The Educational Philosophy of Sosaku Kobayashi

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Abstract

This thesis discusses the educational philosophy of Sosaku Kobayashi, the principal and founder of Tomoe Gakuen, the innovative school featured in the novel *Totto-chan: The Little Girl at the Window*. It begins with an introduction to the novel and its author, situating Tomoe Gakuen within the broader context of early-20th-century Japanese education. After discussing the features of the progressive education movement, I then explore the key principles, values, and teaching style that Sosaku Kobayashi employs, as illustrated through the anecdotes in the novel, and the goals they are intended to achieve. Following this, I discuss how learner-centered education has influenced modern curricula worldwide since the Second World War and examine the ongoing dialogue between its detractors and advocates. This segues into a comparison between the learning philosophy of Sosaku Kobayashi and other prominent styles of progressive education, namely Montessori, Steiner, and outdoor-focused education. Finally, I explore what Kobayashi's philosophy might have looked like had it developed into a broader educational movement and continued to flourish into the 21st century beyond Tomoe Gakuen.

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Table of Contents

Chapter One

Background

Tetsuko Kuroyanagi and Totto-Chan

In 1981, Tetsuko Kuroyanagi published *Totto-chan: The Little Girl at the Window*. This children's novel is an autobiographical recount of her time at Tomoe Gakuen, a progressive school during the waning years of Imperial Japan, and the Second World War. The book itself is separated by chapters that chronologically recount anecdotes that highlight aspects about her time at the school, what her family and home life was like, and how much the world has changed since the early 20th century. 'Totto-chan' is the jejune moniker she chose to adopt as a child.

The Totto-chan we read about in the novel is a boisterous and inquisitive little girl that is expelled from her first primary school. However, she finds a home at Tomoe Gakuen under the principalship of Sosaku Kobayashi. Tomoe Gakuen, for the time, was a unique centre for learning. Kobayashi's educational philosophy and guidance built Tomoe to be a school that empowers students in their learning and immerses them in many practical educational activities.

The story is written in third person and the narrator (who I will be referring to as Kuroyanagi) never drops calling her younger self 'Totto-chan.' 'The Little Girl at the Window,' Kuroyanagi writes herself in the book's epilogue, comes from an old Japanese expression which means 'on the fringe' or 'left out in the cold.' She explains that while at her initial school that she had been expelled from (and much to the chagrin of her teacher) she was literally over by the window, welcoming street musicians and shouting at swallows nesting in the classroom's eaves in the second chapter of the book. Kuroyanagi attests that without her learnings from Tomoe Gakuen and the encouragement she got from Kobayashi, she couldn't have achieved what she did in life; possibly leading to her having hang ups, being left out, or on the fringe of society (Kuroyanagi, 1981, p.190).

Totto-chan herself is energetic, confident, and explorative. As a reader you can see the direct link between the Totto-chan and the loquacious and elegant Kuroyanagi that appears on television and social media. Upon Totto-chan's first meeting with Kobayashi, she is invited to speak with him about whatever she wants for as long as she wants. This one-sided

conversation lasts from before school until lunch time. In a review, Masayo Duus (1984) writes that this is “a prophetic experience, and certainly the proper start for the originator of Japan’s first television talk show” (p.238).

Tetsuko Kuroyanagi grew from Totto-chan to become a household name in Japan. Upon graduating, she attended Tokyo Music School, (Now Tokyo School of Music) intending to be an opera singer, though eventually giving up, unable to memorise long passages. Moving to work for the Japanese Broadcasting Corporation (NHK), she was recommended to train for television, as the medium was then on the rise. Her first roles saw her reading stories on children’s shows, and doing voice work on puppet shows (Kuroyanagi, 1998, p.41). She is best known for hosting Tetsuko’s Room, a celebrity talk show where her forthright and effervescent personality saw it stand out from other shows (Duus, 1984, p.237).

