

Research Article

STORYTELLING AS RESISTANCE: A PODCAST-STYLE EPISTEMOLOGY FOR DECOLONISING EDUCATION IN JAPAN

Yusuke Okuyama*, Lucinda Okuyama**

*This paper explores storytelling as resistance through a podcast-style epistemology for decolonising education in Japan. Framed as the pilot episode of an imagined podcast, *Decolonise This!*, the article draws on action research and community psychology to challenge Western colonial legacies in Japanese higher education. At its core is a dialogic process between two educators, trained in Indigenous focus community psychology in Aotearoa New Zealand and now teaching in Japan. The authors engage in recorded conversations about decolonial teaching practices. These unscripted, heart-to-heart exchanges became a platform for reclaiming oral storytelling and co-constructing a Decolonisation Toolbox grounded in empathy, critical reflection, and student-led inquiry. By employing Social and Emotional Learning, multilevel analysis, and self-reflection, this pedagogical approach fosters what the authors call Edu-Power: a renewable, student-centred energy for social change. The podcast format challenges conventional academic norms by reclaiming reciprocal spaces, cultural nuances, and communal benefits over rigid rules. Ultimately, this article offers educators a creative and relational model for transforming classrooms into spaces that foster the ripple effects of social change. It affirms that decolonisation is not merely a content shift, but a methodological and epistemological reappropriation, one that must begin with listening, storytelling, and the courage to do things differently. In summary, this paper shows how podcast-style storytelling can serve as a decolonising pedagogy that transforms classrooms through empathy, dialogue, and shared power.*

Keywords: social justice education, decolonising education, podcast-style epistemology

1. Introduction

Full podcast available [here](#).

What you are about to read or listen to is episode 1 of a podcast called *Decolonise This!*. This podcast is an imaginary platform from which we share interesting stories about how people decolonise their teaching and learning spaces. This podcast does not really exist, it is only a figment of our imagination. However, the stories told in the podcast are 100% real.

* National Defense Academy of Japan

** Tokyo University of Foreign Studies

You can choose how you'd like to enjoy this podcast: a) read the transcript below or b) follow the listening icons to listen to specific conversations in this episode. The choice is yours. But first, let us introduce how this podcast idea came about. The cover artwork for the *Decolonize This! Podcast* is shown in **Figure 1**.



Figure 1. Cover Artwork for the Decolonize This! Podcast

Note. Image generated using ChatGPT (OpenAI, 2025) from a text prompt created by the author.

[00:53] Hi! It's Lucinda here...one night, Yusuke and I were having dinner and talking about the fact that we had a looming deadline for submitting the first draft of this article. It was getting late, and our conversation wasn't really going anywhere. Since we were planning to write about his teaching, I suggested asking Yusuke some questions and recording his answers on my phone to get a clearer idea of what he does in class, just to give us something to write about later when we had more time.

That week, after dinner, I would pester Yusuke with questions and record our conversations on my phone. The next morning, I'd type up the recordings and come up with new questions to ask him after dinner that night. Slowly, Yusuke warmed up to the idea, our conversations started to flow, and I began to understand what he was doing in class and why it was meaningful in the context of decolonisation. We started having real, heart-to-heart conversations about his teaching philosophy.

Listening to our chats on my phone each morning sounded like podcast interviews, without the fancy edits or music. We wrote up the notes as if they were various podcast episodes. That's

how the idea for *Decolonise This!* came about. We got excited, brainstormed podcast names, and for a while, it felt like a fun project, something that could eventually become a real podcast, where we'd interview others about how they're decolonising their learning and teaching environments. We felt like we were on the right track. We believed that the podcast platform would allow us to engage in oral storytelling and reclaim knowledge-sharing (Christensen *et al.*, 2018).

We were transported back to our time in Aotearoa New Zealand where we had the privilege of learning from Māori communities who embraced us as *whānau or family members in their communities. We had first-hand experience of what it means to learn from elders who were generous enough to share their life-lessons, often from painful personal experiences of racism, marginalisation and oppression on their own land due to the European colonisation. This often happened in informal conversations where we gathered around as friends and always experienced the warmth in the group. As we sat together, the elders and friends shared their hearts, and we collectively developed strategies for social change. The in-depth content of our conversations deserved to be captured in academic journals but is often excluded due to its informal nature and the false notion of neutrality in academia. We knew our heart-to-heart oral podcast method was the right way to disseminate the knowledge and wisdom that can create a ripple effect of social change.

But then, when the paper deadline arrived and it was time to submit our podcast-style article, we panicked. We looked at the review criteria and suddenly lost confidence. We felt inferior, like we'd somehow cheated or taken a shortcut. What if our article got rejected? What if it wasn't good enough—too fun, too experimental, too playful to be considered a “serious” academic piece? We thought to ourselves: should we drop the idea and write something more traditional, more “acceptable”? Maybe the podcast format was only helpful for brainstorming, and we can still rewrite everything in a more formal, academic voice.

We were too ashamed to send in our draft. Instead, we requested a Zoom meeting to talk through our idea, mostly to save face. During the meeting, we explained our hesitation to submit the draft, since it didn't align with the traditional criteria for an academic journal article. We felt pressure to write a formal version because...how can you peer-review a voice recording? Has that ever even been done before? During the ZOOM call we realised we needed to think outside the box and be brave enough to stay there. That Zoom call turned out to be an incredible oral pre-peer review session. We were encouraged to stick with the podcast idea and even to take it further than we'd imagined.

