

## The Japanese Preschool's Pedagogy of Peripheral Participation

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**Abstract** This article examines Japanese teachers' beliefs about children's peripheral participation in emotional interactions in the classroom, and especially in fights. The article is based on a reanalysis of scenes of fighting in Japanese preschools from Tobin and colleagues' 2009 book and video, *Preschool in Three Cultures Revisited*. The reanalysis shifts the focus of attention from the protagonists in the fights, who occupy the center of the video frames, to the children on the margins. Japanese teachers have an emic cultural vocabulary for conceptualizing such peripheral participation, including the terms *gyarari* (gallery), *gaiya* (outfielders), *seken* (the generalized audience), and *mawari no ko* (the children around). Our analysis suggests that Japanese preschool teachers believe that in responding to children's fights their goal should be to give not only the protagonists but the class as a whole opportunities to experience emotions and to cultivate a sense of collective responsibility for events in their classroom community. [peripheral participation, Japan, preschool, *gyarari*, *seken*]

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The best-known scene in Tobin and colleagues' 1989 book and video *Preschool in Three Cultures* is when Hiroki, a four-year-old boy at Komatsudani Hoikuen (daycare center) in Kyoto, steps on the hand of a classmate making him cry, and his teacher, Fukui-sensei does not intervene. When given the chance to watch and comment on this scene, Fukui-sensei as well as many other Japanese early childhood educators, explained that nonintervention is a strategy they use to provide young children with opportunities to experience a range of emotions and social interactions that they have little access to at home and to encourage them to solve their own disputes without the help of adults. In *Preschool in Three Cultures Revisited* (2009), the sequel to the original study, authors Tobin and colleagues present and analyze scenes of fighting at Komatsudani and at Madoka Yochien (kindergarten) in Tokyo. (In the new study, two focal videotapes were made for each country.) In the new Komatsudani video, as in the original study, there is a scene where a Japanese teacher does not intervene during a physical fight and subsequent verbal dispute among a group of children. In the new video, the fight is among a group of girls over a teddy bear. In a scene at Madoka, a teacher does intervene in a dispute between two boys who accuse each other of hair pulling and pinching. As in the original study, the teachers seen in these videos as well as other Japanese early childhood educators explain the thinking that lies behind their decisions both to intervene and not to intervene in children's fights. As in the original study, in their new book Tobin and his coauthors emphasize Japanese teachers' beliefs about how their strategic interventions and noninterventions can help children directly involved in fights best learn about emotions and social relations.

After *Preschool in Three Cultures Revisited* went to press, we began working on a series of follow-up papers using as a source of data the archive of video-cued interviews conducted with Japanese teachers and directors. In the course of reanalyzing these transcripts, we noticed something that we had missed before in comments from an interview with Director Kumagai of Senzan Yochien in Kyoto. As Director Kumagai watches the scene in the Komatsudani video where a group of girls fight over the teddy bear, she comments: “Look, there is a *gyarari* (gallery). Fights are important for the children who are not fighting. Teachers should pay attention to them, and to consider what *they* are learning.”

This comment failed to make it into *Preschool in Three Cultures Revisited*. But as we attended afresh to Director Kumagai’s words, and especially to her unusual use of the English loan word *gyarari*, we came to the realization that in our previous analyses of this and other scenes of fighting in Japanese preschool classrooms we had missed something important. In our focus on the children directly involved in the fights (the children doing the pushing, hitting, pinching, crying, tattle-telling, admonishing, and comforting) we had failed to notice the presence of the children on the periphery of these scenes, children who watched the fights without (at least from our perspective) being actively involved. These are the children Kumagai-sensei referred to as a “gallery.” In the course of shooting and editing the videos and using them as interviewing cues we had watched these fighting scenes literally hundreds of times without noticing the presence of the galleries that formed around the fighters and mediators and without considering what these peripherally participating children might be experiencing, learning, or contributing.

In this article we present a reanalysis of these scenes of fighting in Japanese preschools. This reanalysis has required us to refocus our attention, both metaphorically and literally, from those fighting and mediating in the center of the frame to those in the surrounding gallery of peripherally participating observers. We present a Japanese emic perspective, featuring the words and concepts used by Japanese practitioners to explain their beliefs and practices concerning children who play a peripheral role in fights. The beliefs that underlie these practices are for the most implicit, rather than explicit (Tobin et al. 2009:19). They are not systematically taught in teacher preparation programs, discussed in education textbooks, or prescribed in national guidelines for kindergarten. And yet these beliefs are widely shared, components of what Anderson-Levitt (2002), calls a “national culture of teaching,” what Bruner calls a “folk pedagogy” defined as “taken-for-granted practices that emerge from embedded cultural beliefs about how children learn and how teachers should teach” (Bruner 1996:46); what Wierzbicka (1996) calls a “cultural grammar,” and what Bruce Fuller (2007) refers to, following Geertz (1983) and D’Andrade (1995), as “cultural models,” which he defines as “parent’s and teacher’s tacit understandings of how things should work” (2007:74). We also want to make clear at the onset that we agree with Shimizu’s distinction between what he calls “semantic and pragmatic” dimensions of emotions characteristic of a culture and the subjectively experienced versions of these emotions that are much more difficult to access and study (2000:225). In this article based on analyses of videotaped scenes in a classroom and teachers reflections on these scenes we are concerned primarily with the teachers’ cultural discourses of emotion, rather than the children’s culturally patterned lived

experiences of emotions, although by necessity in our analysis we touch on both and bring them together.