In 1984 Kuroyanagi was appointed a Unicef Goodwill Ambassador, her work taking her to nearly 40 countries stricken with conflict, poverty, or natural disaster (UNICEF, n.d.). This work sees her talk to, comfort, learn from and raise money for the displaced children of these countries, being a child displaced by a war herself. Her writing post Totto-chan is mostly of her ambassadorial work, and while it is often hopeful and full of love, much of it comes from a place of anger and distress that children are allowed to live in such a state. Much like her younger self, Tetsuko bluntly writes of her anger at repeated wars (Jiji Press, 2023), war crimes, famine, disease, and children growing up without education (Kuroyanagi, 1998). Kuroyanagi attributes her storied life to Sosaku Kobayashi: “In my own case, I find it impossible to assess how much I have been sustained by the way he used to keep saying to me, “You’re really a good girl, you know.” Had I not entered Tomoe and had I never met Mr. Kobayashi, I would probably have been labeled “a bad girl,” becoming complex-ridden and confused” (Kuroyanagi, 1984, p.190).

Towards the end of *Totto-chan: The Little Girl at the Window*, Tetsuko recounts a story where her younger self promises to Kobayashi that one day, she would be a teacher at Tomoe; this never came to be. In a sense though, she carried the mission to teach and support children through her work with Unicef, with greater reach, and for students with a greater need. In 1998 she expressed the irony of her life’s orientation stating “I was sure I would be getting married, so to learn how to read stories to my children in an entertaining way (...) I only wanted to learn acting for the sake of my future children. But life is strange. Here I am, with no children of my own, but doing my best to help a great many children” (Kuroyanagi, 1998, p.41).

In watching Tetsuko's House, one can see Totto-chan from the book in her. An exquisitely dressed, strong headed, inquisitive girl, with an 'extraordinary gift of gab' (Duus, 1984, p.237). Tetsuko was correct, without Kobayashi and Tomoe, *this* Totto-chan at any other school may have ceased to exist, her inquisitive fire doused, square peg forced into the round hole of traditional education.

By October 1981, seven months after *Totto-chan: The Little Girl* at the Window's Japanese release it had sold 3 million copies. Bookstore owners attested that people from a range of backgrounds and ages were buying it. Kuroyanagi theorised that its popularity stemmed from a range of factors: the popularity of its author, the modest price upon release, and the beautiful illustrations by the late Iwasaki Chihiro, though it was likely a multitude of factors (Nanako, 1983, p.149). As of 2023, the novel has sold over 25 million copies globally, cementing it as the best-selling single novel by a Japanese author (Tanaka, 2023).

Sosaku Kobayashi's Life

Totto-chan: The Little Girl at the Window is as comprehensive as it is able to be through its anecdotes. Most of the story is from what Tetsuko remembers from her time at Tomoe Gakuen. The events occurred forty years prior to the book's publication, though many of her stories were confirmed by her family and classmates. While I doubt every fact in the book is completely historically accurate, (both because of the timeframe between the happenings and the publication of the novel, and because some restructuring for better storytelling is probably in play), Kuroyanagi claims that none of the episodes were invented (Kuroyanagi, 1981). Regardless, there is much wisdom we can source from the Sosaku Kobayashi presented to the audience in the book. His educational philosophy seemed to have a great impact on his students, and as will be discussed, is still largely relevant to the 21st century.

The book both hints at and explicitly tells us Kobayashi's story. The postscript reveals that Kobayashi was born in 1893, the youngest of six children. Growing up he would pretend to 'conduct' the nature around him on the riverbank near his home with Mount Haruna in the distance. His family was a 'rather poor farming family', so he had to go work as a schoolteacher's assistant. From there, he moved to Tokyo and took up work as an elementary school teacher. This allowed him to study Music Education at the establishment that would become the Tokyo University of Fine Arts and Music (Kuroyanagi, 1981).

After his formal education, Sosaku Kobayashi began teaching at Seikei Elementary. Seikei Elementary (or Sekei Gakuen) is a school that even today promotes ‘character building’ in its education, “not merely focusing on the acquisition of knowledge”. (Sekei Gakuen, n.d.) Tetsuko Kuroyanagi states that “Mr. Kobayashi was greatly influenced by his (Haruji Nakamura, founder of Seikei Elementary) methods and later instituted a similar kind of curriculum at Tomoe” (Kuroyanagi, 1981, p195). While working at Seikei Gakuen, Kobayashi would write the school’s operettas, which impressed Baron Iwasaki, a school’s financial donor and patron of the arts. Iwasaki offered to send Kobayashi overseas to study education (Kuroyanagi, 1981, p. 195).