At the end of the meeting, we felt relieved, and a bit sheepish. Wow, we really had been brainwashed into believing that strong academic work must follow a rigid formula: black-and-white text, citations and double spacing. Why did we doubt the lessons we learnt from Aotearoa New Zealand? Why did we deny the importance of story-sharing that is so important in communities in Aotearoa New Zealand? Why did we feel so small and unimportant? We actually experienced what coloniality does to exclude people from knowledge creation, it is a strong force that is continually reinforced...breaking free from it is easier said than done and standing in solidarity with our peers to stay 'woke' makes it much easier. So, we went back to the podcast draft with the intention of imagining something new and letting go of all the rules that can be so suffocating. We thought to ourselves...let's stop thinking we're taking shortcuts and start valuing the joy in what we create. Let's stop slaving over drafts just to make them look like every other

article in the academic universe. Let's be braver and honour our elders. Let's be freer. Let's reclaim our stories through a podcast-style epistemology.

2. Podcast-style epistemology (Script)

[Podcast intro music fades in] [07:07]

Host: Welcome to Decolonise This! the podcast where we reclaim the power of storytelling as a method of sharing knowledge. Here, we sit down with people who are actively decolonising their environments, challenging systems, and rewriting the stories we've been told. Each episode, we bring you voices from different corners of the world, and we ask them to share their journeys in their own words. Because storytelling is a powerful tool for decolonisation. We believe that oral storytelling can reclaim knowledge-sharing through methodological and epistemological reappropriation—one that begins with listening, storytelling, and the courage to do things differently.

[Brief pause – light instrumental underscore continues softly] [07:53]

Today, we're diving into a powerful topic: *decolonising education*. Education, for many of us, has been shaped by colonial values, Eurocentric ideals, rigid standards, and the erasure of Indigenous and local ways of knowing. But what happens when we challenge that? What happens when educators try to bring diversity, inclusion, and community-centred learning into the classroom as a radical practice? To explore this, we're joined by someone with a truly unique perspective.

[Music rises slightly, then softens] [08:28]

Yusuke Okuyama is a community psychologist, born and raised in Japan, but trained in Aotearoa New Zealand, where he studied a model of psychology deeply rooted in Indigenous values and collective well-being. Years later, he returned to Japan and now teaches at prominent Japanese universities. Through liberal arts and English education, he advocates for diversity, inclusion, and critical self-reflection, often navigating the complexities of being an insider and outsider in his own homeland.

In today's episode, we talk with Yusuke about Japan's colonial history, the challenges of addressing colonisation in the classroom, and some powerful 'Aha' moments from his teaching. We'll also explore the concept of **Edu-Power* and what it means in practice. Be sure to stick around for the final segment, where Yusuke shares his **Decolonisation Toolbox* and some practical tips to help educators decolonise education, one lesson at a time.

[Music Fades Out] [09:39]

Host: Yusuke Okuyama, welcome to *Decolonise This!* We're so glad to have you with us today.

Yusuke: Thank you, Lucinda, it's an honour to be a guest on the show! I've been a listener for the last few years and I'm so excited to be here with you today.

Host: So, Yusuke, you are an educator at a Japanese university, and you are actively involved in decolonial education. Talk to us about Japan's background regarding colonisation. As far as I know Japan has never physically been colonised. In fact, weren't they colonisers? Can you give us some historical and contextual background?

Yusuke: Yes, you are right. Historically, Japan was a major colonising force in Asia and the Pacific (Sahashi et al., 2024). We can discuss this for hours. But, to summarise, Japan colonised Taiwan (1895–1945) and Korea (1910–1945), established a puppet regime in Manchuria (1931–1945), and occupied large parts of China (1937–1945), Southeast Asia (1941–1945), and the Pacific Islands (1931–1945) (Huckabay, 2023; Wong & Yau, 2013; Myers & Peattie, 2020).

This period of expansion ended with Japan's defeat in World War II, following the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the Soviet invasion of Manchuria. After Japan's surrender in 1945, the United States led an occupation of the country (1945–1952) (Myers & Peattie, 2020). U.S. military bases remain in Japan, particularly in Okinawa, under the U.S.–Japan Security Treaty, which is still in effect today (Kensei *et al.*, 2008). So, as you can see, Japan has been a coloniser but has also been occupied. This is an interesting juxtaposition, isn't it? You could say that Japan went through a kind of semi-colonial phase, and that modern Japan was deeply influenced by Western colonialism in all sorts of major ways. Japan started modernising after Western powers, like the U.S., pressured it to open up. To avoid getting colonised, Japan quickly adopted Western tech, military systems, and ideas, which ended up reshaping its laws, government, and schools (Shively, 2015). The legacy of that era still lingers today as Japan's education system often reflects Western ideas about what counts as “real” knowledge, which can make Indigenous and alternative perspectives harder to see or value.

Host: What about the Indigenous people of Japan? What can you tell us about them?

