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The Ideology of Inclusion: Scrutinizing DEI's Implementation in Japanese Education

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Abstract: In an attempt to address “systemic racism” and other perceived societal injustices, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives were introduced into U.S. education in the 1990s. Even though these initiatives are being debated and opposed in the U.S., Western educators are implementing them into education in Japan. The Japan Association of Language Teachers (JALT), for example, has a DEI committee and made DEI the theme of a recent international conference. JALT’s DEI description and aims seem identical to those in the West despite the fact there are significant differences in minority histories and attitudes about identity. Several ideological assumptions are included in DEI initiatives and activism. One maintains that society is composed of oppressors (the race and gender of people with the most power in society), and the oppressed (distinguished by a cascade of identities). Another DEI assumption regards the importance of considering, protecting, and validating the identities of students through greater “inclusion”. This aim to protect and validate is said to pertain to a wide variety of identities including race, language, national origin, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual, pansexual, 2 spirit, class, age, and physical ability. The third assumption is that a major educational objective is the transformation of students, and of society. Indeed, DEI educators believe they have a duty to somehow change the fundamental nature of youth and society. In this paper, these three DEI assumptions will be examined and scrutinized for the ways they might actually harm students and society.

構造的人種差別」やその他の社会的不正義とみなされるものに対処するため、1990年代に米国教育にDEI（多様性、公平性、包摂性）イニシアチブが導入されました。これらの取り組みは米国で議論され反対されていますが、欧米の教育者は日本の教育にこれらを導入しています。例えば、JALT（全国語学教育学会）にはDEI委員会があり、最近の国際会議のテーマをDEIとしました。少数派の歴史やアイデンティティに対する態度に大きな違いがあるにもかかわらず、JALTのDEIの説明と目標は欧米のものと同一のようです。DEI（多様性、公平性、包摂性）イニシアチブと活動にはいくつかのイデオロギー的仮定が含まれています。その一つは、社会は抑圧者（社会で最も権力を持つ人々の人種と性別）と被抑圧者（多層的なアイデンティティによって区別される）で構成されているというものです。DEI（多様性、公平性、包摂性）のもう一つの前提は、より大きな「包摂性」を通して、生徒のアイデンティティを考慮し、保護し、肯定することの重要性に関するものです。この保護と肯定という目標は、人種、言語、出身国、トランスジェンダー、クィア／クエスチョニング、インターセックス、アセクシュアル、パンセクシュアル、トゥースピリット、階級、年齢、身体能力など、幅広いアイデンティティに関わるとされています。3つ目の前提は、主要な教育目標は生徒と社会の変革であるということです。実際、DEI教育者は、若者と社会の根本的な性質を何らかの形で変える義務があると信じています。本稿では、これら3つのDEIの前提が、実際に生徒と社会にどのような害を及ぼす可能性があるのかを検証

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Background

In recent years, many Western educational institutions, including those in Japan such as JALT, have taken an ideological stance that in key respects downplays or ignores fundamental academic issues in favor of political activism. Specifically, the political activism addressed in this paper are three DEI-related assumptions, all aspects of an ideology that emerged in North American universities out of previous iterations of Marxism. Under the umbrella of Critical Race Theory, Critical Pedagogy, Queer Theory, and DEI, ideological assumptions have gained great traction in academia and the corporate world. These ideologies, however, are not without significant opposition. For example, Pluckrose and Lindsay (2020) wrote, "...when a political stance is taught at university, it is apt to become an orthodoxy, which cannot be questioned. Activism and education exist in a fundamental tension—activism presumes to know the truth with enough certainty to act upon it, while education is conscious that it does not know for certain what is true and therefore seeks to learn more" (p. 79). In addition, several U.S. states, for example, have put limitations on DEI initiatives. Likewise, many companies, such as Boeing, are eliminating their DEI departments. Meanwhile, Western ESL educators are seeking to introduce DEI into a Japan context without careful consideration of the consequences. The theme for 2024 International Conference for the Japan Association of Language Teachers (JALT), for example, was DEI. Programs that include DEI principles are far too controversial to advocate in Japan, both because the history of race relations is so different, and because the concepts are highly controversial. Thus, Japan should not uncritically accept what DEI proponents claim.