Kobayashi spent two years in Europe from 1922–1924 studying eurythmics under Émile-Jacques Dalcroze. After returning to Japan he established Seijo Kindergarten, A school synthesised from his education and born from his own personal educational philosophy. In 1930, Kobayashi again set off for Europe, this time to study under Dalcroze and observe a different education system to his own (Kuroyanagi, 1981).

Tomoe Gakuen

Tomoe Gakuen itself was established in 1937. It stood in Jiyugaoka, a neighbourhood that at the time the book takes place, was undertaking a transition from a rural area to being swallowed by greater Tokyo. Notably the school is in the vicinity of a farm, allowing the farmer to teach the students about his occupation several chapters into the story. On Totto-chan’s very first day, the students in her class earned a walking trip to the local Kuhonbutsu Temple. Kuroyanagi (1981) describes the ‘fields of yellow mustard flower’ (p. 37) she passes on her way there. At the time of the book’s publication, the fields; and even the stream have given way to urban development of stores and apartments (Kuroyanagi, 1981).

Tomoe’s most striking physical feature is that the classrooms and library were made up of repurposed train carriages. The insides were stripped of their lengthwise seats, and had been replaced with desks, and a blackboard at the front. The rest of the campus is made up of the headmaster’s office, the assembly hall, and a large outdoor playing area with flower beds and trees for the students to play in. No walls surround Tomoe like Totto-chan’s previous school either, it’s made clear in the book that the school looks ramshackle to those outside of Tomoe Gakuen’s community. But not so to the children inside; there’s childish novelty to a physical space like this to the pupils of Tomoe Gakuen, and this physical space has many benefits pertaining to the goals of the school itself.

While the most notable benefit of Tomoe's campus is furthering Kobayashi's philosophy for learning, it came with a few historically contextual benefits. Tomoe's campus was comparatively small in size, with only a handful of classes, one per age level. With the addition of Totto-chan at the beginning of the story, her class had nine pupils.

Tomoe's small size in both pupils and physical space was undoubtedly due to Kobayashi's lack of publicity. Tetsuko notes in her postscript that "Mr. Kobayashi hated publicity, and even before the war did not allow photographs of the school or any publicity about its unconventionality" (Kuroyanagi, 1981, p. 192). Here she refers to the police-state nature of Imperial Japan at the time. Many of Kobayashi's ideas sat in juxtaposition to the state's view of 'good' education, with many of his ideas directly drawing from Western influences, which were enemies of Japan at the time. Kobayashi's thoughts on publicity extended to the lack of a 'school song' for Tomoe, much to the annoyance of the students in the story.

There is also a self-sustainability that Tomoe exercises as well. Food for students who lacked it was presumably grown and supplied by Kobayashi's family. School events are catered for by the students with supplies from the students' families as we see in the chapter 'Field Kitchen.' Local community members lend expertise to Tomoe's learning experiences, such as the neighbouring farmer who teaches the students during 'The Farming Teacher' chapter. The train cars themselves that are repurposed as classrooms were all repurposed by the school's janitor Ryo-chan. These factors probably saw Tomoe request funding much less than the average school. This, alongside the lack of publicity would have kept Tomoe under the radar, even in a context where the 'thought police' had power to arrest, imprison, and torture left wing ideologues without warning or apparent cause. (Beasley, 1990, p.184).

The establishment of the modern Japanese education system can be traced back to the Gakusei (education plan) put forth by the then new Japanese Ministry of Education following the Meiji Restoration of 1868 (Duke, 2009, p.1). With the Meiji restoration came an end to the self-imposed isolation of the Edo shogunate and education became a means for Japan to both 'catch up' to the colonial powers of the Western world, and join the global capitalist system (Yamasaki, 2017, p.11-12). Japan's entire educational system was modelled from those of The West, yet during the Second World War, much of the Western influence was to be scrubbed or 'Japanified' throughout the 1930s and 40s (Henshall, 2012, p.107). Tomoe quietly existed through this turmoil.

