

Unity in Diversity: Inspiring Future Generations

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Introduction

The Project *Unity in Diversity: Inspiring Future Generations* was born out of the idea of creating a more equitable and inclusive student body within the University of Kitakyushu. The short term aim of the project is to create a course initially for students of the English Department to teach them about diversity and inclusion, the long-term aim is to open the course to all students in the university. The course is accompanied by a bilingual (English/Japanese) workbook which can be easily adapted to suit all levels of English language ability. The workbook will primarily cover the following areas, women's studies, queer theory, human and civil rights, and disability studies, and it is designed to create a comfortable, inclusive, and safe environment from which students can think critically about subjects they perhaps have never discussed in class before. It is hoped the workbook will be the first of many in a series of workbooks from which students will be able to study about all areas of diversity rather than the ones initially chosen for this project.

The research project will initially bring together the following fields of research, linguistics, gender, and diversity. The rationale behind this approach is to bring together the two main fields of research from the

authors' research backgrounds, namely, second language acquisition and gender, and add a new area of studies to the research pot, that of diversity. It is thought that by bringing together two different areas of studies (language acquisition and gender) and using a new area of study (diversity) as a linchpin for the project will have the twofold effect of creating a course full of rich content within a linguistic framework which will benefit student's conversational and academic English language ability.

In addition to the workbook the authors' are creating a pre-teacher training manual for students taking the teacher training course. It is hoped that the *Unity in Diversity: Inspiring Future Generations* project will eventually create a series of workbooks, pre-teacher training manuals, online and face to face courses which future students on the teacher training course can take away with them and use in their own classrooms in junior, senior high schools within the City of Kitakyushu, Fukuoka Prefecture, and Kitakyushu at large. To this end the *Unity in Diversity: Inspiring Future Generations* course, workbook, and pre-teacher teacher training manual will not only offer theoretical instruction but also practical, down to earth workshops from which students will be able to put their ideas into practical use.

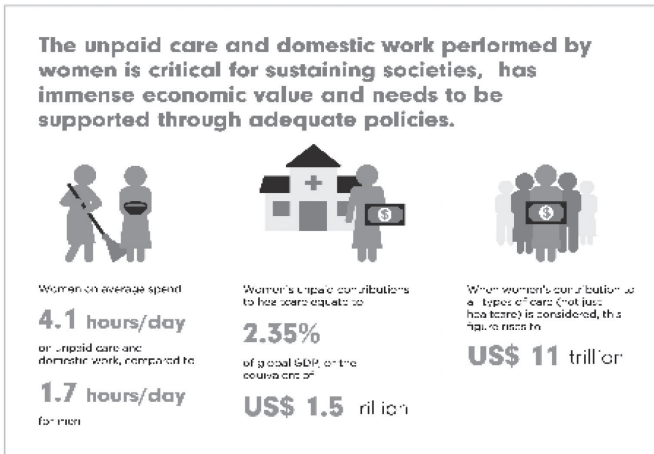
The effects of COVID-19

In April 2020, Japan like the rest of the world was hit by the COVID-19 global pandemic and like many universities around the globe the University of Kitakyushu was also affected by the pandemic. This in turn effected the research project *Unity in Diversity: Inspiring Future Generations*. The original project proposal was to provide students with 'hands on' practical

workshops combined with academic theory to provide them with a well-rounded as well as grounded education which would benefit them in the future.

However, with the advent of COVID-19 it soon became very obvious that the practicalities of doing ‘hands on’ workshops and providing students with practical ‘real time’ training, at least during the academic year 2020, would be difficult. Universities around the world were suddenly faced with a very new ‘online environment’ and Kitakyushu University was no different. Faculty and students had to suddenly acclimatize themselves to teaching and studying online using new online platforms from which to conduct classes and complete assignments.

In addition to adjusting to the new online work environment the authors also had to adjust to the new ‘family’ environment too. It is well documented how COVID-19 has adversely affected women both at home and at work. The United Nations published a policy brief titled, *The Impact of COVID-19 on Women in April 2020*, the brief clearly identifies four main areas in which women have been adversely affected by COVID-19, these four main areas are; 1) Economic Impacts, 2) Health of Women, 3) Unpaid Care Work, 4) Gender-based violence. The authors of *Unity in Diversity: Inspiring Future Generations* are women with dependents, even before COVID-19 women, globally, were more likely to be doing more unpaid care and domestic work (three times more) than that of men.