Yusuke: The Ainu are Indigenous people from northern Japan, especially around Hokkaido. Their roots go way back from around 13,000 B.C.E. to one of Japan's earliest cultures, the Jomon (Ramon-Yusuf, 2023). The Ainu are widely believed to be descendants of the Jomon people, and they lived freely in the northern regions and started interacting with the Japanese (called the Wajin) as early as the 8th century (Ramon-Yusuf, 2023). The Japanese government invaded the Ainu and colonised them (Mizoguchi, 2016). This all started in the late 1800s, when the Japanese government took over Ainu land, resources, and culture. As a result, the Ainu were pushed to the margins and forced to assimilate into mainstream society (Mizoguchi, 2016). Even though they have such a rich and unique history, they've faced a lot of discrimination over the years and were denied recognition as Indigenous people, which almost led to the erasure of their culture and traditions. However, since 2008, there's been growing awareness about the Ainu's struggles, and the Japanese government has started offering more support through new laws and efforts to promote their culture (Ramon-Yusuf, 2023). These steps appear to have helped bring Ainu traditions back into the spotlight and boosted recognition of their importance both in Japan and internationally (Ramon-Yusuf, 2023). But it seems to be too little, too late.

[14:40] Host: I see, like many European nations, Japan also has an unfortunate colonial history involving its own Indigenous people. So, where do you fit in all of this? As you know, in community psychology it is so important to position yourself in your work context. Tell us how you position yourself in Japan as a returnee and as a community psychology practitioner at a Japanese university.

Yusuke: Sure, I was born in Japan and spent the first 20 years of my life there. I had a pretty typical education, Western theories taught within a very Japanese cultural context. At that time, I was really just part of the dominant group in what's basically a very monocultural society. But then I moved to New Zealand and ended up living there through my 20s and 30s. New Zealand is considered a bicultural society, so that was a big shift for me. I studied in New Zealand, and I was exposed to both Western and Indigenous theories. But socially I was no longer part of the dominant group, I was on the other side, I was seen as part of an ethnic minority because of my Japanese background (Okuyama, 2011).

So now, coming back to Japan and working at a university here, I'm kind of sitting in between these two worlds. That middle-ground perspective really helps me facilitate the classroom discussions on power dynamics in social and racial hierarchy. I'm constantly reflecting on how my students could understand the notions of power and privilege, without running away from these uncomfortable topics as some are the dominant population in this relatively homogeneous country. I'm also aware that, as a Japanese male professor in Japan, I hold enormous power, and ironically I have been treated very differently here. When I was in New Zealand as a minority Asian, I always had to be at the top of my game and strategise every situation just to prove myself and get things done. People often underestimated my abilities, seeing me as "just another" minority Asian in New Zealand. Here in Japan, I see somewhat similar forms of discrimination towards non-Japanese Asians, non-white migrants, and some Japanese women.

In this context, I know I need to use my positional power to advocate for those who are oppressed. My intention here is to create a ripple effect of social change starting from my classroom, changing negative attitudes regarding the non-dominant population in Japan and beyond. I believe shifting the negative attitude towards oppressed groups is a big step towards dismantling the colonial mindset in today's society.

[18:00] Host: Thanks for explaining your personal history and positioning. Can you tell us more about the work you do?

Yusuke: I teach at a university in Tokyo in a course called *Global Liberal Arts Programme* (GLA). I will share the course syllabus with listeners in podcast notes (See Appendix). It's designed for Japanese students to study liberal arts subjects in English. In this class we don't focus on English grammar or writing but we are actually using English to explore academic topics. The idea is to give Japanese students a sense of what it's like to study at an overseas university, which is pretty different from the typical Japanese classroom where learning is very formal and passive. In GLA, students are encouraged to speak up, ask questions, and work together, which is a big shift for many of them. In Japan, students grow up in an education system where the aim is passing an entrance exam to enter a prestigious university which promises to provide them with a successful career at a good company. The competition is intense, and students attend cram schools and compete to get into good schools from an early age.

The course I teach is called *Global Social & Cultural Issues*. It's a year-long course for first- and second-year students. In the first part of the course, we build trust and explore our own language learning and intercultural journeys. Here we ask the question...why do we need to speak English? We learn about lingua francas and explore how politics has become personal. For example, due to the outcome of World War II, the powerholders are the U.S. and U.K., and therefore we now have to learn how to speak English in Japan. In the second part of the course, we look at different social

issues in countries that have been colonised. We explore the history, the aftermath, and how it connects to things like language, education, and business practices.

In the course, I often facilitate discussions on how current global business practices continue to exploit labour from the Global South in ways that resemble modern-day slavery, maintaining control without provoking resistance. Students often come to realise that while slavery may have formally ended, colonisation persists through economic and political terms. I believe the decolonial learning process becomes evident not only when students begin to recognise the ongoing nature of colonisation, but also when they start applying a decolonial lens to other social issues. My goal is for students to be equipped with this lens, enabling them to independently seek out relevant information, critically identify, and understand hidden colonial dynamics, such as Israel's genocide in Gaza.

An important lesson that I have learnt in teaching Japanese students is that I need to be careful not to confront students with so-called highly controversial or sensitive topics such as the Gaza genocide, at the very beginning. Instead, it is more effective to first provide them with the appropriate tools, namely the decolonial lens mentioned above. If I begin with a controversial or sensitive topic, students often withdraw and disengage from further exploration. I took this approach because, culturally, many Japanese tend to conform to the majority and avoid standing out or appearing different. So, I worked to establish the discussion of minority or marginalised social justice issues as the norm within our class over the course of the semester. In the Spring semester of 2025, for example, I taught a range of social justice issues except the Gaza genocide. Once the class had embraced social justice topics as part of their normal discourse, it was some of the students themselves who later chose to unpack the issue of the Gaza genocide in their presentations.

