

# Empowerment through School Events in Japanese Education

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## Abstract

This study investigates the potential of Japanese sports festival undōkai held at national schools for student empowerment. Undōkai is an obligatory event for all the students in formal education in Japan. It requires 1-month preparation and involves the entire school including teachers of all subjects, parents and members of local community. This research challenges the idea of establishing indicators for empowerment evaluation in education i.e. school projects or festivals based on the case from Japan. The research combines indicators for empowerment evaluation from education and community development while keeping in mind ideas of cross-disciplinary empowerment studies represented by different researchers with a focus on the idea that the result of taking action by empowered-to-be subject is not important as both success and failure lead to improvements to their levels. Utilized methodology included observation, document analysis and cross-disciplinary literature review. Observation area consisted of 1 primary school in developing city area where fieldwork lasted 1 month and 1 high school in the countryside of the Western Japan with fieldwork between October 2018 and July 2019. It confirmed undōkai being an example of school festival built on the idea of cooperation and inclusion which structure is closely related to one of projects. It also showed that facilitation plays the biggest role in student empowerment, not necessarily the school level. School festivals provide space for implementing skills different than the ones used in everyday school activities such as: leadership, short-term goal setting and its execution with results noticeable in a relatively short time.

**Keywords:** Empowerment Evaluation; Facilitation; School Festival; Student Empowerment; Undōkai.

## 1. Introduction

Empowerment has been a popular development slogan for decades and is often limited to the concept of women empowerment while it is a necessary to make it a goal for all people in the world. Especially nowadays where the value of human individuals is questioned over robotics. This paper challenges establishing indicators for empowerment evaluation in education i.e. school projects or festivals based on the case of undōkai - a sports festival included in the national curriculum of Japan.

Its aim is to show the potential of school events and teachers' facilitation towards empowerment of students. It is commonly understood that education equals knowledge which leads to empowerment, but what kind of factors support empowerment and why Japanese sports festival is unique for its empowering values?

### **1.1 Empowerment in global and Japanese education**

Freire was among the ones who started describing the concept of empowerment. He was the first to do so in the field of education, but his work transcends the disciplines, as status and power do not exist without the oppressed which are present anywhere in the world. In his work oppressors are defined as “those who deny personal autonomy of others by imposing a worldview paradigm onto the oppressed that denies them the power to direct their own lives” (Kidd, n.d.). Freire also describes that reflection is an important part of getting out of oppression and transforming the world. “When the oppressed believe in themselves, they must reflect and act on changing their world”. He admits that getting out of oppression is extremely difficult as many people do not consider themselves oppressed or oppressors. He goes further stating that oppression is an act of violence (Kidd, n.d.) so in a way empowerment may be a way to peace. However, it cannot be achieved by switching positions of the oppressed with the oppressors, rather by recovering equal rights and voice (Kidd, n.d.). Freire also mentions that oppressed suffer from low self-esteem which is one of the components towards empowerment as shown by Bandura. Freire's criticism of the banking education concept might have had influence on the curriculums we have now. Ashcroft (1987) noticed that empowerment itself is a such a unique concept that cannot be replaced with any other wording, but at the same time it is an “educational jargon” or “the latest buzz word for the academic community”. They also notice it is controversial and risky, because of its political aspects, however it is important in education philosophy. The article titled “Defusing "Empowering": The What and the Why” strips down the literal meaning of the word “empowerment” and explains its roots what brought this definition of empowerment: bringing into a state of belief one's ability to act effectively. According to Duhon-Haynes (1996) teachers play a crucial role in this process by the initiation and facilitation of effective relationships between teachers and students. Ashcroft also discusses Buscaglia's (1978) understanding of Maslow's term of a self-actualized individual which is “becoming the powerful forces ourselves, not puppets manipulated by outside forces”. She states that “empowering can't be something you do some hours of the school day or certain periods of the week. It is conscious and committed and pervasive (...)”. Empowering in schools needs to be a philosophy of education”. She also referred to Elbow's (1981) idea that “Belief is the source of child's power” and what is more important is that he noticed that people can forget about their power. The difference between external and internal empowerment is going to be discussed later in this paper. Sleeter (1991) in her work “Empowerment through Multicultural Education” notices that the importance of empowering students has long been recognized by various researchers. However, the concept is misunderstood or still new to many teachers as they limit it to the idea of a “melting pot” only (Sleeter, 1991). She also discusses the importance of multicultural education for empowerment as education is a tool for social change and emancipation and brings up Banks' view on the school: “the