We read this Japanese emic perspective alongside and, in some cases, against theories from the anthropological, developmental psychological, and sociological theories of legitimate peripheral participation, observational learning, social learning, self-regulation, and panopticism. We conclude with some implications for what this Japanese approach might offer for best practice beyond Japan.

## Method

The method we employ for our reanalysis is a modification of the video-cued ethnographic interviewing approach used in the old and new Preschool in Three Cultures studies. In this method the videos are not the data. Rather, each scene in the video functions, like a verbal question in an ethnographic interview, to provoke reflection and explanation from cultural insiders. For this article we deployed this method in three ways. We reanalyzed the transcripts from the interviews with Japanese early childhood educators conducted for *Preschool in Three Cultures Revisited*, this time looking for comments on peripherally involved children. We also reinterviewed some of the informants who had participated in the study and asked them to again watch and comment on the fighting scenes in the videos. We asked these informants follow-up questions about children on the periphery of the fights and about the terms they used to refer to these children. We also reedited the fighting scenes in the Komatsudani and Madoka videos. We went back to the originally shot uncut footage, this time selecting more wide-angle shots, which showed not just the fights' protagonists but also the children on the periphery. The videos were shot with two cameras, with one usually on tighter focus, the other wider. The edited videos featured mostly close-ups of the fighting children, with the wider shots used mostly only to establish the scene. In contrast, the new edited versions include more of the wide shots to better show peripherally involved children. We used these reedited videos as interviewing cues with Japanese informants.

## Fights at Komatsudani Hoikuen and Madoka Yochien

Nao-chan is the youngest and most recently enrolled girl in the four-year-old class at Komatsudani Hoikuen. During a period of free play before lunch, an argument breaks out among Nao, Rina, and Mana. Sachi hovers near by, at first watching the fighting among the girls (see Figure 1) and then getting a bit involved, putting in her hand for a moment when the three girls are pulling and tugging on a teddy bear (see Figure 2). Sachi then steps back and watches when the girls fall in a pile on the floor, fighting over the bear (see Figure 3). Nao, having lost control of the teddy bear, starts to cry. Sachi goes over to Nao, touches her comfortingly (see Figure 4), and then approaches Rina to talk. Ami (on the right side of the frame in Figure 5, in a yellow dress) has been watching Nao's crying. As Rina and Mana enter into a discussion with Nao, Ami hovers on the edge of the discussion (see Figure 6). Mana then says to Ami, "You should scold her" and Ami says something to Nao (see Figure 7).



**Figure 1.** Sachi is watching.

As Ami is addressing Nao, Toshi steps into the frame (see Figure 8), watches and listens for a bit, and then puts his hand on Nao's back (see Figure 9). As fight concludes with Nao and Rina locking little fingers and singing a song about being friends ("Keep this promise or swallow a thousand needles . . ." another girl, Mina, approaches and stands nearby (see Figure 10).

A second event takes place in Madoka Yochien, a private kindergarten in Tokyo that serves children from three to six years old. In Kaizuka-sensei's class of four-year-olds, at the end of the school day the students change back to the uniform they wear going and coming to school. In the video, as the children are changing, we see Nobu, in tears, approach Kaizuka-sensei and say, "Yusuke pulled my hair." Kaizuka-sensei gathers the two boys around her and squats between them to mediate their dispute. As soon as Kaizuka-sensei comes to the two boys, a girl and boy close by begin watching their interaction while changing their clothes (see Figure 11). Although Kaizuka-sensei keeps talking, several girls around them are watching. Another children watch them as well (see Figures 12–18). Kaizuka-sensei's



**Figure 2.** Sachi reaches in.



**Figure 3.** Sachi steps back.

intervention continues and some of the children finish changing their clothes. When Kaizuka-sensei mentions, “God sees everything you do,” three children are around them (see Figure 19). One boy imitates what Kaizuka-sensei is doing. His hand is almost reaching his friend’s head.



**Figure 4.** Sachi gives her hand in comfort.



**Figure 5.** Ami approaches Nao.

### **Fighting as Performance**

When Yoshizawa-sensei, the former director of Komatsudani Kyoto, watched the scene of the girls fighting over the teddy bear, he said, “It takes a real professional teacher to tell the difference between a real fight and rough play.” Yoshizawa credits Morita-sensei as having the experience and wisdom to recognize that Nao and the other girls were engaged in rough



**Figure 6.** Ami looks on.





**Figure 7.** Ami gets involved.



**Figure 8.** Toshi approaches.



**Figure 9.** Toshi watches.

play, rather than in a fight with intent to hurt each other, and he suggests that this awareness allows Morita-sensei to follow a strategy of nonintervention. Many Japanese teachers who watched this scene, like Yoshizawa-sensei used the word “playing” rather than “fighting” to describe the girls’ interaction. One of the teachers commented: “Basically they are *jareau* (play fighting).” *Jareau* is most often used for describing the way puppies and kittens engage in mock fights as a way of playing, engaging, and preparing for adulthood. Other teachers described the fighting as *kodomorashii* (childish), a term in Japan that is usually used positively, to refer to behavior that is innocent, cute, and natural for young children. Another teacher commented: “The girls don’t really want the bear. They are just wondering how Nao will react if they take the bear from her. Will she cry? Or will she get angry? Or just be upset?”

