she reclaimed her "responsibility for [their] subjectivity" (Biesta, 2002, p.8), which is central to any ethical pedagogical relationship. As Biesta (2002) writes:

If teaching is about creating opportunities for the student to come into presence, if it therefore is about asking "difficult questions," then it becomes clear that the first responsibility of the teacher is a responsibility for the subjectivity of the student, for that is what allows the student to be a unique, singular being. (p. 13)

Previously, the coercive relationships Takeishi-sensei experienced with her students limited her ability to open up to them, and for them to open up to her. Because of this, she was unable to see them as singular, complex beings full of possibilities rather than simply as "yan-kee" children who were unteachable.

The Power of Pedagogical Philosophy: Nurturing Philosophical and Pedagogical Growth in Self & Others—The Narrative

During the first four years teaching at Ishikawa Elementary School, Takeishi-sensei was functioning within a disconnected and isolated position within the overall school environment and community. While she was slowly instilling components of the individualized curriculum in her classroom, the rest of the school operated within the traditional *issei shido* teaching structure and culture. The tides were due to shift four years into her post when a new principal was selected. In April 2005, Principal Ishiyama, with whom she had worked in the open-structure schools, took charge of Ishikawa Elementary School and soon joined forces with Takeishi-sensei to reshape the instructional style, learning environment, and culture of the school. Takeishi-sensei began a practitioner-research project in her classroom, recruiting some of her colleagues in the upper elementary division to observe her lessons. After classes, the teachers would gather to discuss and reflect on the lessons with her. Through these activities, Takeishi-sensei enabled her colleagues to *see* the students as capable, responsive, and engaged learners. She was no longer an island. Takeishi-sensei said:

The teachers don't talk about philosophy in the first place. When I was in Sa-kanoue Elementary, the principal there told me that at the end of the day, "it's all about philosophy." But the teachers [here] don't think they really need it. It's just that not having a strong philosophy and not having any will to try is different. I don't think there is a need to hire particularly intelligent teachers. We just need normal teachers who have the will to teach and develop their practice. If they learn to think about how they teach then they can really put their strong points into practice. I think we have that kind of system at the present point. That is how I feel. Primary school teachers generally teach the children so they can simply master reading, writing and sums. Of course, that is important too, but even when you remove those three points there has to be something more important left. You know the national curriculum guidelines? It is the law and decided by the Ministry of Education. So, we have to carry it out...The teachers become worried when they can't cover all the content in the textbooks. Being able to go over the textbooks brings a sense of achievement to the teachers, but that doesn't mean the students understand the lessons completely. Many teachers only check if they do the exercises in the textbook and can feel satisfaction that they have accomplished their task as dictated by the text. This is separate from the actual experience of the students and whether they have learned anything or not.

Five years into her term at Ishikawa Elementary School, Takeishi-sensei was supporting several of her peers to develop an appreciation for the individualized curriculum, a process that sparked and nurtured their philosophical awakening. In the same way that she formed a bond of trust to further awaken the children's desire to participate in their own learning and engagement within the school, she committed herself to supporting new teachers as they grew in their pedagogical practice and philosophy. Takeishi-sensei helped them move beyond the limitations of the commonly accepted disciplinary teaching practices and blind allegiance to textbook lessons. In a sense, Takeishi-sensei had come full circle from her earliest years as a nascent educator in the open-structure schools where she developed her own pedagogical philosophy and practice. She became the mentor to a new generation of teachers.

The Power of Pedagogical Philosophy: Nurturing Philosophic and Pedagogical Growth in Self & Others—Philosophical Reflection

From her earliest years as a teacher, Takeishi-sensei was fortunately welcomed into a nascent practitioner research community that developed theories and innovative practices associated with the emerging open-structure schools and individualized curriculum movement. Teacher practitioner research in Japan is not unusual. In fact, most schools and teachers engage in some form of practitioner research, and there are extensive journals published by, and for, teachers in Japan (Cave, 2008; Okano & Tsuchiya, 1999). These journals generally provide practical ideas on how to better implement the national curriculum and enhance learning experiences in the classroom, though some focus on theory development (Cave, 2008).