The principles that have guided liberal democracies include free speech and other personal freedoms, the goal of racial equality, the goal of "innocent until proven guilty" in a justice system that purports to treat everyone equally, an aim to resolve differences through law, constitutions, and rational thought, among other principles. While liberal democracy's broad goal of realizing a just society is shared, in some key ways, with DEI, in other ways DEI initiatives stand in opposition to liberal democratic principles. In recent years, for example, equity has been advocated rather than equality, as has the notion that minor-

ity groups are necessarily, systematically discriminated against or even oppressed. Censoring "misinformation" has become the preferred modis operandi rather than free speech, and, in some cases, ideological beliefs has come to take precedence over rational, logical thought (which may be perceived to be the tools of the oppressors). In liberal democracies, the identity of an author has historically meant little compared to rigor of their ideas. DEI proponents, however, routinely question identities. For example, at the JALT 2024 International Conference, "Moving JALT into the Future: Opportunity, Diversity, and Excellence," plenary speaker Dr. Avril Haye-Matsui explained in her pre-conference interview that people who oppose DEI do so because of their identities (white, heterosexual men, for example) (Haye-Matsui, 2024). This focus on identity, rather than arguments, is a feature of a DEI approach. Thus, some principles of liberal democracies are being challenged, or subsumed, by DEI ideology. Efforts to spread DEI ideology have become more and more prominent, including within an educational organization such as JALT, whose aim is ostensibly second language acquisition.

Ideological Assumption 1: Oppressors and Oppressed

The foundation for DEI is a world view based on Karl Marx's notion that capitalist society involves a struggle between those with power, the owners of production, the oppressors, and those under their thumb, the working class, the oppressed. Utilizing a Marxist framework, advocates of DEI argue that minority groups in society are, to varying extents, oppressed (Salzman, 2025). Conversely, the oppressors are the identity categories perceived to hold the bulk of the power, White heterosexual males. These observations are categorically different from classical liberal (CL) condemnations of specific incidents of racism and sexism. The classical liberalism adage to never judge people "by the color of their skin" has been overturned by DEI. Now, the claim is that racism, for example, is "systemic." Racism is, per DEI, fully integrated into various institutions in the United States and, presumably to a lesser extent, other countries such as Japan. One key difference between the classical liberal approach and the DEI approach is that the former demands specific evidence of incidences, while the latter is part of a system of beliefs, an ideolo-

gy that claims racism pervades every of life in the West, and that it necessarily involves individuals in power discriminating against minorities.

The world view that society is divided by oppressed identities, and oppressor identities, was the foundation for the JALT 2024 conference theme: “Moving JALT into the Future: Opportunity, Diversity, Excellence.” In JALT’s online introductory blurb labeled “Diversity equity, inclusion, and belonging,” questions are posed asking how DEI initiatives can be promoted within Japan’s largest language learning community. An attempt is made to connect diversity with excellence. For example, the conference introduction claims, “In order to truly realize excellence, JALT must be a diverse association...” When considering the fact that humans can be diverse in terms of ideas, religion, sex, race, political beliefs, and almost any other metric, this claim can more accurately be considered dogmatic; it is expressing an ideology. In her plenary talk blurb for JALT 2024, Kubota (2024) wrote, “Central to this mission (protecting human dignity and building solidarity) is justice-affirming language teaching for raising critical consciousness of how oppressive forces affect the lives of individuals who are positioned differently in power hierarchies.” This ideological stance is a radical departure from the straightforward goal of teaching Japanese people a foreign language.

Regardless of the oppressor-oppressed categories and how they are determined, the first problem with grouping individuals in society this way is the fact that an emphasis on physical characteristics such as skin color, or sexual proclivities, is divisive. In the most basic, literal sense, this Marxist view of the world is dividing humans based on what most agree are superficial characteristics. Rather than seeking to end all injustices while focusing on our commonalities as human beings, postmodernists seek to fragment society into hierarchical groups. This fragmentation has become so extreme that influential Leftist authors such as Ibram Kendi and Robin DeAngelo have gone so far as to say all Whites are white supremacists, a sweeping judgment and radical redefinition of a term that used to be reserved for the worst racists, the ones who would burn crosses on the yards of Blacks, or even extra-judicially lynch Blacks. In addition to a focus on race, DEI activities are often focused on sexuality. Trans activists, for example, claim that heteronorma-

tivity—the way society presents and accepts heterosexuality as the norm—must be torn down, in part by teaching children about sexual identities, radically redefining children as sexual beings, implicitly (or in some cases explicitly) denying that they are inherently innocent. Nguyen (2021), for example, argues that innocence is socially constructed, with historical ties to white privilege.

