1. Introduction

Much of my childhood I spent in the country-side in Shizuoka Prefecture at a place known as “The Danish Farm (デンマーク牧場). My parents had come to Japan to work as missionaries and brought me and my two brothers with them. A difficult question for them was school. There was no international school in the vicinity and my parents thought that a Japanese school would be too different from the Danish system they would be returning to later. In the end, they chose home schooling. It was clear to us children, that our particular school experience appeared very strange to our Japanese friends. But it was not just the schooling experience which was different. The way my friends interacted with their parents was also different from what I was experiencing. I particularly remember being very envious of my Japanese friends because if they said to their mother, that they were bored and didn’t know what to do, she would suggest something they could do. In such cases my own mother would just reply: “fine, you just go on being bored, and you will think of something in the end.” I can see today, that this was also a way of educating me, but at the time, I felt hugely disadvantaged compared to my Japanese friends.

Another thing that was already clear to me then, and which has continued to impress me is how serious and how respectful the majority of the Japanese are about education – knowledge and learning is basically something you respect. In Denmark, while we certainly acknowledge that a certain level of learning is nec-
ecessary for our country to succeed, many also have an inherent distrust of the
highly educated person. There are assumptions that such a person will be out of
touch with reality, is a nerd, is inferior when it comes to practical tasks or com-
mon sense. The effect is that there is less respect, for example for the teacher.
Violence against teachers perpetrated by pupils as well as their parents is in-
creasingly being reported by the media (For example Brandt, 2017; Obelitz, 2016)
and put on the agenda by the Danish Working Environment Authority. In metropo-
litan Copenhagen alone, the increase of reported instances of violence against
teachers was 78 percent in the period 2013–2015 (Brandt, 2017). Some of this re-
cent increase, it is suspected, is caused by attempts to include children with be-
havioural problems in ordinary classes, but ultimately, and particularly when it
comes to violence by parents against teachers, I think we will also have to ac-
knowledge that respect is an issue.

My Japanese friends went to shōgakkō and I remember being impressed that
they would help with the cleaning of the school. This was (and is) not done in
Denmark. As I have learned more about shōgakkō, I have come to highly appreci-
ate it for the generally high levels of literacy and math they achieve and for the
great variety of subjects taken up. Musical and creative subjects have not been
nearly as downsized as they have in Denmark.

This is not to say, of course, that I see no problems in Japanese education. All
educational systems have their strengths and weaknesses. There is plenty of re-
search which point out problems with standardized learning and learning con-
tents, lack of creativity, low proficiency in English, bullying and so on. The highly
competitive admission system particularly on the higher level of education puts
pressure on those who attempt to compete in this system. There is plenty of doc-
umentation of the pressure and competition testing and the entrance examination
system creates in Japan. In Denmark there is less pressure, as there is no public-
ly acknowledged hierarchy between institutions of higher education to speak of,
and since admission to the next level is almost exclusively based on your average
grades on the previous level. This, however, has not failed to create stress for
those focused on performing well, so now we see that a number of high schools
experiment with not using grades in the first year of high school.
2. **My previous research**

As someone who received education in quite varied environments, it has always been natural for me to be interested in education and education-related matters, and ever since my MA-thesis on the Japanese universities, Japanese education has been a keen interest of mine. My PhD-thesis (published in 1998) was about the work with education reform initiated by then Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro in 1984 when he set up the *Rinji Kyōiku Shingikai*. In my thesis I analysed the major subject areas of *Rinkyōshin*’s reports and I interviewed some of the major stakeholders to uncover the motivations and goals in the reform work. Initially the reports did not seem to have much practical effect, but over the years I have seen that many of the ideas expressed in the reports have re-surfaced for example in the suggestions made by *Chūō Kyōiku Shingikai*.

The next major research undertaking for me was a monograph on juku. There was very little research in English about juku at the time, mostly the juku were just referred to briefly as something which further increased the pressure on individuals in the Japanese education system. I interviewed several representatives from various juku and based on that and what presentation material they may have had, I made a typology of juku to encourage a more nuanced understanding of this phenomenon, because I found that juku have more functions than they are usually credited with. It is my opinion that juku exist in a symbiosis with schools and without juku, schools would have to reform their current structure. The monograph was published in 2006.