[23:06] Host: Thank you for sharing some of your reflections on coloniality and decoloniality from your classroom. Do you have any 'Aha' or breakthrough moments from your class that you can share with us? We love a good story here at *Decolonise This!*

Yusuke: Oh, for sure! There was one lesson that really stuck with me. So, most Japanese students are regularly exposed to mainstream Western news, especially American outlets. There's this deep-rooted perception that the American accent is somehow more "correct" or "refined", and of course, algorithms just keep feeding that content. But in my class, I make a point of bringing in non-Western perspectives to shake that up.

One time, I showed a documentary from Al Jazeera about colonisation in Australia (Al Jazeera English, 2014). It was a hard-hitting, graphic look at how Aboriginal people were systematically cheated out of their land and pressured to assimilate into white, mainstream culture. After we watched it and broke it down through multilevel analysis, I posed a pretty provocative question to the class. I asked something like, "Wouldn't it just be easier for Aboriginal people to assimilate and take advantage of the benefits colonisation supposedly brought?" I wanted the students to sit with that discomfort and think critically.

And what happened next really blew me away. The students were able to confidently say "no" and more importantly, they explained why. They understood that even if Aboriginal people did assimilate, they'd still be treated as second-class citizens. The racism wouldn't disappear. That moment was powerful, especially because in Japan, racism is often brushed aside or rarely acknowledged out loud (Yoshitaka, 2023).

That conversation opened the floodgates. Students started sharing their own experiences of racism. They shared stories from when they were studying or living abroad. We used Social and Emotional Learning techniques to reflect on those experiences, and suddenly, the class wasn't just about history or politics, it became deeply personal. They were connecting global issues to their own lives, and that kind of engagement leads to lasting understanding.

Honestly, I sometimes joke that maybe there's a young dictator sitting in my classroom...what I mean by this is that a student with authoritarian, and nationalistic political views, who disregards individual rights. A student who may grow up to control marginalised populations, undermine expert knowledge, and reinforce traditional power structures at the expense of personal freedom and social progress. Someone like that could be sitting in my class, watching these documentaries, wrestling with these ideas, maybe even questioning the system and critically reflecting on their personal political views.

And it's not entirely far-fetched. The university I teach at has produced a long list of influential leaders, business executives, sociologists, and politicians. Some of our graduates have even gone on to become prime ministers. I have a list right here...the university produced multiple politicians such as Nobuteru Ishihara, Katsuyuki Kawai and Ichizō Kobayashi. Some graduates have gone on to become prime ministers like Inukai Tsuyoshi, Ryutaro Hashimoto and Jun'ichirō Koizumi (EduRank, 2025). So yes, when we have these discussions in class, I'm very aware that they could be shaping the perspectives of the people who'll one day be in charge of making significant decisions.

Politics aside, businesspeople in Japan also wield a lot of power. In Japan, many politicians are closely associated with major business corporations, which can be beneficial for the economy. However, Japanese business practices are often influenced by current global business models that carry the legacy of continuous colonisation, as mentioned previously. Educating the younger generation, who will become Japan's future decision-makers, serves as an early intervention, encouraging Japanese businesses to embrace the value of partnership with Global South rather than exploiting them. And that's a big part of why I do what I do. This is what I call *Edu-Power* the power of education (Okuyama, 2023).

[28:35] Host: That really is an 'Aha' moment, I'm glad you get to experience that type of energy in class. You mentioned something interesting that listeners might want to know more about. What is *Edu-Power*? Please tell us more.

Yusuke: *Edu-Power* is a strategy for driving social change, and it centres on young people because they tend to be more open to new ideas and change, unlike older generations who are often more set in their ways (Okuyama, 2023). I like to explain it using the metaphor of renewable energy. Think of solar, wind, or hydro power, these are energy sources that don't run out; they replenish themselves. Education can work the same way. It generates energy in the classroom that doesn't just stop there, it creates a ripple effect. That's *Edu-Power*: the kind of energy sparked by education that spreads outward, inspiring social change (Okuyama, 2023). It's renewable and sustainable because it passes from one person to another, as individuals make transformative choices based on what they've learnt, whether in their families, schools, universities, or workplaces.

[30:01] Host: Tell us more about this decolonising teaching methodology. How do you implement this in class? I think this is something listeners, especially educators, might want to know more about.

Yusuke: Well, I have come up with a *Decolonisation Toolbox* that educators can adapt into their own context if they feel it is appropriate.

Host: Please walk us through how you utilise this toolbox step by step.

Yusuke: Sure, let me break it down for the listeners at home.

Step 1: First of all, it is important to reach students emotionally. That is why I implement Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in my course. SEL builds empathy and cultural sensitivity, reduces prejudice through emotional connection, encourages respectful, open-minded dialogue and equips students to advocate for fairness and equity (Black, 2021). A good documentary can be a tool for SEL. The documentaries help students to connect with the real struggles of people, especially in a monocultural and homogenous context of Japan where students seldom have the opportunity to engage with people different from themselves. This creates empathy. This empathy provides an opportunity for self-exploration and analysis (Poeschl, n.d.). For example, I use a documentary called, *Chocolate: A Taste of Independence in Togo* in my class (Al Jazeera English, 2019). This documentary features a chocolate-making activist fighting against foreign exploitation in Togo. In addition to the previous example of the documentary about colonisation in Australia (Al Jazeera English, 2014), I also use a documentary called, *Locked Up Warriors*, showing the negative impact of colonisation among Māori communities in Aotearoa New Zealand (Al Jazeera English, 2017). But we can't just stop there. Watching interesting documentaries is not enough. We have to dig deeper. That is why the next step is multilevel analysis.