School itself is contradictory, since it often expounds democratic values while at the same time contradicting them. The school does socialize students into the existing social structure; it also enables some students to acquire knowledge, attitudes and skills needed to participate effectively in social action and social change” what in a way could be interpret as the struggle of balancing the curriculum between local and global values or universal and contextual empowerment. Her attitude towards

education as empowerment also shows the old thinking regarding the concept. UNESCO has also shown changes in their approach towards empowerment of people over the years as it is no longer consistently focusing on empowerment of women, but both men and women. Regions struggling in the area of gender issues still receive necessary attention in that aspect, while others are challenged to improve their own drawbacks (UNESCO, 1995, 1998, 2015). Duhon-Haynes (1996) has summarized different researches on empowerment in education and came up with clear indicators for its measurement. They are going to be discussed in the Methodology chapter. Concerning empowerment in Japan the biggest inspiration for this research was previously mentioned picture book “Miki’s First Errand” written by Yoriko Tsutsui and published in 1976. A TV series of the same title was broadcasted for the first time in 1991 and continues until today. It shows struggles of children usually aged between 2 and 6 finishing errands given to them by their parents. The show gives us a glimpse of what Japanese attitude towards kids is like as in the program community members do not interfere kids actions, but they provide facilitation. *Ikiru Chikara* (official translation: zest for living, 1996) is a Japanese set of qualities developed in 1996 and fully implemented from 2002 that describes the principles of education in Japan. It is believed that students need to be equipped with these to live in the contemporary world.

1. The abilities and the qualities conducive to identifying problems for themselves, studying on their own initiative and thinking for themselves, exercising their own judgment and acting independently, and solving problems properly;
2. A rich sense of humanity, embracing an ability to self-control, a willingness to cooperate with others, and a heart that allows them to care about others and to be sensitive to valuable and precious things;
3. The health and physical strength enable them to live an active life.

(...) “The Council stressed that for children to be able to cultivate this “competences for positive living”, it was important for the school, the home and the community to collaborate together” (Saito, n.d. p. 10)

This idea of collaboration is especially strong in Japan, also shown in Aizawa’s work. “Japanese strength in education is not only about high levels of academic achievement but is also about their system of schooling and their social constitution. Other scholars have celebrated the value of cooperation, community, and association, emphasized in primary and lower secondary schools” (Aizawa, 2016). Having a look at Aims of school events and sport events by MEXT we can observe that the practical part is included here.

### **Aims of School Events**

To develop good relationship, including deepening students’ sense of belongingness and solidarity and nurturing their social mind to build a better school through cooperation and bringing up people willing to volunteer and take action. Adapted from: Chapter 5: Special Activities, Course of Study “Ikiru Chikara”

The aims consist of 3 parts: 1. Deepening students’ sense of belongingness and solidarity Sense of belongingness is said to be the strongest and the most unique part of Japanese education as in Aizawa. 2.

Nurturing their social mind to build a better school through cooperation. The second one shows that students’ input is respected and considered valuable for the future development of school and its social ties. 3. Bringing up people willing to volunteer and take action. While the last one covers the most challenging part of empowerment which is taking action. It was not discussed in aims of school subjects

such as History, Geography and Civics mentioned earlier in this paper what shows the importance of school events for overall children's education in regards of empowerment.

### **Aims of Health Safety & Physical Education Events**

To deepen interest in whole body and soul development and good health maintenance and achieve safe and disciplined collective behaviour, good attitude towards physical activities, cultivate sense of responsibility and solidarity and improve physical strength through various activities. Adapted from: Chapter 5: Special Activities, Course of Study "Ikiru Chikara".