These and other comments suggest that the children are not so much fighting as playing at fighting and this play has a performative dimension, a dimension highlighted by Director



**Figure 10.** The Promise Song.





**Figure 11.** The interaction begins.

Kumagai's use of the word *gyarari* to describe the children watching on the periphery. The children watching are the play's audience and the fighting children the actors. Just as a play needs an audience, such fights need a gallery. In both the Komatsudani and Madoka fight scenes, the teachers do not tell the children on the periphery to move away, suggesting that they value the participation of the *gyarari*. Japanese early childhood educators' comments on these scenes suggest that the role of the *gyarari* in such fights is complex and multiple,



**Figure 12.** Children are watching.



**Figure 13.** More onlooking.

and that being a member of such a gallery is both a valuable learning opportunity for the children watching as well as a form of social control for the children fighting.

### **Sympathetic Identification and Legitimate Peripheral Participation**

The word gallery might seem to suggest that those watching are passive, but this is not how the Japanese educators we interviewed described the *gyarari* that gathered around the fights in the videos. Several teachers emphasized the distinction between active and passive watching by making a distinction between being a member of a *gyarari*, on the one hand, and being a *yajiuma* (onlooker) or *boukansya* (bystander), on the other hand (Akiba 2004; Morita and Kiyonaga 1996). The word *yajiuma* is most often used for describing people's



**Figure 14.** The gaze of the onlookers.



**Figure 15.** Seated girl looks on intently.

behavior at sites of accidents. For instance, people who gather around a car accident out of curiosity and speculate about what happened and who was at fault are called *yajiuma*, which is sometimes translated into English as “rubbernecker.” The word is derogatory, suggesting that those gathering around are motivated not by genuine concern but only by curiosity and a desire for vicarious thrills. One teacher said about the watching children in the video: “They look kind of like *yajiuma*, but not really, because they are worried.” It is their appearance of being worried, suggesting empathy, which makes them legitimate peripheral participants, rather than mere onlookers. *Boukansya* (bystander) is a word used in Japan mostly in social psychology, as in the technical term *bystander effect*. It is used to refer to people who watch with no intent to be participants. This term, like *yajiuma*, was used by teachers to distinguish illegitimate from legitimate participation, as in the comment of a teacher in Tokyo who said: “Those watching the children involved in the fight are not *boukansya* (bystanders). They are people concerned about their friends; they are *all* participants.”



**Figure 16.** More girls watching.



**Figure 17.** Onlookers reach out.

As in attending a play, the *gyarari* that gather around these fight scenes are potentially both moved and edified by their viewing. Japanese educators emphasized that it is not only the children directly involved who learn from fights and their resolution but also the children watching, through observational learning and sympathetic identification. Japanese preschool teachers often used the words *kimochi* (feelings), *doujou* (sympathy, compassion), and *omoiyari* (empathy) to describe the *gyarari* children's experience of watching their



**Figure 18.** Watching closely.





**Figure 19.** “God sees everything you do.”

classmates engaged in emotionally intense interactions. One teacher said, “Sympathizing with others is important.” The experience of the *gyarari* therefore can be conceived as a form of vicarious participation, in which the observing children feel (or at least attempt to feel) what is being experienced by a classmate.

The Japanese teachers’ practices seen in fighting scenes in the video, as well as their and other Japanese educators’ reflections on these scenes, are largely consistent with Lave and Wenger’s (1991) concept of “legitimate peripheral participation,” and with the related concepts of “observational learning” and “intent participation.” Rogoff and colleagues describe intent participation as “keenly observing and listening in anticipation of or in the process of engaging in an endeavor” (2003:176). Gaskins and Paradise write that “Observational learning typically occurs in familiar contexts in which one person performs an activity while another person, who knows less, watches them do it” (2009:85). Lave and Wenger define legitimate peripheral participation as:

a way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old-timers, and about activities, identities, artefacts, and communities of knowledge and practice. A person’s intentions to learn are engaged and the meaning of learning is configured through the process of becoming a full participant in a socio-cultural practice. This social process, includes, indeed it subsumes, the learning of knowledgeable skills. [1991:29]

The Japanese practices and beliefs we have presented here are unlike most descriptions of peripheral participation and observational learning in the literature in several key ways. First, the learning here is not, as in most of the studies of peripheral participation and observational learning, of a cognitive skill or a trade, but instead of a social skill and of an emotional disposition. The children are learning, through observing and sympathetic



identification, how to feel, what to do with their feelings, and how to behave as a member of a community. Such learning in the domains of emotions and sociality is underdiscussed in the peripheral participation literature, which emphasizes the cognitive and skill domains, but well described in the cultural and psychological anthropological literature on acculturation (e.g., by Briggs 1999; Hayashi et al. 2009) and in some conceptualizations of observational learning. For example, Gaskins and Paradise in their review of “Learning Through Observation in Daily Life” write that:

Many rules about emotions must be learned, including how and when to express emotions and how they are managed, labeled, and interpreted. These rules can be observed by attending to people’s facial expressions, body language, speech and other audible expressions of emotion, and actions directed toward others and the physical environment. [2009:108]

Gaskins and Paradise also suggest that children learn

culturally structured rules about social behavior and social roles, in large part by observing the interactions that go on around them. . . . They can also observe the consequences of certain social acts in their particular social worlds—what Bandura (1977) called *vicarious reinforcement*—by observing others who share a social category with them and are seen therefore to be “like me” (e.g., gender, age, race, or class). [2009:108]