My latest monograph (from 2017) is about moral education in Japan. What is a ‘good’ person and how do we educate ‘good’ persons? This question of morality is central to any society and its government and educational system including the Japanese. In many societies it has been customary to teach about morality from a religious standpoint, but not so in Japan, where ‘religion’ is not a subject in schools. So, how do the Japanese go about the business of teaching values and morality? Using the Japanese example, I looked at moral education from the basic point of view of universal and common human values, with the necessary attention given to culture-specific traits. I placed moral education within the context...
of globalization and cosmopolitanism and I found that moral education in Japan is a useful key to understand how globalization and cosmopolitanism can work within a specific system, in this case Japanese values education. Specifically, I analysed the policy speeches, contents of the curriculum guidelines, of *Kokoro no Nōto* and *Watashitachi no Dōtoku* and I supplemented these more official ideas about what moral education should be with cases describing lessons in practice. In moral education I could see the attempts to maintain national identity while relating to the global world and thus I found moral education to be a good example of how global pressure can be handled locally.

3. Current research interests

I was invited as a key note speaker for a symposium in Tokyo about moral education and citizenship education in early 2015. The symposium attracted a wide selection of Japanese researchers with an interest in citizenship education; they were part of a network on citizenship education in Japan and met regularly. The existence of this network and my experience as a key note at the symposium has made me interested in the topic of global citizenship education (GCED). Global citizenship has become an increasingly important issue on the educational agenda since the late 1970’s (Parmenter, 2011, 368; Davies 2006, 6). The importance allotted to this issue is clear in the attention given to it by for example UNESCO where GCED is mentioned as a strategic focus in Target 4.7 in the *Education 2030 Agenda and Framework for Action*, which among other things calls on countries to “ensure that all learners are provided with the knowledge and skills to promote […] global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development” (UNESCO, 2015).

Several of the researchers in the Japanese citizenship network are working with issues that also relate to GCED and we are taking the first steps toward applying for funding to work on a comparative project about GCED involving at least Denmark and Japan, and hopefully also China and Korea. Questions to be addressed include: 1) How can the concept of global citizenship be defined and how can it be taught in schools? 2) How can issues of civic rights, responsibilities and values and identity be negotiated in a global context and how is this dealt
with in the partner countries? 3) Can there be one common version of ‘global citizenship’ or will each country have to find its own brand? We intend to work closely together with schools in East Asia and Denmark. We see our different backgrounds as an advantage enabling us to look at the issues from various angles. There are ways of working with GCED that may seem perfectly natural in one country and surprising or problematic in another. For example, should religion play a role in GCED and if yes, what role? Are human rights the most important basis of GCED? Language is also an issue. Our different languages will express values and ideals in different ways and some terms may be difficult or even impossible to translate. In some cases this can lead to a specific focus at the expense of other possibilities. Interestingly, Parmenter (2011) has made a survey suggesting that in Asia, while it was accepted that human rights should be part of GCED the respondents often found a focus on human rights to be not quite enough and they felt that there was something more important, something more overarching that was not just about ‘rights’, but about being and living as a human and sharing the human condition. To cover this, Parmenter constructed the phrase ‘human-beingness’. This is not really a word in English and perhaps this is why human rights have become the most common point of reference for much of the literature about GCED in English. However, in Germanic languages, such as German or Danish, there is a common word for ‘human-beingness’, ‘menschlichkeit’ in German and ‘menneskelighed’ in Danish and perhaps one could use ninjensei (人間性) in Japanese? Exclusive use of English may therefore create a sort of blind spot in relation to other possible focal points in GCED. This is why we want to work with a non-English and Asian perspective on GCED and using non-English and Asian languages to talk about it as it may yield new ideas and insights about GCED.

In many ways Asia is playing an increasingly important role on the global arena. It is important that learning from each other actually does go both ways, so that we can learn from what works in Japan and you can learn from our successes. It is my hope that with a project like the one outlined above we may not only learn from each other, but also be instrumental in broadening and nuancing the understanding of what GCED is and inspire the way it is put into practice in
schools in a more general way, so that we can add the voice of Japan and Japanese scholars (and hopefully in time also Chinese and Korean scholars) to the global discourse on GCED.

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