Apart from physical development, soul development is considered an important part of sport activities, however it is not specified what soul development is. Achievement of save and disciplined collective behaviour may be highlighted due to Japan's history of natural disasters along with the value of discipline in the country's context.

The integrated studies period (*Sôgôgakushû no jikan*) is a time slot in which each school is expected to develop their own learning activities without using textbooks (Saito, n.d.) through interdisciplinary project-oriented activities (Hamamoto, n.d.). Going further into aims of integrated studies by MEXT we can see a big difference in approaches between the regular curriculum and integrated studies as regular curriculum tends to stop at the point of reflection, whereas integrated study period wants to go further and provide solutions, promoting students' problem-solving abilities and self-learning skills (Hamamoto, n.d.). It shows that integrated study period is crucial for the "active" component of empowerment definition. Ashida (2002) describes how "appropriate advice" differs from "interference" in the course of developing a plan for a school festival, but according to his observation and fieldwork conducted for this study teachers' attitude towards preparation and organization of sports day at school is closer to the one described in "Aims of integrated studies" by MEXT. The challenge lies in effective support of students' ideas and facilitation. Implementation of integrated study period abroad might be challenging due to curriculum differences, however using the aims as indicators for leading school projects is visible. MEXT defines the integrated curriculum as environmental, social experience based on observation, experimentation, research, problem-solving and real-life learning with a lot of freedom for teachers to conduct projects and activities they create themselves (MacDonald, 2006). This autonomy along with following the idea of *Ikiru Chikara* in regards of 2 aims for students (below) and suggestion of utilizing local community uniqueness (MacDonald, 2006) indicate empowering values the community, its students and teachers.

1. Foster children's ability and quality to find a theme, think, judge and solve a problem on their own;
- and 2. Enable children to think about their own life, urging them to explore subjects with creativity and subjectivity and to solve problems through their own ways of learning and thinking.

Adapted From: MEXT. Education Reform in the 21st Century (2001).

### **1.7 Attachment**

Strzelecka, Woosnam and Bynum Boley (2017) conducted a study about empowerment of local residents and its relationship with tourism development and classified empowerment into 3 spheres Political Empowerment: knowledge and information lead to empowerment along with its transfer and local leaders. Psychological Empowerment: occurs when actions promote self-esteem and pride Social Empowerment: community cohesion as a result of actions sustaining strong local relationships with place attachment being a foundation. The study shows human drives for taking actions in the field of

Tourism. Attachment to school, a teacher, and feeling as a member of community or sense of belongingness may contribute towards students' empowerment and taking action.

### 1.8 Empowerment through events

Cudny (2016) in his work “Festivalisation of Urban Spaces: Factors, Processes and Effects” discusses roles and values of community events. He analyzes the background of the word and then goes into describing the uniqueness of each time an event takes place as even if it is regular it consists of interactions of its participants with their surroundings at the given time. He goes further stating that missing an event is a “lost opportunity”. Festivals are differentiated from events as they are often themed and shared within agricultural, religious or social communities. However contemporary film or music festivals share the same (border-free) values, language and history. Cudny (2016) showcased a view on festivals represented by Piette who believes that “festival is said to destroy social convention in order to reinforce it” and allows people to periodically escape their social roles and enjoy the spur of the moment what could be observed in ancient Greece and Rome (Cudny, 2016). Those special activities, conducted for the event are said to “evoke feelings and emotions different” from regular and make “interpersonal relations more profound, integrating the community as well as building social identity and social capital. The latter consists of interpersonal ties, relationships, acquaintances and cooperation within a community”. Ashida (2002) included a similar description of undōkai in his paper as “the festival was not to be considered ordinary or everyday-like in any sense. Everything about the day was to be special, including the contents of the boxed lunches” (p. 198).