This points to a second key difference between the *gyarari* situations of peer learning we have presented in this article and Lave and Wenger’s notion of legitimate peripheral participation and Rogoff and her collaborators’ notion of intent participation, which emphasize learning in hierarchical, rather than peer contexts and most often describing those observing and being observed as “newcomers and old-timers” or as “masters and apprentices.” We are not suggesting that such hierarchical forms of peripheral participation are not important in Japan, well known for its rich traditions of apprenticeship learning in the arts, or that hierarchical learning is a form of peripheral participation not found in Japanese preschools. Both the old and new Preschool in Three Cultures books describe the importance teachers at Komatsudani Hoiken and other Japanese preschools give to the benefits of mixed-age learning (*tate-wari kyōiku*) for both the younger and older children (Tobin et al. 2009; Tobin et al. 1989; Ben-Ari 1996:61, 81n). But alongside the value placed on newcomers learning from old-timers, in Japanese preschools there is a great emphasis placed on the value and importance of learning through peer relationships. *Peer* is a relative term. Even in classes of children of similar ages, there are differences of age and experience. Naochan is the youngest and newest child in her class, and her teacher suggested this played a role in the girls’ behaviors. But the underlying logic Morita-sensei and other Japanese teachers used to explain the value of teachers nonintervention to allow the children to experience fighting and emotions, both directly and vicariously, was that of the children interacting as a community of peers.

The third important distinction we want to emphasize and that is the focus of the section that follows is that, whereas most of Lave and Wenger’s examples are of people learning as individuals, the *gyarari* situations emphasize group learning and group experience.

None of these points we are making here are inherently inconsistent with the conceptualizations of Lave and Wenger of legitimate peripheral participation, of Gaskin and Paradise of observational learning, and of Rogoff and colleagues' of intent participation, all of which implicitly are concerned with social as well as cognitive learning, in that peripheral participation and intent participation function to help individuals become full, appropriate, contributing members of a community. Our argument is that the Japanese emic view can contribute to a widening of the concepts of peripheral participation and intent participation, with a greater and more explicit emphasis on emotion and on learning with and from peers, and on peripherally participating as a group.

### **Embodied Learning**

In his 1996 article on nap time in Japanese nursery schools, Ben-Ari uses Abu-Lughod and Lutz's (1990) work on the embodiment of emotion to demonstrate how Japanese young children learn to transfer emotional resonances learned at home with their family members to their classmates in preschool. Ben-Ari focuses on the multisensorial experience of cosleeping, but a similar case can be made for the embodiment of emotion in children's fights at preschool. For the children fighting, the teddy bear scuffle was clearly embodied, not just in the sense of bodily contact, but also in the intense shared experiencing of the sights, sounds, and smells that accompany rolling around on the floor pulling and tugging on a bear, and in the interlocking of pinkies while making a promise, the wiping away of tears, and the embrace at the fight's resolution. What is less readily apparent is how the fight provides an experience of embodied learning of emotions as well for those on the periphery, who also engage multisensorially with the action. Rather than being passive, the *gyarari* children are engaged in intense, focused looking and listening and even, at times, in reaching out and touching the fight protagonists. Moreover, unlike the members of a theater audience who are generally confined to a single seat at some remove from the action on the stage, the *gyarari* at these fights move around, sometimes approaching close enough to touch the protagonists, sometimes moving back, and sometimes imitating with their bodies the movements of the protagonists.

### **Collective versus Self-Regulation**

Most American early childhood educational practices and beliefs, as well as Western theories of child development, emphasize constraint on antisocial behavior as self-constraint. In contrast, the Japanese early childhood educators' reflections on the two *gyarari* scenes emphasize the importance of children learning to function as a self-monitoring, self-controlling community. The locus of control on misbehavior is on the group, rather than on each child as an individual. The *gyarari* is conceived by Japanese early childhood educators not as a gaggle or mob of rubbernecks but, rather, as a collective, with the power to induce prosocial and limit antisocial behavior in others.

When we asked preschool teachers if they ever ask children who are watching fights to move away, most said no, and emphasized not just that watching was beneficial for the watching children, but also for those being watched. For example, a teacher in Tokyo answered,

“Well, occasionally, yes. But most of the times, I tell the children who are directly involved that other children care about you and are worried about you.” In addition to providing empathy and emotional support, the observing children are seen as a source of control on the fight protagonists. As Professor Usui Hiroshi of Hokkaido University of Education told us: “The watching children function as one of the factors that controls the fighting. The observers don’t let the stronger children take things away from the weaker ones all the time. They provide some self-regulation to the fighters.” This comment is characteristic of the Japanese cultural belief in the collective ability of the group to self-regulate and in the importance of preschool as a site for this collective ability to be experienced, learned, practiced, and cultivated.

Rather than passive observers, the children watching in these fight scenes are active on several levels. They are active, in the sense that they choose to watch and to attend to what they are watching. They also are active in the sense that they respond to the actions they are observing, verbally as well as nonverbally. Some of the watching children literally take action, closing the gap between actors and audience, protagonists and observers. For example, Ami is among the peripherally involved children watching the first noted of the fights until Mana says to her, “You should scold Nao.” Ami responds to this call, and abandons her spot in the *gyarari* to become an actor. As Ami admonishes Nao, she puts her arm around her waist, as if playing the part of a teacher or mother. In the Madoka video we see Toshi, a boy in the *gyarari*, become physically involved by reaching out and patting one of the disputant’s on the head, echoing a gesture just made by the teacher.

Director Machiyama of Madoka Yochien in Tokyo referred to the children on the periphery of the fights not as a *gyarari* but as a *gaiya*, in his comment, “The *gaiya* choose to watch their friends’ fights.” *Gaiya* is a word used in Japan mostly in baseball, where it can mean the bleachers, and in this sense the meaning is close to that of the word *gyarari*; but it can also mean the outfielders. The outfielders spend most of the game standing some distance from the central action, but their active participation, though sporadic, is essential. The children on the periphery of the fights are, to follow Director Machiyama’s metaphor, like fans in the bleachers cheering their team on; or, perhaps, like outfielders, watching and waiting, ready to make a play when needed.