Philosophers such as Jiddu Krishnamurti (hereafter K) have identified division as a fundamental human problem, especially the division of people into groups. “It is division which denies freedom and love,” K wrote. “Belief in any form, ideals, however noble or effective, breed division... So be concerned with those things which divide, those things which bring about division between man and man, whether they be individual or collective... When there is freedom and love, then this intelligence will act in co-operation, and will also know when not to co-operate” (Krishnamurti, n.d.). K wrote long before identity politics, and often pointed to the ways religious identities divide society. The divisions wrought by religion while K was speaking publicly, from 1950 until his death in 1986, were indeed profound, leading to wars even, but they were simple and few compared with today’s identity politics. Today’s divisions brought on by identities—perhaps accelerated by greater and greater individualism—includes accusations and excuses based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, and social background. In DEI, feelings about identity are all-important, with the gravitas to even replace actual biological realities.

Assumption 2: Education benefits from greater “inclusion”, and efforts should be made to “include” sexual minorities such as trans-identifying youth.

Certain ideological assumptions have crept into the field of language teaching over the past decade. For example, JALT’s 2020 plenary speaker Yoshi Grote wrote in *The Language Teacher*, “Regardless of what versions of gender we personally perform...we live in a world divided into pink and blue, salad and steak, ballet and basketball, strength and kindness.” It takes an ideological framework to make sense of such claims. One outside that framework could respond that we don’t “perform gender” or see the world divided by these apparent representations of male and female. For a more recent example,

in the blurb for her plenary talk at JALT 2024, Kubota (2024) writes in her opening line, “As threats to human dignity and existence are growing in our society, language educators have increasingly recognized the importance of equity, diversity, inclusion, and social justice.” Again, this makes sense given the dictums of DEI ideology; others might be confused by what is threatening “human existence” and how diversity and inclusion will solve that.

In the modern era, sexual minorities have not been excluded from activities in public schools, mainly for the fact that the sexual orientation of learners, especially of children, was not in any way an acceptable topic of discussion. Sexual orientation was considered a private matter that had nothing to do with mastering the basics of reading, writing, and math. Postmodernists, inspired by Freire’s calls for the transformation of society, and for revolution, have entered the teaching profession with a propensity towards viewing teaching as activism. “Whether we admit it or not,” Grote (2020) writes, “teaching is a political act.” Grote continues to advocate for “including” the identity that most often gets mentioned, gender: “We need to (change society) to present our students with wider possibilities for their own experiences of gender...” (p. 7).

The liberal democratic society approach had been moving towards greater acceptance of sexual minorities and same sex marriages. However, explicit advocacy of any ideology or religion was not acceptable. Grote goes on to tell readers that the responsibility lies with teachers to create teaching materials that reflect sexual minorities.

The very notion of a gender identity is ideological, regardless of the extent to which Western institutions have embraced it. Jack Turban (2024), a psychiatrist specializing in child and adolescent psychology, defined gender identity as follows:

The most basic part of gender identity is what I call our transcendent sense of gender. In a way that goes beyond language, people often just feel male or female, and some more strongly than others. This can manifest in different ways. Some of my young patients draw themselves as a certain gender and have a “wow, this is me” feeling. Others have strong positive feelings when people use certain pronouns for them, or strong negative feelings when people use

other pronouns. As is the case with many emotions, it’s hard to describe this transcendent feeling in words.

A “transcendent sense of gender” that is “beyond language” is similar to dogmatic religious assertions. Hence, there is no justification for such ideology in any school; Japanese schools and universities should carefully scrutinize the DEI advocacy that Western educators are attempting to spread.

Gender ideology was first articulated in universities in North America, and later spread throughout the Western world. However, many controversies and problems have arisen. For example, gender advocates have insisted, and still insist, the medicalization of youth, including puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones, is essential so youth won’t kill themselves (Tordoff et al., 2022). There are, however, studies that show puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones do not reduce the risk of suicide (Ruuska et al., 2024). Many in liberal democratic societies who have historically strongly criticized FGM, Female Genital Mutilation, now deem radical mastectomies of physically healthy girls as gender affirming care. Such a phrase for unnecessary life-altering surgeries of youth is tragically ideological. Concurrently, these advocates have claimed that sexual development could be seamlessly restarted in the future. While many physicians and experts have been expressing doubts and reservations, the Cass Report (2024) published in the U.K. found the supposed benefits were weak or non-existent, and risks included the permanent disruption of bone, brain, and sexual development. Moreover, puberty blockers—which were developed to treat youth fighting cancer, not gender issues—did not appear to “save” youth from suicide. So not only is the claim false that youth who weren’t allowed to go on puberty blockers would often commit suicide, but it is unethical as well. “It’s essentially emotional blackmail,” Jungian analyst and social worker Marianne Brandon explained to journalist and author Abigail Shrier (p. 138). And subsequent steps, like cross-sex hormones, lead to permanent infertility. Another even more extreme subsequent step that more and more young females have been choosing, radical mastectomies, the removal of healthy breasts, are often regretted later by detransitioners, individuals who understand that they can’t actually change their sex.

