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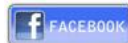
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Sugino, Toshiko (2008) *Nikkei Brazilians at a Brazilian School in Japan: Factors Affecting Language Decisions and Education*. Tokyo: Keio University Press.

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This book introduces the reader to an important dilemma in Japanese society that has received too little attention within Japanese scholarship: the presence and role of ethnic schools in Japan. A small private school for the Portuguese-speaking community of Hamamatsu provides a look at how immigrant families known as Nikkeijin attempt to bridge their ethnic and linguistic worlds while surviving in an unexpectedly difficult host nation. The school provides a venue for the author's effort to assess the ethnolinguistic vitality of the Portuguese speaking community in Hamamatsu. Professor Sugino's work offers both the benefits of its dissertation source as well as the drawbacks. We are given a conceptual framework, and a lucid presentation of the research process, including some

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of the false starts and limitations often omitted from academic publications. The step by step path, with its detours and improvised solutions, exposes the project to criticism. However, the importance of this topic to understanding contemporary life in Japan, combined with a persistent curiosity on the part of the author, result in a valuable and unique report.

The project involves a few individuals within a small segment of a minority community in one mid-sized Japanese city. In an attempt to balance the limited sample and single site, the author also uses survey data that reaches a more diverse, though still small, population. The efforts to obtain a larger range of voices were met with an interesting variety of resistance—both official and personal—to open discussion of educational policy and life among an uncertain immigrant community. It is in the depth of the ethnographic work that we find value, though she is careful to explain the limitations of such specificity.

The author's central interest is parental choice of language of instruction for children of Brazilian families who are attempting to maintain a Portuguese ability for their children while surviving in a Japan unable to adapt to the educational needs of these children. Criticism of Japanese schools in the community is muted both by a lack of informants' willingness to be interviewed and the limited exposure to "regular" schools on the part of the children attending the Brazilian school at the heart of the study. The readers are left to their own knowledge of how immigrant (newcomer) children have survived the trials of Japanese schooling. For my part, I can attest that these children face a painful and normally unsuccessful effort for which teachers are woefully unprepared, although often heroically inclined to be helpful.

The author combines her visits and interviews with educators and staff within the Brazilian school and a few parental conversations with a survey of her mixed sample in an effort to unravel a decision-making process that is necessarily varied due to the circumstances and attitudes of each family. What emerges are the difficulties faced by would-be temporary immigrants as they balance the educational challenges of their children. What gives this community a special poignancy is the larger context of Japan's effort to meet labor force needs without diluting

its presumed racial homogeneity. The author effectively sets the context of both persistent and newcomer diversity so that we arrive at our designated school in Hamamatsu with a ready empathy for the difficult decisions that our Nikkei parents will have to make. These individuals simultaneously face a Japanese economy unable to continue its prosperity, for which they have traveled such distances and made such sacrifices, and a society ill-equipped to tolerate diversity in this Brazilian community, no matter how pure the Japanese ancestry of at least one family member.

In providing the details of her work, the author provides numerous blow-by-blow accounts of what takes place in the small and ill-equipped classrooms. Her reactions to the students and teacher behavior set up an interesting contrast with the authors' own schooling experience. However, if the author had explored more low-income schools, especially "konan ko" or troubled schools, in both immigrant and non-immigrant communities, she may have found far less of a contrast. In any case, this aspect of the book does not significantly contribute to the main research questions. The reasons for parental choice of the Brazilian school and its Portuguese language of instruction are not related to classroom discipline or school facilities.

The few interviews and the more extensive survey results point to a parental frustration with Japanese schooling for their Portuguese-speaking children as well as a hoped-for return to the Brazilian homeland in time for their children to receive an adequate education. This equivocation sets children up for potential failure in an educational system like Japan's which is relatively lock-stepped. While the official recognition of the school by Brazilian authorities continues to support that hopeful return to the home country, the economic imperative of Nikkei life in Japan often postpones that result well beyond realization. As the school attendance and graduation rates so plainly demonstrate, the children of South American Nikkei families are failing to reach the levels of Japanese schooling required to move beyond a life of difficult labor and marginalized existence. Professor Sugino's work shows clearly how frustrating and ultimately unsuccessful the efforts of Nikkei parents continue to be.

The solutions are not easy to come by. The inability of adults to honestly and accurately assess the complex realities of living in Japan as foreign laborers is complicated by the awareness that they are of Japanese ancestry but are treated as The Other, and have been allowed to enter due to the assumption that they will blend in, meaning not cause trouble. However, the government has in fact created problems by giving them this dual and contradictory identity. They are Japanese but they are not. They have come to do the work that other Japanese nationals would not deign to engage in. Meanwhile children are left to dangle between the frustration of surviving “regular” Japanese schools which have made little or no preparation for them, or irregular, unofficial “schools” set up by the Brazilian government which preclude transition into Japanese schooling and society.

In her concluding discussion, the author addresses the strength of ethnolinguistic vitality among the families in question and provides a good case for the continuation of Portuguese language use among this immigrant community. However, a major source of that strength is the likelihood that their immigrant life is temporary and return to their Brazilian and Portuguese-speaking homeland is imminent in their perception. The vitality of Portuguese among those families and children who choose not or simply are unable to return diminishes rapidly where there is little or no support for native language maintenance in Japanese schooling and minimal recognition of ethnic schooling in general. I certainly concur with the author’s views that her work should encourage more research among Japan’s minority communities and their language needs, both old and newcomer; that a blend of quantitative and qualitative methods is needed; and that such research may lead to a broader understanding of Japan as an immigrant nation and the resultant need for multicultural education within all schools.

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