In Japan, as in many other countries, for most contemporary children the preschool is their first and best opportunity to learn to be a member of a community, or in Japanese metaphorical terms, the first site where they get such opportunities to be members of a *gyarari* or a *gaiya*. Both *Preschool in Three Cultures* projects showed how a primary function of preschools is to turn young children into culturally appropriate members of society. Japanese preschools are sites for teaching young children to have a characteristically Japanese sense of self, which is to say a sense of self that is socially minded. Japanese preschool teachers’ understandings of peripheral participation in fights is a piece of this larger picture of how Japanese preschool classrooms function as sites for teaching young children to come into selfhood collectively.

The concepts of collective selfhood and collective self-regulation sound oxymoronic to Western ears, but not so in Japan. We suggest that the perspective of Japanese educators that

the locus of control for fighting and other antisocial behaviors is at the level of the group, rather than the individual, is a useful addition and challenge to Western psychological theories of self-regulation and more generally of child development (Shimizu 2000). Most of the work on the development of prosociality in psychology focuses on how individuals experience and express emotions and on how individuals control or fail to control their behavior. As Eisenberg and colleagues write in their 1996 work on children's prosocial behavior: "Three aspects of individuals' dispositional functioning related to pro-social responding are individual differences in children's emotionality, regulation, and social competence" (1996:975; see also Eisenberg and Mussen 1989). In another article, Eisenberg and Spinrad make a useful distinction between self-regulation and "externally imposed regulation," and between being able to regulate emotion oneself and modulating emotion primarily through the efforts of others" (2004:336). A Japanese emic perspective would recast this distinction as a group regulating its own emotions and behaviors, versus the group being regulated by others (e.g., with the intervention of a teacher).

This Japanese perspective on regulation, while not negating the importance of understanding individual processes of emotion, cognition, and behavior, would expand the Western psychological literature by seeing the locus of control in a preschool classroom not just or primarily as the sum of the self-regulation of each child, but also as the collective emotional and social skills of the class as a community. The focus is on helping children learn to be members of the class as a community, and then on providing opportunities for this community to develop the capacity to self-regulate.

We are not the first researchers to call for more attention to communal forms of behavioral regulation and for the need for greater attention to how young children learn in preschool to function collaboratively. Catherine Raeff warns against essentialized notions of cultures as being independent versus interdependent. Just as U.S. preschool teachers support the development in children of interdependent behaviors and attitudes (Raeff 2006), Japanese teachers support children's independence as well as interdependence (Peak 1992). In arguing that the Japanese emic understanding of peripheral participation emphasizes the encouragement of a collective locus of control we do not mean to suggest that peripherally participating children in Japanese preschools do not also have individual motives or that they lack the ability for self-control. As Raeff (2000, 2006) argues, it cannot be the case that children in some cultures are independent and in some cultures interdependent, for all cultures require people to act both independently and interdependently. Therefore, as Raeff suggests, the focus of our analysis should be on explicating in which contexts in a culture children are expected to act independently and in which contexts interdependently. We are suggesting not that Japanese teachers always or consistently discourage independence, but that in the domain of dealing with children's fights in Japanese preschool classrooms there is general encouragement from teachers for an interdependent solution.

We would also point out that though like Japanese preschool teachers, U.S. preschool teachers talk with children about the importance of thinking of the classroom as a community of friends and of the need to consider others' feelings and to not be selfish (Raeff 2006),

the strategies U.S. teachers use to encourage interdependence are different from those we describe in this article and elsewhere (Hayashi et al. 2009; Tobin et al. 2009) as favored by Japanese preschool teachers and directors. We see a contrast between the mostly teacher-led, teacher-mediated discourse of sharing and friendship in U.S. preschools described by Raeff and in *Preschool in Three Cultures Revisited* (Tobin et al. 2009) and the child-organized practices commonly found in Japanese preschools that feature less teacher-led instruction on the virtues of interdependence and more emphasis on learning communal skills and attitudes through indirect, observational learning and peripheral participation.

### *Ijime*

An important finding of our analysis of the interviews is what Japanese early childhood educators did not say about these fighting scenes but might have said, which is that these fights are in some way connected to *ijime*, or classroom bullying. *Ijime* is considered to be a significant educational and social problem in Japan (Akiba 2004), especially at the middle school level (LeTendre 2000; Fukuzawa and LeTendre 2001). *Ijime* in its paradigmatic form involves a group of children, or even a whole class, ostracizing, teasing, and in other ways harassing a single child. Akiba suggests that *ijime* should be viewed as both an effect and a symptom of a more general break down of society, a form of Japanese postmodern anomie in which the traditional community structures have been eroded:

The lack of group orientation and trusting peer relationship may be a reflection of larger societal changes towards individualization (Fukuzawa and LeTendre 2001). With a smaller number of businessmen spending after hours for socializing with their colleagues and a diminished sense of local community where neighbors are strangers, it is becoming more difficult to expect their children to develop group-orientation and trusting peer relationship. Despite these societal changes, there have been few changes in the school organization to foster collective values to prepare students for the society. The impact of the gap between the societal changes and the traditional role of schools to foster Japanese cultural values needs to be examined in relation to *Ijime* phenomenon in future studies. [2004:234]

Although *ijime* is mostly a middle and high school phenomenon in Japan, Japanese educators are concerned about the antecedents in lower grades. Some Japanese educators we interviewed (but few of the early childhood educators) saw in the fight over the teddy bear at Komatsudani the beginnings of *ijime*. For example, Masakazu Mitsumura, who is conducting research on middle-school *ijime*, said of the girls' fight:

Even though *ijime* is considered mostly a lower secondary school problem, these days concern about the antecedents of *ijime* behavior makes even preschool teachers worry about bullying in their classrooms and to second-guess their traditional non-intervention approach. What we see happening in this scene in your video in my opinion might contribute to the development of *ijime* behavior later. I worry less about the children directly involved in the fight than about the effect on the bystanders, who are watching and developing bad habits of following the lead of the dominant figures in the classroom and becoming passive bullies.