[32:25] Step 2: What I do is, after students watch the documentary, we workshop the situation together. I put a simplified version of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model up on the screen so the whole class can see it (Guy-Evans, 2024). I briefly explain the model, then have students break into small groups to analyse a specific situation, like the example I mentioned earlier about colonisation in Australia and its impact on Aboriginal communities.

The model helps guide students through a systematic, multilevel analysis by examining the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (see Figure 2.). It really opens their eyes to the various layers of influence and helps them see how systems, such as institutional racism, sustain injustice. I want them to understand how macro-level forces like politics can directly shape the everyday lives of individuals. It's about waking up to the deeper, often hidden, structures that affect people's lives.

We use this model so often in class that eventually, I don't even need to explain it anymore, it becomes second nature, almost like an autopilot framework that shapes how we think and talk about issues. I'll ask you to include a link or image of the model in the podcast description so listeners can visualise it too.

One of the key points in this decolonial education is when students start seeing how their own lives and perspectives (individual-level) have been shaped by colonial history and these hidden political agendas (macro-level) that are still at play. And when that clicks, they start noticing their own Eurocentrism, often strengthened by the media. I've heard students saying, "we don't need to speak with a [so-called superior] American accent anymore". Others start advocating for ethical products or locally made products in the Global South.

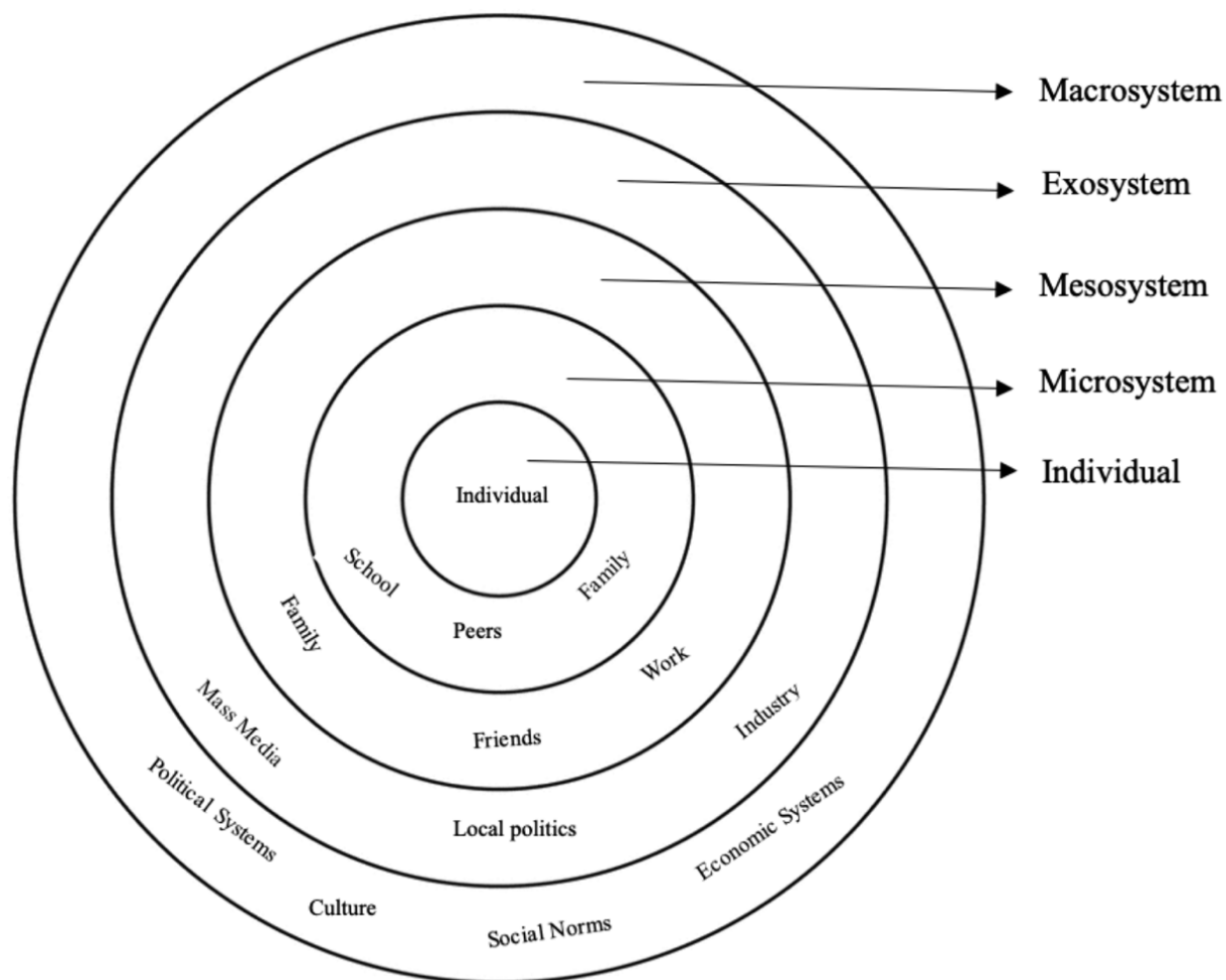


Figure 2. The Ecological Systems Theory.