(United Nations, 2020, p. 14)

Pre-COVID-19, working conditions for women were no different from the rest of the world working women in Japan shouldered the burden of unpaid care work and domestic work, the statistics brought out in 2017 by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications showed that women, on average spent 4 hours and 54 minutes on domestic chores compared to 46 minutes by men (Society, 2018). At the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis the burden of care work and domestic work increased dramatically for the authors. This was due mainly to the closure of schools, after school clubs, childminding facilities, and other support networks both authors had in place before COVID-19. The authors were faced with double the amount of work in the workplace ensuing that guidelines related to online classes were met, as well as double the amount of care work and domestic duties which has affected working women across the globe (Takahashi, 2020).

The effects of COVID-19 on women researchers are only just becoming apparent, in the early stages of global national lockdowns the number of publications for male researchers rose whereas the number of publications for female researchers decreased (The Conversation, 2020). The effects of COVID-19 on women academics are well documented (Donald, 2020) and the additional burdens women academics face during COVID-19 heightens the need for the promotion of diversity and inclusion not only amongst the student body but also amongst the University structure as a whole—hence the urgent need for a course like *Unity in Diversity: Inspiring Future Generations* to be introduced to the University of Kitakyushu.

In addition to the impact COVID-19 has had on women faculty the impact on women students also needs to be addressed. Research has also shown that during COVID-19 an increasing number of women students are living at home and as a result are also expected to take on more care work and domestic work than their male peers (United Nations, 2020). The students who expressed a desire to work on the *Unity in Diversity: Inspiring Future Generations* project are all women and have struggled to find the time to work with the authors on the project in this new online environment. Initially the authors believed that the reason for this was the increased workload students seemed to be facing in the online environment however, further investigation needs to be conducted to find out the main reasons why the students struggled to work on the project in spite of being paid for the work. The aforementioned problems notwithstanding, the authors adapted to the new environment and adopted new research approaches for the *Unity in Diversity: Inspiring Future Generations* project.

Moving Forward: *Unity in Diversity: Inspiring Future Generations*

As previously mentioned, *Unity in Diversity: Inspiring Future Generations* will initially cover the following areas women’s studies, queer theory, human and civil rights, and disability studies. In the future it is hoped that a series of workbooks to include the following additional areas of diversity such as age, religion, nationality and ethnicity.

The first workbook to be published next year is going to be broken down into fifteen chapters and is designed to complement the 15 week syllabus the researchers will run in the 2nd semester of the academic year 2021 for the class: 「特定課題演習B（ダイバーシティ）」 for details see the table below:

Syllabus	Workbook
Week 1: Why How? . Gender, Diversity and Second Language Acquisition	Chapter 1: Why How? Gender, Diversity and Second Language Acquisition
Week 2: What is Gender? What is Diversity? What is Second Language Acquisition?	Chapter 2: What is Gender? What is Diversity? What is Second Language Acquisition?
Week 3: Breaking down the Myths of Feminism	Chapter 3: Breaking down the Myths of Feminism
Week 4: Marriage Education and Career	Chapter 4: Marriage Education and Career
Week 5: Workshop 1: Assertiveness and Assertive training	Chapter 5: Workshop 1 Assertiveness and Assertive training
Week 6: Gender Fluid -LGBTQ+ community	Chapter 6: Gender Fluid -LGBTQ+ community
Week 7: Marriage for All	Chapter 7: Marriage for All
Week 8: Workshop 2: Proud of PRIDE: Understanding the Importance of the LGBTQ+ Community	Chapter 8: Proud of PRIDE: Understanding the Importance of the LGBTQ+ Community

Week 9: Civil Rights/ Human Rights	Chapter 9: Civil Rights/ Human Rights
Week 10: The lives of Rosa Parks and Malala Yousafzai	Chapter 10: The lives of Rosa Parks and Malala Yousafzai
Week 11: Workshop 3: The Changing Face of Japan Looking inwards: Cultural diversity in Japan	Chapter 11: The Changing Face of Japan Looking inwards: Cultural diversity in Japan
Week 12: Celebrating differently Abled Abilities	Chapter 12: Celebrating differently Abled Abilities
Week 13: Different Ways of Learning, Different Minds	Chapter 13: Different Ways of Learning, Different Minds
Week 14: Human Rights, Educational Rights	Chapter 14: Human Rights, Educational Rights
Week 15: Student led Workshop	Chapter 15: Learning Goals, Summary

The style and tone of the workbook will be chatty friendly, informative and engaging, it will also be visually creative, and it is hoped that students will be able to design the graphics/ pictures for each chapter. In addition to this, each chapter of the workbook will have the following five main ingredients: ① vocabulary, ② Reading Comprehension, ③ Writing/ Discussion ④ Creative Component ⑤ Creative Component.