In contrast, most of the Japanese early childhood educators we interviewed, while agreeing that *ijime* is a major social concern, and agreeing that the antecedents of classroom behavior and misbehavior begin in preschool, argued that the social skills children need to acquire to cohere as an effective classroom community are best supported not through direct instruction or heavy teacher intervention, but instead by providing ample opportunities for young children collectively to experience complex social interactions.

As Morita-sensei explained:

If I think a fight, such as this one in the video, is unlikely to result in anybody getting hurt, I stay back and wait and observe. I want the children to learn to be strong enough to handle such small quarrels. I want them to have the power to endure. If it's not dangerous, I welcome their fighting.

When we asked Morita-sensei to respond to the suggestion that the girls were bullying Nao-chan, she replied,

She is strong. All the children have strong personalities, so in this kind of situation they all want to make their case and put forward their opinion. Compared with the other children, Nao is not very good at speaking. She cries when she can't express what she wants to say verbally. But as you saw in the videotape, even while she was crying, Nao tried to pull the teddy bear back. She has a strong core.

Morita-sensei went on to explain that she viewed Nao's behavior, though babyish and seemingly counterproductive, as prosocial, as she also viewed the older girls' aggressive responses. *Ijime* usually takes the form of ostracizing and excluding a classmate seen as weak. Nao's interactions with the other girls are just the opposite: intense emotional interactions, initiated by Nao as well as her classmates, with the expression of affection as well as anger and critique. In this sense we suggest that the fighting scenes we are analyzing here are the precursors not of middle-school *ijime*, but the opposite—the kind of social interactions that allow young children to learn to experience themselves as members of a classroom community.

### **Seken: The Social Gaze**

In the Madoka video, as she is mediating the fight, Kaizuka-sensei says to the two boys: *Kamisama datte miterun dayo*. In English this can be translated as either “God, too, is watching,” or “The gods, too, are watching,” or “The spirits, too, are watching you.” The notion of god in Shinto comes from the belief that everything in nature—water, mountains, flowers, trees, rocks—have spirits and therefore are kinds of gods. There is a Shinto expression that refers to “eight million spirits,” which means that the eyes of the gods are everywhere. This Shinto notion, in turn, is tied to the Japanese traditional concept of *seken no me*. *Seken* literally means “society”; *me* means “eyes.” Together they mean literally, “the eyes of society,” or, following Takie Lebra's definition, “the generalized audience” (1992). Lebra lists a set of related terms *seken-nami* (conforming to *seken* standards, or ordinary), *seken-banare* (incongruent with *seken* conventions, or eccentric), and *seken-shirazu* (unaware of *seken* rules, or

naïve). Like the phrase “The gods see everything,” “*seken no me*” carries the meaning of being aware that one is always being watched. A related phrase used by many of the Japanese early childhood educators to describe the children on periphery of the fight scenes was *mawari no ko*, literally, “the children around” or “the children surrounding.” This phrase was sometimes used in conjunction with *mawari no iken*—the opinions of people around you.

Interestingly, Kaizuka-sensei said not just that “The gods (*kamisama*) are watching (*miterun*), but that the gods, *too*, are watching (*kamisama datte miterun, daiyo*). *Datte* means “as well” or “too.” Besides the gods, who else, then, is watching the boys? One interpretation is that their teacher, Kaizuka-sensei is also always watching. Another interpretation is that the two boys are watching each other. A third interpretation is that everyone in the community of the classroom is always watching each other (which is a paraphrase of *seken no me*, or “generalized audience”). “The gods, too, are watching” is thus Kaizuka-sensei’s way of reminding the boys and the surrounding *gyarari* of the existence of people around them, who are watching, and care about the participants and what they do.

In the old days in Japan in a village or in a city neighborhood everyone knew each other and everyone took responsibility for watching and, when necessary, correcting children. For instance, if a child did something naughty or dangerous on the street any adult who saw him would let him know he was being watched and correct his or her behavior. Such collective regulation of behavior has become increasingly rarer in modern Japan, where demographic change and modernization has led to the dissolution of the coherence of traditional rural and urban neighborhoods and therefore of the power of the *seken* (generalized others) and *mawari no iken* (opinions of others). With this shift, preschools have increasingly become the first and most important place where young children come to practice and experience being watched by and watching others. Professor Usui Hiroshi approved of teachers’ giving children opportunities to solve their own disputes because it allows children to experience a social complexity lacking in their lives at home:

This is compensatory education. These days, children lack opportunities to experience human relationships. In the old days, children had siblings, but not anymore. Now that Japan is wealthy they have their own toys and own rooms. Living this way, they never have the experience of fighting over things and of watching others fight over things.

A preschool director in Tokyo said of the children’s desire to be part of the *gyarari* watching the fights: “There is no single thing that is not their business. Everything that happens here is everybody’s business, as long as they are at the preschool. They live together.”