Note. Figure created by authors based on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory as developed and depicted by Simply Psychology (Guy-Evans, 2024).

[35:14] Step 3: To really solidify the learning and anchor meaningful change, it's important that students reflect on what they've learnt and connect with it on a personal level. That's why I make time in class for both self-reflection and communal reflection. This kind of reflection can take on many forms. Formally, it might be through group discussions, reflective essays, oral presentations, or storytelling, where students share their own experiences and link them to the lesson material.

But informally, I draw a lot from my time living in Aotearoa New Zealand where I learnt a lot about community psychology from an Indigenous point of view. I learned so much from Māori culture. Some of my colleagues modelled beautifully what it looks like to facilitate reflective, emotionally honest sessions. They were warm, sincere, and willing to share personal stories. They broke down formal classroom hierarchies and created a sense of *whānau or family, as they say

in Aotearoa New Zealand. That had a deep impact on me, and I've carried that approach into my own teaching.

It really made me understand how critical power dynamics are in the classroom. To build trust, the facilitator needs to share power and be willing to be vulnerable. Decolonising pedagogy also requires educators to engage in genuine listening and the co-construction of knowledge with students, rather than positioning themselves as the sole authority in the classroom (Kimura & Tsai, 2023). It reminds me of **terakoya*, a form of community-based education in Japan before Westernisation during the Edo period (1603–1868). In those schools, young people would come to temples or local community space and receive holistic education from local monks or lay educators, not just literacy skills, but moral and personal development, too (Takahashi, 2022; Kawano, 2010). The lessons were tailored to each individual, rather than following a one-size-fits-all model.

In that sense, I see real parallels between Māori values in Aotearoa New Zealand and traditional Japanese educational practices. Before the Europeans colonised Aotearoa, Māori used to learn within their own communities from their respected elders (Rameka, 2021). Their learning was based on relationships and trust, and therefore very much applicable to their lives (Rameka, 2021). On the other hand, Westernised classrooms in both New Zealand and Japan have systematic approaches, but I feel very disconnected from it as a human; as an educator, I feel it is very difficult to teach the essence of community psychology, the value of social justice, and advocacy for marginalised groups such as indigenous communities in Australia and New Zealand, or non-white immigrant workers and refugees in Japan without having trust and relationships in class. So, to make the classroom more personal and to create a safe space for self-reflection, at the beginning of my course I usually tell my students, "The course contents are based on things that I wish I had known when I was your age, and please learn from my mistakes as well [meaning, things I didn't know before]."

[39:12] Host: So, what do your students share in these reflective sessions? Can you give us an example?

Yusuke: Well, often the students who have attended international schools often have had positive cross-cultural experiences and enjoyed living in a multicultural environment. But those who have attended local schools in foreign countries often talk about their experiences of racism or 'Asian hate'. This is often a therapeutic time of healing and meaning making. It is something I can identify with as I have experienced it acutely myself. We share our pain, but we also talk about our strengths. We talk through how we have survived those types of encounters and how we have adapted and learnt. The students are very resilient, and they share the lessons they have learnt with their peers. Some have joined sports teams to build friendships and others have stepped out of their comfort zones to initiate conversations with the intention to build friendships.

The students who haven't been overseas often talk about their frustration in having to learn how to speak English in Japan. They feel defeated by a system that produces paper based English speakers, meaning those who have mastered English for the sake of passing exams but cannot use the language in any other practical way. They are so tired of engaging in endless memorisation and gap-filling activities that do not enhance their communication skills.

[41:06] Host: It sounds like a very dynamic learning environment. How do you keep up with the changing perceptions in class? Also, how do you evaluate this type of learning?

Yusuke: When students deliver oral presentations in class, based on their personal experiences, I am able to assess where the class is and what they are thinking and feeling. This gives me some good insight on what further material I need to provide students to aid their learning even further.

In terms of grading, I actually don't openly disclose their grades in these types of presentations because I just don't want them to focus on their scores but rather on their personal reflections. I don't want students to be disingenuous just to get a higher grade. So, after the session, I just provide some general feedback in terms of presentation style and contents. The main focus is reflection and connection with the material and not scores. In addition, to make sure we all share a safe space, I do teach students what inclusive language is (American Psychological Association, 2023), and I remind them that there are no wrong answers, and, in this way, we all find ways to share our stories.

[42:43] Host: So..., what is next? Where to from here?

Yusuke: As for what's next, I'm currently designing an *Edu-Power* exchange programme to Morocco. The idea is to take Japanese university students to a country that was once colonised but is now independent and give them the chance to experience a completely different world firsthand. One of the main goals is to enable students to develop intercultural competencies from a non-Western perspective. They'll stay with local host families, take part in language classes, cultural exchange activities, reflection sessions, and of course, do some sightseeing. The goal is to move beyond just watching documentaries or learning about other cultures from a distance, we want them to be fully immersed. I believe that programmes like this have the potential to be truly transformational.

[43:55] Host: I see, you are truly taking it to the next level. As we come to the end of this podcast, tell us...what are your top tips for listeners about decolonising education as a teacher in the classroom?

Yusuke: I would say, 1) make sure you use teaching materials or articles from non-Western, Indigenous, and marginalised backgrounds. Just using Western material does not stimulate the same discussion. 2) Encourage students to critically analyse text from a multilevel perspective to spot colonial assumptions and agendas. 3) Share power with the students in class and allow them to take centre stage. Let them tell their personal stories. 4) Don't rush, take the time to allow students to reflect and don't put the main focus on test scores or overall grades (Kessi et al., 2001; MacLise & Watkinson, n.d.; National Council of Teachers of English, 2025; Concordia University, n.d.; Burns, 2024).