## 2. Methodology: indicators and perspectives

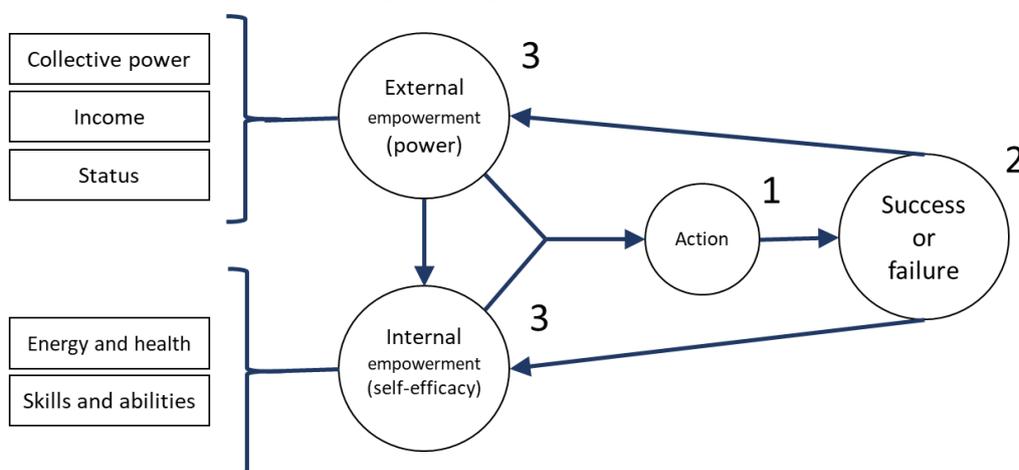
Empowerment being a lifetime process is indeed difficult to measure, but as discussed before, for some, the entire educational process itself is considered the pathway towards empowerment. Curriculums are set within nations according to which their educational plans are the best possible for their young citizens, their future. However, young people’s empowerment is dependent on their teachers, as both of them together are responsible for relationships they develop. Teachers are expected to act as facilitators, while they lack indicators. Analyzing different perspectives on empowerment as phenomenon this research came up with a mix of indicators expected to facilitate empowerment at school. It is essential to state that these are used for developing a universal empowerment model for schools, which does not necessarily support local needs. In the case of Japan discipline is considered an important aspect of schooling, required and expected from all the society members, including students after graduating. For this reason, adjustment of these indicators for Japan should include discipline as an important factor for contextual empowerment, however if conducted properly student should be able to understand the need for discipline in Japanese society on their own as Narayan stated “Empowerment as a value and phenomenon is clearly universal. People all over the world (...), want to feel efficacious, to exert control over their lives, and to have some freedom of choice among options” (Narayan, 2005). Then, it is up to them to decide whether they comply to social rules or not. This might be the reason why empowerment is considered a risky value. Similarly, Oppenheim Mason (2003) has conducted a study in five different countries and discovered that social and cultural systems influence the domestic sphere of lives of women more rather than their individual traits. Respectively, Narayan (2005) shows that empowerment indicators need to be adjusted to research areas bringing up an example of Bangladesh and Jamaica. While in Bangladesh women need to receive permission from a male household member when leaving, in Jamaica women can move freely. Such cultural differences make it difficult to utilize the indicator of women’s movement universally. However, if we are to introduce scales and look into belief of feeling empowered of groups in question more viable results might be

obtained as “Individual traits and experiences such as education, health, or paid employment may influence women’s empowerment, but they do not automatically determine it” rather community norms do (Narayan, 2005).

### 2.1 Empowerment and motivation

Sometimes the concept of empowerment is mixed up with the one for motivation as they are closely related. Motivations on its own can lead to burnout regardless its intrinsic or extrinsic, whereas empowerment when external is to finish when its resources are exploit, while internal empowerment (self-efficacy) will keep us going forward as long as we have physical energy and aims. According to Bandura (1994), a researcher on self-efficacy: “People’s beliefs that they can produce desired effects by their actions influence the choices they make, their aspirations, level of effort and perseverance, resilience to adversity, and vulnerability to stress and depression”. Ed Diener and Robert Biswas-Diener (in Narayan, 2005) stress the importance of internal feelings of competence, energy, and the desire to act as external conditions such as money or status are not strong factors for empowerment. They believe that the most important aspect of empowerment is not objective power but feelings of power because physically having power is not an equivalent of being empowered or willing to take action (Diener, Biswas-Diener, 2005). Moreover, having similar abilities and resources empowerment level differs between people, thus psychological aspects such as self-confidence and self-efficacy influence the ability to take action (Diener, Biswas-Diener, 2005).