The value Japanese educators place on the socializing power of the gaze of others contrasts with Foucault’s notion of panopticism, and more generally with discourses in Western scholarship on visibility and power. In Western educational discourse, it is the teacher, with eyes in the back of her head and trained in the importance of setting up her classroom so all her students are always visible to her, whose gaze maintains classroom order. In contrast, in the Japanese early childhood classroom it is the group of children who are encouraged to

keep each other in view and to use their collective gaze to maintain order. In such a classroom power is more diffuse, and not concentrated in the teacher.

In *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault describes several regimes of visibility, several versions of the power of the gaze. The first is the Spectacle, as represented in his description of the public torture and execution of a regicide in 17th century France. The second is the Dungeon. The notion of discipline most readers take from Foucault's book as being emblematic of our modern condition is the Panopticon, the prison invented by Jeremy Bentham and analyzed by Foucault in which a single guard peering out through a small window can surveil and thereby control a hundred or more prisoners housed in a grid of cells. But for Foucault the more chillingly effective form of surveillance is the internalization of the Panopticon and the rise of the self-monitoring, self-judging, self-punishing modern ego. This inward disciplining gaze is created in the contemporary child in contemporary Western society both at home and also in the preschool, where the goal is that he eventually need not be watched by others once he has learned to watch himself. The discourse of Japanese early childhood education emphasizes neither control of misbehavior by the surveillance of the teacher (the panopticon model) nor control through the self-regulation of the individual members of the class (the internalization model) but instead control through collective responsibility and collective surveillance and vigilance. In this model the gaze is the gaze of a gallery, not of a guard. And the gaze is seen as primarily prosocial and humanizing, rather than as draconian and dehumanizing.

Most writing on *seken* emphasizes the positive effect this generalizing gaze has on would-be or actual miscreants, whose impulse to misbehave is controlled by fear of public censure and shame. But we suggest that the experience of being part of a *seken*, and sharing in administering the collective gaze is also beneficial for the gazers who have an opportunity to participate in intense emotional experiences and to experience the sense of community such shared participation produces in all involved. Shimizu discusses a scene of a *gyarari* in Meiji-era Japan collectively experiencing deep emotion, as described in a story by Lacadio Hearn, about an incident he witnessed in which a thief who had killed a policeman who pursued him was captured and brought to the town square where he was brought face to face with the wife and son of his victim. Hearn describes what happened as the traumatized boy burst into tears in front of the captured criminal:

The crowd seemed to have stopped breathing. I saw the prisoner's features distort; I saw him suddenly dash himself down upon his knees despite his fetters, and beat his face into the dust, crying out the while in a passion of hoarse remorse that made one's heart shake: "Pardon! Pardon! Pardon me, little one! That I did—not for hate was it done, but in mad fear only, in my desire to escape. Very, very wicked I have been; great unspeakable wrong have I done you! But now for my sin I go to die. I wish I die; I am glad to die! Therefore, o little one, be pitiful!—Forgive me!" The child still cried silently. The officer raised the shaking criminal; the dumb crowd parted left and right to let them by. Then, quite suddenly, the whole multitude began to sob. [Hearn 1896:11]

We can say that this is a kind of gaze that stands outside the Western genealogy of optical disciplinary regimes described by Foucault. Or, if we were to categorize it according to

Foucault's types, we would have to say it is the gaze not of the Panopticon, the Dungeon, nor of internalized self-scrutiny, but instead a gaze closer to the logic of the Spectacle and to an era when emotionally charged interactions were watched and emotionally experienced by the community, a shared experience considered beneficial for all involved.

### The Teachers' Role

This implicit cultural practice of teachers not intervening in children's disputes does not mean never intervening, but instead having nonintervention in children's fights as an option, a strategy they can deploy. In the segment of the video from Komatsudani, the teacher, Morita-sensei, chooses to not intervene as the girls fight over the bear. However when the fight seemed to her to be on the verge of getting out of control, Morita-sensei called out from across the room, "Kora Kora" (Hey, Hey). A teacher in Tokyo complimented her on this light-handed strategic intervention, which she suggested allowed the children to continue working out the problem in their own way, by cueing them to be thoughtful about their behavior without directly intervening: "See, when the teacher called out to them, how they turned from being physical to being verbal." Morita-sensei's strategic use of a subtle intervention in this dispute can be said to have scaffolded the girls' interaction, providing opportunities for children to practice collective control.

In the Madoka video we see Kaizuka-sensei intervene much more aggressively in the dispute between the two boys, which she ended up mediating. But there are other times during the day we videotaped in her classroom that we saw Kaizuka-sensei choose not to intervene in fights. Like Morita-sensei, Kaizuka-sensei strategically chooses when to intervene and when to stay back. In *Preschool in Three Cultures Revisited* our analysis of the hair pulling and pinching incident focused on what the two fighting boys learned from the way Kaizuka-sensei mediated and scaffolded their exploration of their feelings and led them through a process of apology and reconciliation. Now, as we pull back our focus, and notice the children on the periphery of this mediated discussion, we can see how Kaizuka-sensei's intervention also created an opportunity for a *gyarari* to form and for a group of children to experience vicarious emotion, empathize, and learn.

The reasoning behind the noninterventionist strategy is to give children ample opportunities to deal with socially complex situations including arguments and fights. This reasoning does not require that teachers never intervene, just that do not always or usually intervene. Kaizuka's stated policy on disputing in children's physical disputes is almost exactly the same as Morita-sensei's:

When there's a fight among children, I watch and wait and try to decide if they are really attempting to hurt each other, or if it is just rough play. It is sometimes hard to tell. If it looks like it's getting to be too rough or that it might get out of control, I tell them to be less rough, but I don't tell them to stop.