[45:09] Host: Those are some great tips! Well, thank you so much, Yusuke, for sharing your insights, experiences, and innovative approaches to decolonising education in Japan. Your work shows us that meaningful change is possible, even within systems that have long been shaped by colonial legacies, when we commit to listening deeply, reflecting critically, and empowering new generations to lead with empathy and courage.

For our listeners, remember, decolonisation is not a destination but an ongoing journey. It asks us all to question whose stories are told, whose knowledge is valued, and how we can create learning spaces that honour diversity, justice, and community.

If you're an educator, student, or simply someone passionate about social change, I encourage you to explore Yusuke's *Decolonisation Toolbox* and consider how you might bring these ideas into your own classrooms, communities, or conversations.

Thanks again to Yusuke for being part of *Decolonise This!* And thank you to all of you for tuning in—wherever you are in the world. Don't forget to like and subscribe to our channel. Until next time, keep questioning, keep listening, and keep decolonising.

[Outro music fades in] [46:46]

Acknowledgement

We would like to express our gratitude to the editors of this special edition—Dr. Mazna Patka, Dr. Hana Shahin, Dr. Tiffeny R. Jiménez, and Dr. Olga Glantsman—for their support in conceptualising this paper as an imaginary podcast. Their openness and willingness to experiment beyond traditional academic structures have been both refreshing and liberating. We commend them for embodying their philosophies, putting their values into practice, and having the courage to approach the peer review process in such a personable and inspiring way.

References

- Al Jazeera English. (2014, July 17). *Language: At threat of extinction* [Video]. Living the Language. <https://www.aljazeera.com/program/living-the-language/2014/7/17/language-at-threat-of-extinction>
- Al Jazeera English. (2017, April 12). *Locked up warriors: New Zealand's prison problem* [Video]. Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/video/rewind/2017/4/12/locked-up-warriors-new-zealands-prison-problem>
- Al Jazeera English. (2019, September 19). *Chocolate: A taste of independence in Togo* [Video]. Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/video/people-power/2019/9/19/chocolate-a-taste-of-independence-in-togo>
- American Psychological Association. (2023). *Inclusive language guide (2nd ed.)*. <https://www.apa.org/about/apa/equity-diversity-inclusion/language-guidelines.pdf>
- Black, D. L. (2021). *Essentials of social emotional learning (SEL): The complete guide for schools and practitioners*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Burns, K. (2024, October 1). How to decolonize and indigenize your teaching. *Learning Bird*. <https://learningbird.com/how-to-decolonize-and-indigenize-your-classroom/>
- Christensen, J., Cox, C., & Szabo-Jones, L. (Eds.). (2018). *Activating the heart: Storytelling, knowledge sharing, and relationship*. Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- Concordia University. (n.d.). *Strategies for Decolonizing Curriculum and Pedagogy*. Centre for Teaching and Learning. Retrieved June 26, 2025, from <https://www.concordia.ca/ctl/decolonization/strategies.html>
- EduRank. (2025, March 2). *100 notable alumni of Keio University [Sorted List]*. EduRank.org. <https://edurank.org/uni/keio-university/alumni/>

-
- Guy-Evans, K. (2024, January 17). Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. *Simply Psychology*. <https://www.simplypsychology.org/bronfenbrenner.html>
- Huckabay, M. (2023). *Japanese colonialism: Unraveling the complex historiography and cultural genocide in the Korean Peninsula*.
- Kawano, Y. (2010). *Japanese Indigenous knowledges and impacts of vibrating energy: Pedagogical implication in education* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto). ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Kessi, S., Marks, Z., & Ramugondo, E. (2021). Decolonizing knowledge within and beyond the classroom. *Critical African Studies*, 13(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21681392.2021.1920749>
- Kensei, Y., Sakamoto, R., & Allen, M. (2008). U.S. bases, Japan and the reality of Okinawa as a military colony. *Asia-Pacific Journal*, 6(8), e10.
- Kimura, D., & Tsai, A. (2023). Decolonizing classroom discourse: Insights from interactional research. *ELT Journal*, 77(3), 327-337.
- MacLise, E., & Watkinson, T. (n.d.). A guide to decolonizing the classroom. University of Northern British Columbia. <https://www.unbc.ca/sites/default/files/sections/office-equity-and-inclusion/guide-decolonizing-classroom.pdf>.
- Mizoguchi, K. (2016). The colonial experience of the uncolonized and the colonized: The case of East Asia, mainly as seen from Japan. In J. Lydon & U. Rizvi (Eds.), *Handbook of postcolonial archaeology* (pp. 81-92). Routledge.
- Myers, R. H., & Peattie, M. R. (Eds.). (2020). *The Japanese colonial empire, 1895-1945*. Princeton University Press.
- National Council of Teachers of English. (2025, February 15). Decolonizing the Classroom: Step 1. <https://ncte.org/blog/2019/04/decolonizing-the-classroom/>
- OpenAI. (2025). ChatGPT (2025 version) [Large language model]. <https://chatgpt.com/>
- Okuyama, Y. (2011). *An Investigation of successful and unsuccessful communication between international and North African social workers at centres for disabled children in North Africa* [Master's thesis, University of Waikato]. Research Commons. <https://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/10289/6028/thesis.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y>
- Okuyama, Y. (2023, July 21-23). EduPower: Social change through university education in Japan [Conference presentation]. *The First Global Community Psychology Seminar*, Tokyo, Japan.
- Poeschl, B. (n.d.). *Critical consciousness, Social-Emotional learning, and serving diverse students*. The Keep. <https://thekeep.eiu.edu/theses/4970/>
- Rameka, L. K. (2021). Kaupapa Māori assessment: Reclaiming, reframing and realising Māori ways of knowing and being within early childhood education assessment theory and practice. *Frontiers in Education*, 6, 687601. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2021.687601>
- Ramon-Yusuf, H. O. (2023). (De)marginalization of Indigenous people: A historical analysis of the Ainu of Japan. *E-Revista de Estudos Interculturais*, (11), 1-15.
- Sahashi, R., Matsuda, Y., & Aoyama, W. (2024). *Asia rising: A handbook of history and international relations in East, South and Southeast Asia* (p. 304). Springer Nature.
- Shively, D. H. (Ed.). (2015). *Tradition and modernization in Japanese culture*. Princeton University Press.