The vocabulary section of the workbook will include words taken from the Academic Word List (AWL) which was developed by Averil Coxhead at the School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. As well as words from the AWL students will also learn specific vocabulary related to the topics taught each week. Talking about diversity correctly and comfortably in your native language can be difficult at times and this difficulty can be compounded when using a second language. Thus, students will be taught how to communicate comfortably and correctly in their second language

about a subject which might be difficult to broach in their own culture.

For the reading section, selected readings will be added to each chapter and where necessary additional readings will also be added and recommended reading materials will be included in this section. The main aim of the reading section of the workbook is to engage the students interest so that they actually want to read further than what is being produced in the workbook. Reading comprehension questions will differ from standard textbook questions in that they will be more self-reflexive and open ended, almost like a diary in which students can write down their own thoughts and ideas about the material they have just read. The goal in this section of the workbook is to open the students' minds to the wonder world of diversity rather than bury them with technical terminology which could hinder their exploration of the topics rather than enhance it.

The writing and discussion section of the workbook will complement the reading comprehension in that it will continue the theme of self-exploration and self-growth for the students rather than concentrate only on the mechanics of academic writing which are covered in other courses the students take.

Finally, the two creative sections of the workbook are designed to engage critical thinking in a fun and diverse way so that the atmosphere at the beginning and end of each chapter will be something fun an exciting for students to work on. The researchers feel these creative sections of the workbook and the classes are extremely important in creating safe and comfortable environments from which students can work in and move forward from. As mentioned previously, discussing diversity and inclusion can sometimes be uncomfortable if students are not familiar with the

topics, having creative ways to express their thoughts and ideas will enable students to recognize their own and others diversity and empower students to move forward and continue celebrating diversity even after graduating from university.

The creation of a pre-teacher training manual to compliment the workbook. Although the course will be open to all students the pre-teacher training manual will focus on those students taking the teacher training course. The original idea was to create a teaching manual to accompany the workbook, but it soon became apparent to the authors that what was really needed was a pre-teacher training manual. The concept of this pre-teacher training manual is to enable our students on the teacher training course to create their own ideas and initiatives about diversity and inclusion rather than us (the authors) just telling them what to do in a teacher training manual. Students will gain additional teaching practice teaching *Unity in Diversity: Inspiring Future Generations* to the new i-Design community college members of 'Interactions with a Diverse World.'¹ The rationale behind this additional teaching practice is the idea that students will be teaching classes to adults, thus, essentially teaching classes to their future co-workers. It is also important for the authors to obtain feedback not only from our main student body but also from mature students in the university. Part of the *Unity in Diversity: Inspiring Future Generations* project is to bridge the gap between generations as well as inspiring the younger generation.

¹ The initial research proposal included members of the new i-design Community College but unfortunately during the academic year 2020 the community college was closed because of the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of this research project is the implementation of inclusion. This means not just talking about diversity and inclusion but also practicing what we preach and actively implementing diversity and inclusion throughout the project. It has already been noted above the difficulty the authors have had with inclusion of students on the project due to COVID-19. The authors are now seeking ways in which to make the workbook, and the course as inclusive as possible not only for face-to-face classes but also for on-line instruction as well. Our research for online classes, to date, has included work related to universal design font which is easier to read and understand than standard fonts and we are exploring the idea of multi-sensory virtual classrooms.

During the next academic year the authors will complete the workbook (digital and paper copy) and begin to teach the new course *Unity in Diversity* as part of the 特定課題演習 classes offered in the Department of Foreign Studies and outlined in the table above. The authors intend to put the new course officially into the curriculum after two years when the new curriculum for the Department of English can be altered.

It is hoped that during the next academic year the i-Design Community College will also be running either online or face to face or hybrid face to face/ online classes and members of the community college will join the project. The authors are planning to make a documentary about the journey the students involved in the project undertake whilst working on the project and it is hoped that this documentary can be used not only to promote the project in the future but also to promote, the Department of Foreign Languages and i-design Community College.

One final part of the project the authors are hoping to set up is the

creation of a peer reviewed journal for students and faculty to submit their work to. The journal would be creative, and students and faculty alike would be able to submit, academic papers, creative pieces of writing, poems, plays, songs, the main objective of the journal would be to allow students to work together with faculty to produce something positive and creative for the university.

Conclusion

Diversity is becoming an increasingly popular concept in Japan and the authors hope to be able to give students and faculty alike the opportunity to have a deeper understanding of diversity and how we as a university can practice diversity and inclusion and improve the study and working conditions for students, faculty, and staff within the university. It is also hoped that the project *Unity in Diversity: Inspiring Future Generations* will bring about more awareness of diversity in the local area, and in local schools.

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