Tomoe, due to events discussed at the end of the book, no longer stands. In its place, now stands a supermarket and parking lot (Kuroyanagi, 1981, p.190). In 2023, Kuroyanagi herself unveiled a plaque commemorating where Tomoe Gakuen was (Kuroyanagi, 2023)—an act of publicity that Kobayashi might have been able to appreciate given the progression of the political environment in Japan.

Chapter Two

Learner-Centred Curriculum Theory

The Learner-Centred Curriculum

Sosaku Kobayashi's philosophy for learning is often explicitly explored during *Totto-chan: The Little Girl at the Window*. Evidence of the philosophy comes in the form of anecdotes that are accompanied by musings about what Kobayashi actually wanted to teach. Often though, small yet notable interactions with his students offer us an insight into what kind of educator Kobayashi was, what his values were, and how these influenced his practice. I argue that the educational philosophy of Sosaku Kobayashi aligns with what would be described as a 'Learner-centred' curriculum philosophy and his school reflects a humanistic philosophy of learning to achieve this end.

Curriculum Theory is defined by Kliebard (as cited in Lavatelli, Moore, & Kaltsounis, 1972) as "The field of curriculum is devoted to the study and examination of the decisions that go into the selection of what is taught. Implied in such a study is the notion that a curriculum may be planned with basic principles in mind. These principles, when they are reasonably consistent and coherent, constitute the essence of curriculum theory." When we speak of curriculum generally, we often talk of the 'formal' or 'national' curriculums released by academics or government entities that most schools teach from. In the case of Tomoe Gakuen, it is evident (through many of the anecdotes that will be discussed in the next section) that most curriculum development is happening at the local level by the educators themselves, allowing for a personalised and relevant curriculum for their students and a freedom to teach unorthodox classes such as Eurythmics. Learner-centered education is a school of thought that exists within curriculum theory.

Two primary ideas characterise Learner-centered education. First, The Learner-centred idealogues believe that "the function of the curriculum is to provide each learner with intrinsically rewarding experiences that contribute to personal liberation and development." (McNeil, 2009, p. 5). Michael Stephen Schiro (2013) writes about Learner-centred ideologues 'Learner-centred educators are concerned about people rather than theories regarding people, about sensitivity, and responsiveness to people rather than scholarly rigor in the study of people, and about helping people learn the things of the greatest concern to them rather than teaching people what they 'need' to know' (p. 114–115). This sits in

contrast to traditional education, or education that has the exclusive goal of supplying students with the knowledge that would contribute to a trade, profession, or academic subject. As the name suggests children are put first, their needs and wants guide curriculum development (which is done by their direct educators, the ones that know their students) rather than the reverse. Naturally, *who* a student is, or will become is emphasised over what they know or should know.

Second, Learner-centred educators hold the belief that knowledge is constructed by learners and meaning is created through the experience of the student. Knowledge then is “a function of a synthesis of each individual’s experience with the world” (Barth, 1972, as cited in Schiro, 2013). Learner-centred schools are geared towards giving students a range of experiences to aid in this, rather than curating lessons in which students are merely told information and expected to remember it. Teachers using Learner-centred approaches aim to create learning scenarios for students to explore and gain experiential knowledge by interacting or problem-solving through. Knowledge is meaning-making, not a transmission of facts and figures from teacher to student. Michael Ignelzi (2000) writes of the work of neo-Piagetist Robert Keegan: “An event does not have a particular solitary meaning attached that simply gets transferred to the individual. Instead, meaning is created between the event and the individual’s reaction to it” (p.7). For younger children, this can look like role-playing a range of characters, playing in a range of locales, or manipulation of a range of tools. (Vogt et al., 2018) For older students, it could be contextual problem-solving using skills previously taught, or a collaborative goal put forth for a range of students to come together and accomplish (Care, Scoular, & Griffin, 2016). In both cases, learning occurs as students derive meaning and understanding from such events.