In deciding whether or not to intervene both teachers say they use the strategy of *mimamoru*, of observing and "standing guard" instead of immediately taking action. This strategy is

related to a pedagogical approach called “machi no hoiku” [caring for children by waiting], an approach that although not formally taught in Japanese colleges of education or stated in the official curriculum guides, is employed by preschool teachers across Japan. As a preschool teacher in Tokyo explained to us: “Japanese teachers wait till children solve their problems on their own. Children know their abilities, what they can do. So we wait. It could be said that we are able to wait because we believe in children.” Mimamoru and machi no hoiku are not easy to practice. They are not a passive absence of action but instead a strategic deployment of nonaction, a strategy, like other Japanese regimens of self-control, that takes years of experience to master. Morita-sensei told us, “After five years of teaching I’m just starting to feel like I know what I am doing and to have confidence that I can make the right decisions about when to act and when to hold back and watch.” Retired director Yoshizawa sensei told us: “It takes a real care for a professional to tell the difference between rough-play and a real fight. It takes at least five years.” Director Kumagai of Senzan Yochien in Kyoto commented on the fighting scene at Komatsudani by saying:

This teacher can wait because she has three years experiences of working in a day-care center. First year teachers can’t wait. This is the big difference between an experienced preschool teacher and most young parents. Watching and waiting (*mimamoru*) is very difficult for parents. If most parents were at school and they saw their children in a fight like this, they couldn’t stand it. They’d have to do something. So would inexperienced teachers. That’s why we need experienced teachers, who can stand back and watch and wait. Children need to be given opportunities to experience life in the gray zone, where things aren’t just black and white. When teachers intervene too quickly, it’s like they are picking a bud before it has a chance to flower.

The role of the teacher in such a classroom is demanding. Children need to know you are paying enough attention to give them confidence that someone will be there to keep things from getting totally out of control. But the teachers’ presence, her watchfulness, has to be soft enough so children take responsibility, and so they perform primarily not for her but, rather, for and in interaction with their classmates. Morita-sensei artfully manages this balancing act, as she shifts back and forth from acting as if she is not paying attention to the fighting children to occasionally letting them know that she is watching. The art of teaching in such a classroom, which is to say the art of Japanese preschool teaching, is to be aware of what is happening while seeming to be not watching. In their review of observational learning Gaskins and Paradise (2009) emphasize that when children are allowed to follow their interests and are given only minimal feedback, “They take initiative in directing their attention and finding or creating activities to practice on their own skills they have not yet mastered” (p. 97).

By avoiding being the audience for the children’s performance, Morita-sensei allows for a child-oriented, childlike piece of drama to unfold. Several of the Japanese teachers commented that the children in the fighting scene at Komatsudani are “acting *kodomorashii* (childlike).” Although Kaizuka-sensei’s interventionist approach seems to be the opposite from Morita-sensei’s, there is a deeper similarity. Morita-sensei intervenes with the fighting boys, but not with the *gyarari* who gathers around them. Both teachers allow children on the



periphery of these fights to take on the roles of the audience, of the legitimately peripherally participating classroom community.

## Conclusion

To suggest that the kind of peripheral participation we have described here, emphasizing a group of children observing, empathetically experiencing, and getting involved in classmates' disputes is characteristically Japanese is not to suggest that such beliefs and practices are unique to Japan. We are not suggesting that there is anything unusual about preschool children becoming peripheral participants in other children's fights. What we are suggesting is cultural and characteristically Japanese is how Japanese teachers respond to such fights and the way they think and talk about their practice. The chapters on Japan in the two *Preschool in Three Cultures* books argued that the Japanese noninterventionist approach to children's fighting is an implicit cultural practice of Japanese early childhood education that allows the fighting children to experience a range of emotions and to benefit from the opportunity to work out their own solutions to disputes. Here we have expanded this analysis by adding that the Japanese teachers' goal is to encourage not just the protagonists at the center of the fight, but also the wider group of children who gather around fights to explore, collectively, childlike solutions to disputes. Rather than telling the galleries of peripherally participating children "To move away" or "This is none of your business," they allow and quietly encourage children to get involved in everything that goes on in the classroom.

In calling this approach characteristically Japanese we are not suggesting that it is uniquely Japanese or uniquely suited to be used as a strategy in the Japanese context. Our suspicion is that preschool teachers in other cultures also at least sometimes allow noncombatants to peripherally participate in their classmates fights, rather than shooing them away. An area for future research would be to study legitimate peripheral participation in children's fights in preschools in other cultures.

Our article also has potentially useful implications for practice. One of our goals in describing and explicating the Japanese emic approach to legitimate peripheral participation in fights is to present to early childhood education practitioners and teacher educators in the United States and other countries an approach to dealing with children's fighting that they might consider adapting in their own classrooms.

In closing, we would add that although our focus in this work has been on the *gyarari* that form around fights, we have reason to believe that Japanese early childhood educators are equally supportive of peripheral participation of children in other emotion-laden events, such as children experiencing sadness (Hayashi et al. 2009). Fights are dramatic, but they are far from the only dramas that take place everyday in preschool classrooms. For example, in the Komatsudani video, there is a scene of Nao arriving at school and having a difficult time separating from her mother at the gate. Sachi, who has been watching this unfolding drama from a few meters away, then approaches Nao, and helps her make the transition to her life

in the preschool. Studies of peripheral participation in Japanese classrooms should be expanded to other domains, cognitive as well as social and emotional.

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