Figure 1. Two Types of Empowerment Are Necessary for Deliberate Action.



Adapted from: *Psychological Empowerment and Subjective Well-Being* (Diener, Biswas-Diener, 2005, as in Narayan, 2005)

Similarly to motivation there are two types of empowerment: external (power in its first meaning) and internal (self-efficacy) which are not differentiated in definitions of empowerment. In business or communities i.e. schools having members that complement each other with either qualities, but this research focuses on internal empowerment. It is crucial to notice that any action leads to either success or failure and either of those may have influence on the subject of empowerment (both individual or group, anybody). Referring back to Cudny’s research on events, any kind of participation in these will have an empowering effect on the participant as the result of this participation is not important, but the active part of taking action is what fuels empowerment.

*Table 1. Adapted indicators to assess empowerment facilitation methods in school (Stone, 1995, as in Duhon-Haynes, 1996), Factors for effectiveness of empowering relationships between students and teachers (Nel, 1993, as in Duhon-Haynes, 1996), Areas of Empowerment to be improved for students' learning and teachers' work (Stone, 1995, as*

*In Duhon-Haynes, 1996), Empowerment Evaluation Principles in Practice: Assessing Levels of Commitment (Fetterman, 2005)*

Indicator	Description
1. Ownership	Ownership gives teachers the sense that they have as much right as administrators to make changes. Ownership for children is the feeling that the classroom is theirs, too, not just the teacher's (Robinson, 1994 as in Duhon-Haynes)
2. Choice.	Teachers should be able to make choices about curriculum, instructional materials, even staff Choice for children may take many forms. They may choose what they want to study, how they will study it, which centers or projects they would like to experience, and how long they will spend on learning experiences.
3. Autonomy	Teachers need to be able to set their own goals and action plans, and children should be able to set their own goals and chart their own progress.
4. Decision-making.	Empowered teachers decide what to teach, how to teach, what materials to use and how to assess students. Empowered children also make decisions that affect the classroom, including what topics to pursue and how to implement curricular choices. According to Kohn (1993, as in Duhon-Haynes), children learn how to make decisions by making decisions, not by following them.
5. Responsible	Empowered teachers and children become increasingly responsible for the decisions that affect their lives. As Kohn (1993, as in Duhon-Haynes) noted, "If we want children to take responsibility for their own behavior, we must first give them responsibility, and plenty of it".
6. Independent	Stone asserted that when teachers are empowered to make their own decisions, the teachers initially exhibit high degrees of dependency. The principal's encouragement helped the teachers become independent.
7. Risk-taker	Empowered teachers also experience the freedom to take risks, which is important for growth and change. Empowerment releases the bonds of failure and frees children to go on learning.
8. Collaborator	Empowered teachers are more at ease collaborating, for they feel less of a need to compete. Empowered children also enjoy the lack of competition with others in class and tend to be more thoughtful and cooperative.
9. Self-evaluator	The empowered teacher continually evaluates established goals in order to formulate new ones. Empowered children engage in self-evaluation in order to set their own learning goals
	10. Incorporation of students' language and culture into the school culture / program;
	11. Encouragement of minority community participation as an integral component of children's education;
	12. Promotion of intrinsic motivation in minority students to use language actively to generate their own knowledge;
	13. Teachers becoming advocates for minority students in assessment procedures
14. Respect.	The empowered teacher is viewed as a respected professional who has the knowledge and ability to participate in the school's change. Respecting children involves recognizing and accepting who they are and what they do. Individual learning rates and styles must be respected and honored.
15. Validation.	Validation often means sharing your knowledge of an individual's worth with someone else.