Student interest guiding curriculum design and experiential learning make up the core tenants of the Learner-centred ideology. These two ideas inform the educator’s practice and inform the curriculum development for the class. In a sense they become the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of the content taught in the classroom. Student interest informs what is taught, experientialism dictates the makeup of the lesson. The role of the Learner-centered teacher manifests as diagnostician, curriculum developer, and classroom educator (Schiro, 2013).

Following from these two core tenants of Learner-centered education are a few further characteristics that aid in defining it. These are natural corollaries of the two guiding philosophies and will vary in implementation based on the educator’s personal beliefs about learning, policy, and the students' needs.

Learner-Centered Philosophy and Subject Areas

Learner-centred philosophy, taken to its most radical, sees little point in the classification of subject areas, or at least little point in educating students through these isolating categories. Instead, education is often delivered via contexts, from which students would draw meaning from through all academic disciplines (Schiro, 2013, pp. 101–104). This sits in contrast to an academic-focused traditional classroom that often transitions between the discrete teaching of individual classroom subjects throughout a day. An example of a holistic, encompassing lesson from *Totto-chan: The Little Girl at the Window* would be the trip to Kuhonbutsu temple. Kuhonbutsu Shrine is a short walk from Tomoe Gakuen and as such, the students make use of the locale. On Totto-chan's first day, the afternoon was spent going for a walk to the shrine as a reward for the student's hard work in the morning. On the way there, Totto-chan's teacher stopped the class to examine the blooming mustard flowers, asking the class if they knew why flowers bloomed. She continued on to discuss the parts of the flower, namely the pistils and stamen, and how butterflies help the flowers to bloom. At the shrine, the students examined the statues of the Buddhist gods and compared their feet size to a footprint said to be made by a Tengu, a goblin monster of Japanese folklore. The students played hopscotch outside before heading back to school. One educator could argue that this lesson is scientific. Pistils, stamens, and the pollination process falls readily under the scientific academic discipline. Another could argue that the afternoon was made up of a study of the humanities with regards to the cultural significance of the temple. An educator could also argue that the lesson was steeped in the area of health and physical education because of the movement the students engaged in (walking and hopscotch). To the Learner-centred educator, a lesson on pistils and stamen makes up a small part of the lesson in the context of Kuhonbutsu which encompasses many of the academic disciplines through a single lens. The learning then becomes holistic rather than isolative. Kuroyanagi is aware of this as she points out: "Little did these children realise then that these walks—a time of freedom and play for them—were in reality precious lessons in science, history, and biology" (Kuroyanagi, 1980, p.39). Kuroyanagi also recognises that lessons like the Kuhonbutsu walk are fun, interactive, and rewarding as well as educational. As mentioned above, a common theme of Learner-centred education is that lesson construction aims to be relevant and interesting to the student. In this case, the lesson is almost 'disguised' as play in order to enthuse the students further.

Learner-Centered Philosophy and Humanism

If the question of curriculum theory is “What do we teach students?” and the answer of the Learner-centered educator is “To be happy, intelligent, flourishing people”, then naturally an aim for schooling would be student’s emotional intelligence, their wellbeing and self-realisation (Gribble, 1969). Students who suffer, lacking grounding on the lower rungs of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, with mental health needs unmet (Desocio & Hootman, 2004) or low-income backgrounds, consistently perform worse than those from more affluent suburbs (Esposito, 1999). Kobayashi provides food at eating time for students who may be without it, as seen in the chapter *Sea Food and Land Food.* A practice that (when implemented correctly) aids in both student achievement (Belot & James, 2011) and increases student attendance (Bartfeld et al., 2019).

A focus is also put on the development and modelling of Interpersonal or ‘soft’ skills in Learner-centered classrooms. Novick (1996, as cited in Schiro, 2013) describes cooperative learning, mixed-age grouping, and family, school and community partnerships as appropriate practices for Learner-centred education. Learner-centered idealogues acknowledge that maintaining relationships are integral to almost every aspect of one’s life, including that of their wellbeing, and aim to give students the opportunity to immerse themselves in beneficial social situations through both free play (Barnett, 1990) and cooperative activity. We actively see free play during learning time at Tomoe Gakuen in the chapters *School Walks and* “*Shabby Old School”.* We see cooperative lessons in a number of chapters including *A Trip to a Hot Spring* and *Field Kitchen.* The lesson structure in classrooms (which I will discuss in the section *Embracing and Catering for Student Uniquity*) also allows for students to choose a cooperative method to complete tasks. In these ways, and other aspects such as student autonomy, Tomoe Gakuen takes on a more humanistic approach to the education of its students than traditional education does, with more focus put on both the wellbeing of its students as well as the social interactions they have with one another.