-
- Takahashi, S. (2022, October 24). “Terakoya”: Edo-period education for all. *nippon.com*.
<https://www.nippon.com/en/japan-topics/g01005/>
- Te Aka Māori Dictionary. (n.d.). *whānau*.
<https://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?keywords=whanau>
- Te Ara – Encyclopedia of New Zealand. (n.d.). *Whānau – Māori and family*.
<https://teara.govt.nz/en/whanau-maori-and-family/page-1>
- Wong, H. W., & Yau, H. Y. (2013). What does it mean by “being colonized”? Reflections on the Japanese colonial policies in Taiwan. *Journal of Group Dynamics*, 30, 342-360.
- Yoshitaka, S. (2023, February 7). Why does Japanese society overlook racism? *NEUT Magazine*.
<https://www.publicbooks.org/why-does-japanese-society-overlook-racism/>

APPENDIX A

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Decolonisation Toolbox: A collection of adaptable strategies, examples, and resources that help educators and institutions decolonise teaching and learning. It offers practical advice for rethinking curricula, pedagogy, and power relations to include diverse and marginalised knowledge systems.

Edu-Power: A student-centred and renewable force for social transformation generated through education. Like renewable energy, it sustains itself as learning inspires further learning, motivating individuals to act on and share transformative ideas across, families, institutions, and communities.

Terakoya: Community-based education in Japan before Westernisation during the Edo period (1603–1868), originally linked to temples but later run by local educators. They provided basic literacy, arithmetic, and moral education, contributing to widespread literacy (Takahashi, 2022).

Whānau: Extended family or kin group in Māori society, traditionally the primary social and economic unit. Grounded in shared ancestry (whakapapa), it emphasises collective identity, support, and responsibility, and can also refer to close non-kin groups united by shared purpose (Te Aka Māori Dictionary, n.d.; Te Ara – Encyclopedia of New Zealand, n.d.).

APPENDIX B

COURSE SYLLABUS: GLOBAL SOCIAL & CULTURAL ISSUES

Course Description/Objectives/Teaching Method

The aim of this course is to develop students' overall English skills and cross-cultural competencies. Students will enhance their critical analysis skills by investigating socio-cultural issues from around the world and reflecting on their personal experiences. Academic reading materials and documentaries will be used to prompt class discussions, presentations, and reflective assignments. By the end of this course, students will have improved their academic reading and writing skills, professional presentation abilities, and cross-cultural competencies, equipping them to work effectively with multinational teams.

Course Plan

Please note that this schedule may be adjusted according to students' learning needs.

<i>Spring Semester</i>	<i>Autumn Semester</i>
1. Introduction and course overview	1. Introduction and course overview
2. Explicit and Implicit Learning	2. African Innovators: Science and Technology
3. History of Language Learning	3. Scarification
4. Lingua Franca	4. Mid-term Presentation (1)
5. The Origin of the English Language	5. Mid-term Presentation and Feedback
6. Mid-term Presentation (1)	6. Storytelling in Africa
7. Mid-term Presentation (2) and Feedback	7. Ecotourism
8. The Lives of Aboriginal People	8. Sports and Politics
9. Social Issues in New Zealand	9. Final Presentation (1)
10. Māori Culture and Language	10. Final Presentation and Feedback (2)
11. West Africa's Chocolate Industry: Togo	Diversity in Japan
12. Final Presentation (1)	11. Diversity in the U.S.
13. Final Presentation (2) and Feedback	12. Climate Change
14. Final Reflection and Course Summary	13. Final Exam and Course Summary
Other: Active Learning - Reading, documentary, and reflection	Other: Active Learning - Reading, documentary, and reflection

Method of Evaluation

Grades will be determined based on: Class participation (40%), Mid-term examination (30%), Final examination (30%).

Textbooks

Course (reading) materials will be provided by the instructor.

Lecturer's Comments to Students

The philosophy of this class is to build a community of learning (an environment where we learn from one another). The classroom will be a space where we can all share our unique stories as it relates to the lesson content.

Note: To maximise your participation in class discussions, please prepare before class (for example reading articles, writing reflection papers and looking up specific vocabularies).

Questions/Comments

I will be available for students before and after class for questions and consultation.

Class Language

The class will be facilitated in English.