16. Success.	We should not diminish teachers' status by focusing on weaknesses, rather we must acknowledge their strengths. Drucker (1989) suggested that "education must focus on the strengths and talents of learners so that they can excel in whatever it is that they do well ... one cannot build performance on weakness, even correct ones. One can build performance only on strengths"
A. Improvement	Help people improve program performance
B. Community ownership	Value and facilitate community control
C. Inclusion	Invite involvement, participation, and diversity
D. Democratic participation	Open participation and fair decision making
E. Social justice	Address social inequities in society
F. Community knowledge	Respect and value community knowledge
G. Evidence-based strategies	Respect and use both community and scholarly knowledge
H. Capacity building	Enhance stakeholder ability to evaluate and improve planning and implementation
I. Organizational learning	Apply data to evaluate and implement practices and inform decision making
J. Accountability	Emphasize outcomes and accountability

As Fetterman designed these indicators having community development in mind this research combined his indicators with ones from Stone and Duhon-Haynes which tackle empowerment facilitation methods in school. Undōkai being obligatory and one of the biggest school festivals in Japan and a yearly tradition also need to include Cudny's perspective on festivals as community events, along with Diener and Biswas-Diener's view on action leading towards empowerment. All of them, combined can help assess empowering values of undōkai as it is both a community and a school event as a part of national curriculum and understand its cultural value.

Observation was conducted in two schools: primary school in rural, developing city area (school A) and high school combined with junior high school in rural, developing city area (school B). It lasted roughly 1 month in school A from 07.05.2018 till 08.06.2018 and from October 2018 till July 2019 in school B (once a week after undōkai was finished). I had a chance to observe regular classes in both school during this time as well. However, due to complexity of observation it was not possible to provide full attention in looking in the case of junior high school students.

### 3. Results

Undōkai is a Japanese sport event, which focuses on the idea of cooperation and inclusion over competition. It is an obligatory event for all the school students and teachers that requires at least a month of preparation. Every student needs to participate in a competition, at lower level races are obligatory for each student, but they still form groups for other performances and competitions. Due to the rule that every student needs to participate in the race the whole event itself takes a long time (inclusion). Usually it is held on one day of the weekend starting from 9AM till 3PM. It requires preparation beforehand not only for the sport competitions, but also school facilities. Teacher and community members set up stalls and equipment one day before the event or early in the morning on the day.

The event is packed with teamwork-

based competitions that strengthen bonds between students and sometimes their teachers and parents as well. They are designed in a way that anyone can enjoy despite their skill level and the focus of each is put on cooperation over competition. Every school has its own twists and traditions, but most of the competitions are more or less the same or repetitive in different schools. They include: entire grade of students pulling a big ball over their heads while the beginning of the formation moves to the back to continue the race or again entire scattered on the ground in moving structures built of 4 students with a king on top. The task is to steal baseball caps from opposite formations.

Project-like implementation of undōkai provides space for students to utilize skills such as leadership, goal setting and execution with noticeable to them results in a relatively short time span. Effectiveness of empowering values of the festival are dependent on facilitators and different individuals within the school. Primary school in comparison to high school had more activities towards inclusion of the community members in the project, however it is not dependent on the school level at all, but the approach of its members. While indicators observed within high school activities remained more saturated what may suggest more impactful empowering value than at primary school. High school students had more ownership, choice, autonomy, independence and were more active in the process of decision-making regarding issues related to the festival. On the other hand, it is just a matter of planning to implement such wide range of empowering indicators in primary school projects.

Undōkai's festival aspect plays an important role due to its challenging impact on the community members as they get out of their usual, everyday life social roles and develop their ties. It is clear that indicators do not cover all aspects of empowerment through participation in events as they also relate to classroom environment. No scale was utilized what makes it difficult to say whether e.g. collaboration is stronger in primary or high school level. However, as these are different educational levels with different needs and expectations utilizing a scale might be viable when comparing different schools at the same grade level or when assessing teachers' input on facilitation of their students' empowerment. Collaboration itself is also dependent on factors not shown in this study. Additionally, disempowering comments (against the indicators) are not analyzed or given negative marks in the overall assessment of undōkai. However, the results show that both students and teachers are to benefit from participation in such events. Analyzing these indicators only in the context of events is difficult as empowerment is a long-time process that takes place constantly in various life spheres. It is impossible to say when it starts and when it ends as experiences accumulate and students reflect on those.