Assumption 3: Educators have a right, or even duty, to seek the transformation of youth and society

Critical pedagogy, the idea that raising the consciousness of students about political realities, conscientization, is the highest educational aim, was articulated and advocated by the influential educator, Paulo Freire. Born and raised in Brazil, Freire viewed education as a way to achieve revolution (Evans & Wilson, 2016). In Freire's most famous work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), which is often required reading for U.S. education majors, the main aim is to get students to view the world from the "standpoint of the oppressed," and to "denounce the 'dehumanizing conditions' of the world." Freire wrote about his approach: "Authentic revolution attempts to transform the reality which begets (a) dehumanizing state of affairs" (p. 68). On the surface, Freirean education sounds lofty and desirable—but many questions are left unanswered, such as what might replace the present oppressive ("banking" education in Freire's words) system. Spring (1975) praised Freire's writing, noting that "Freire wants to restore humanity to the oppressed by giving them a conscious life" (p. 65). Evans and Wilson, with even greater loft and enthusiasm, write that Freirean Education "becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which we deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of our world" (p. 53). Thus, the forerunner of DEI in education is critical pedagogy.

In a TLT interview, Kubota (2018) defined her professional interest, critical pedagogy, as "critical reflection and action that can lead to social transformation." Kubota, like other DEI educators, seeks what Freire articulated, to "empower [learners] to become agents of social change." In her plenary talk introduction, she went into greater detail about the role of language teachers and how society is to be transformed: "Central to this mission (of language teaching) is justice-affirming language teaching for raising critical consciousness of how oppressive forces affect the lives of individuals who are positioned differently in power hierarchies." It is beyond the scope of this paper to discern the degree to which this claim is true or false, but the deeper truth is that it's unfalsifiable, much like any religious claim. Christians, for example, might deign to teach language learners that the way to transform society is through faith and repentance, earning God's grace, and doing good

deeds for spiritual growth. A liberal democracy way of thinking, before the imposition of DEI, was that a teacher who sought to "transform society" by imposing their beliefs on learners was inappropriately proselytizing.

While historical concerns about indoctrination have focused on religious dogma, the same criticisms can be made about ideological dogma. Lindsay (2022) explains,

Our capacity for reason makes us human, and therefore the state cannot dictate to us *what our capacity for reason is purposed for*, if anything, whether that be to serve and glorify God, submit to Allah, transcend worldly suffering through the Eightfold Path and reach Nirvana, or ascertain the subject-object dialectic so that we realize ourselves to be transformative subjects working to build the world into a Marxist Utopia (p. 36; italics in original).

DEI aims at the transformation of youth are not fundamentally different from the religious aims Lindsay highlights. Attempts to implement DEI in educational settings violate foundational principles of liberal democratic societies. DEI aims are more akin to propaganda and proselytizing than they are to education. And while DEI is questionable in the context within which it arose, North America, it deserves far greater scrutiny in a society with vastly different attitudes and philosophical approaches to life.

Conclusion

The infusion of ideological left-wing content has now become an international phenomenon, with DEI efforts and programs even infiltrating seemingly unrelated fields such as second language learning in Japan. Leftwing ideological aims often downplay or ignore fundamental academic issues in favor of political activism. Writing about the author of "Drag Queen Story Hour," Lindsay (2024) wrote,

Rather than learning basic academic skills or pursuing academic excellence, [students are) taught instead to "speak the word to proclaim the world" with their "voice" as activists—say, through encounters with grown men who dress and act like highly sexualized, irreverent, provocative women (Drag queens). As it turns out, his method is completely destructive and lacking in any substantive capacity to build anything. (p. 104)

Ideology, which is “a set of beliefs, values, and ideas that form the basis of a political, economic, or social system” provides a framework for making decisions, organizing actions, and interpreting the world. Educators should be very wary of imposing their beliefs on students, whether they regard religious paths to salvation or ideological claims to transformation. The three ideological claims highlighted in this paper are highly controversial and divisive. But whether one agrees or disagrees with the three ideological claims articulated in this paper is less important than the understanding that ideology is political, not educational, and thus inappropriate in educational settings.

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