Classroom research focused only on teaching strategies may lead to better practice, but it does not necessarily foster the development of a philosophical stance that ultimately leads to changes in a teacher's consciousness about her role and ethical responsibilities to her students. Nor does it ask her to consider and critique the purposes, and predominant practice, of education in the lives of the students she teaches. For too many teachers, the main focus is getting through the mandated material in preparation for the next grade level and required standardized test preparation for entry into junior and senior high school. This narrowly conceived practice ultimately draws teachers' attention away from seeking a pedagogy based in ethical relations and can prevent them from asking the difficult questions that lead to deeper knowing and more engaging, educative experiences for themselves and students. This form of *knowing* requires educators to develop a habit of self-care through critical reflective practice, whereby they can nurture ethical resistance to normalizing practices. Gunzenhauser (2012) claims that, "In regard to professional practice, we need something more than moments of individual actions. We need instead something like a stance, a set of habits that places an educator in a position of constant vigilance against normalization" (p.139-140).

Takeishi-sensei came to reevaluate the value she placed on her own pedagogical philosophy, in light of the new circumstances and unethical pedagogical relations entangling her on entering Ishikawa Elementary School. Schön (1983) calls this "reflection in action" (p.50) describing it as a kind of practitioner's art. "It is the entire process of reflection-in-action which is central to the "art" by which practitioners deal with situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflict" (p.50). This reflective and refocused insight renewed Takeishi-sensei's convictions to rethink the applicability of an individualized pedagogy in her new school and re-envision new possibilities for herself and the children in her classroom. At last she could draw

on her "capacity to see [the] unfamiliar situation as [a] familiar one…" and "…bring [her] past experience to bear on the unique case" (Schön, p. 140) in which she found herself entrenched.

The "matrix of relationships" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 141) that was beginning to form among the teachers at Ishikawa Elementary School would eventually grow to include individuals from across schools and universities in the region and beyond. Takeishi-sensei came to claim a central position within this intricate web of professionals who drew on their shared pedagogical philosophy to ultimately transform a once troubled school into a collaborative, inclusive, and responsive learning community.

Concluding Thoughts

Here, at the end of Takeishi-sensei's personal story, what can the reader take away from the particulars of her narrative, based as it is on Japanese culture and centered around a unique set of circumstances in a foreign country? The value of narrative work is that it provides a truthfulness of experience that both honors and transcends the individual by allowing the reader to recognize aspects of his or her own story within that of a distant other (Eisner, 2005). Like many educators, Takeishi-sensei spends her professional life rooted in the daily lives of the children she teaches and for whom she feels responsibility. She prepares them to seek fulfilling lives, both inside and outside of school, and guides them as they decide on the life paths they will eventually take.

Takeishi-sensei came to recognize that neither the Japanese-Brazilian children, nor the Japanese children from low-income or single parent homes, were uneducable. She refused to support a system that denied its responsibility for its children and ignored their disengagement from learning. She recognized that all the children were rebelling against a pedagogical, curricular, and structural system that narrowly defined them; forced them to the margins; denied them opportunities to reveal their inner talents and goodness; and held them back from full participation in their own learning experiences. The students did not respond to the coercive, non-forgiving teaching methods required by the traditional, teacher-centered and uniformed *issei shido* educational system that was in place. They resisted participating in schooling altogether.

Takeishi-sensei was unable to work under the pressure of the system, which imposed a logic on her that she could not reconcile. Therefore, she used every resource, both inner and outer, available to help herself confront the daily conflict she experienced. It was a hard struggle, but through this professional and personal crisis Takeishi-sensei came to see beyond the limited image of the students she initially saw, to question how her own gaze had created a distorted view of them. She chose to seek an alternative view and experience for herself, and for her students. Greene (1988) tells us that, "When people cannot name alternatives, imagine a better state of things, share with others a project of change, they are likely to remain anchored or submerged…" (p. 9). Takeishi-sensei fought to remove the chains that had submerged her pedagogical consciousness under the weight of the normalizing and disciplinary practices she encountered.

In initial meetings with Takeishi-sensei, I could not have fathomed the depth of despair and confusion she experienced. Nor, could I have expected her suffering would push her to reimagine her pedagogical role in relation to her students after the many years she had spent in the classroom. Her aims went much deeper than adhering to curricular mandates and passing

her students through the system, whether they learned or not. She drew on her philosophical and personal experiences to make choices, and to act as a responsible, ethical educator, engaged in her own project of self-constitution.

Through ethical resistance and care of self, Takeishi-sensei asked difficult questions that led her to overcome the oppressive and self-limiting conditions she encountered. Reflective practice helps educators to view their teaching through a philosophical lens. This further empowers them to resist institutionally sanctioned practices that work against their own and their students' well-being. Developing a philosophical foundation, grounded in ethical relationality and professional response-ability, helps to guide the eye, the mind, and the heart of the teacher. This allows her to enter into the unknown committed to take action in fostering self/other agency and grounded in an ethic of care.

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