It is essential to point out that in the case of undōkai all students throughout Japan are to join the event in various communities, combinations, teams etc. All of them have an equal opportunity whose impact is dependent on the facilitation skills of their teachers. School events should be given similar importance, attention and obligatory structure in schools all over the world, so every student receives a chance to improve their own empowerment outside of regular class activities and feel a part of their school community. Importance of role models cannot be forgotten, as students mimic teachers' behaviour when they take up their position class.

Table 2. Contextual characteristics of Empowerment in Japanese schools

Empowerment in Japanese schools	
Strengths	Weaknesses
A. Treatment of students as a group	
A1. Obligatory and inclusive school events	A4. Strict time restrictions limiting students' natural reflections. Usually they are forced.
A2. Multiple school communities i. e. circles, classrooms, grades	A5. Following rules for the sake of rules – no critical thinking
A3. Teacher's approach: group harmony, unity and praising, collaboration between students and teachers	A6. No direct criticism
B. Discipline as a strong factor of contextual empowerment	
C. Anxiety over universal empowerment	

#### 4. Conclusion

The process of empowerment occurs overtime, usually through practice time leading towards the event and its follow up what makes it difficult to evaluate it consistently, what is more it is individual teacher's facilitation dependent, but overall design and implementation of undōkai supports students' empowerment. Based on indicators to assess empowerment facilitation methods in school (Stone, 1995, Duhon-Haynes, 1996), Factors for effectiveness of empowering relationships between students and teachers (Nel, 1993), Areas of Empowerment to be improved for students' learning and teachers' work (Stone, 1995, Duhon-Haynes, 1996), Empowerment Evaluation Principles in Practice: Assessing Levels of Commitment (Fetterman, 2005) this research showed empowering potential of school events and how its strength is dependent on teachers. Similarly, Ashida (2002) discussed how undōkai can be a child-centered festival based on teachers' instructions and facilitation. He also showed shift from Japanese group approach towards one focused on individuals and cooperation in kindergarten. It was not observed during fieldwork observation at primary school, while in high school individual student-leaders were given more spotlight. However, the indicators used in this research require adjustments to local context and culture. In this case, group harmony and discipline were visible as important values for Japan on top of premade indicators. Although, specific educational goals and aims of school events in Japan are mentioned in the curriculum, the relationship between them, their hierarchy and implementation cannot be assessed without class observation. Although, in high school the group harmony is not as nurtured as it is at primary school, it is still a present value what shows the tendency pointed out by Ashida being still not strong enough. What is more, disempowering factors which may disturb the empowering process need to be considered as Japanese discipline could be a double-edged sword, both empowering and disempowering. Empowerment as education philosophy may be tricky to some educators as through empowerment of their students they somehow lose power over them. It may lead to excessive use of time in class when it comes to deciding on a new project or including everyone's opinion on a certain matter. However, the ultimate goal of education is empowerment of people which should not be partial. Difficulty in contextual and universal empowerment lies in a similar spot as the balance of local curriculum and global curriculum at schools. Empowerment ideally provides such broad perspective on the world that it should enable anybody to understand their local culture along with the global one and teachers should not consider it a difficulty but facilitate growth. During observation there were times when Japanese teachers were stuck between

their cultural norms and global issues discussed at class and they were especially careful when explaining them to students as discipline, rules and local culture had a stronger value over other aspects. At the same time, it needs to be highlighted that empowerment on top of representing assertiveness, being enlightened with knowledge and having critical thinking skills is just a belief of being capable of doing things as a result of high self-efficacy levels which might be stemming from knowledge and experience. Events make people forget about their social roles – they become equal and provide different value to lives of school communities.

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