Learner-Centered Philosophy and Assessment

Because Learner-centered philosophy transcends both the learning goals and educational means of traditional education, there tends to be inconsistency between Learner-focused education and traditional assessment. Schiro writes of the beliefs of Scholarly-academic curriculum theorists that “worthwhile curriculum knowledge is objective rather than subjective in nature. Similarly, they believe that evaluation should be objective in nature—both in terms of what types of knowledge are assessed and in terms of how one goes about testing children.” (Schiro, 2013, p.52). Here we already see an incompatibility between traditional

assessment and Learner-centered philosophy as the definition of knowledge is different. Rather than meaning being made by students, knowledge is hard, objective facts of the world. On the Scholarly-academic curriculum theorists' view, it is within reason to conclude two things: first, that education is the transfer of knowledge from teacher to student, and second, if assessment is only an objective test of how much knowledge students have, then the most efficient way to teach would be to teach straight from first developed test with little to no variation on learning. Schiro writes of the scholarly academics view of children: "(They) are less concerned with the child than with curriculum content. When they do speak of the child, they speak of the child's mind. In particular, they speak of the rational or intellectual aspects of the child's mind. Man—the child and the student—is viewed as a creature of intellect. Other aspects of man's nature are of little concern to these developers." (Schiro, 2013, p.45). This system of assessment has remained the most pervasive in formal curriculum. It's little wonder that Learner-centered idealogues are proponents of a revised assessment system.

According to Schiro, the public perception of Learner-centred ideologues is often that they want to abolish assessment altogether, though this is possibly derived from their aversion to a numerical grading system or the act of ranking their students (Schiro, 2013). The truth is that assessment is a tremendously meaningful part of education, though the means of assessment look wholly different. In a traditional setting, testing is performed by the student and marked by the teacher. In contrast, Learner-centred educators encourage students to assess their own work, asking students how they feel about their work or what they could have done differently as means to have students self-reflect (Schiro, 2013). When students discuss what they enjoyed, what they disliked, or what they thought was easy or difficult, this informs the teacher of next steps in their curriculum design. For instance, imagine that at the end of a self-directed inquiry on insects, many students indicate that they found the research stage of the process difficult, saying they didn't quite know where to find easy to understand information around the topic. This could then inform the teacher in their next steps, deciding to run a workshop on how to find easy to understand information in books, on webpages, or in videos. The assessment has informed curriculum design to suit the needs of the students as opposed to grading or ranking them and moving on. Another argument from Learner-centered educators is that assessment should be "authentic" (Villarroel, et al, 2018) and "gestalt" (Shiro, 2013). Where a grade and a memo left by a teacher on a test may let students know where they went wrong in a test, it isn't likely to be meaningful to the student. Authentic assessment from the Learner-centered educator is more likely to take the form of "portfolio assessments, teacher notes, teacher diaries, developmental checklists, learning

logs and journals, student self-assessments, student peer assessments, and informal anecdotal narratives" (Schiro, 2013, p.146). These are all in service to engaging students in higher-order cognitive skills, student autonomy, motivation for learning, and encouraging self-regulation and self-reflection (Villarroel, et al, 2018). Novick (1996, as cited in Schiro, 2013) writes that "Authentic assessments provide a more meaningful picture of children's development than test scores. They address a much broader definition of intelligence, encourage children to become reflective, self-directed learners, help parents to see their children's progress, and enhance children's parents' and teachers' ability to develop shared meaning and memories." (p. 147). Assessment is extensive to the Learner-centered educator, but it is able to involve students in their learning by asking them to think critically about their work, involves families by developing a larger snapshot of their students' work to see, as well as being informative to the teacher about the skills, likes and dislikes of the students in their class.

Learner-Centered Philosophy and Play

Because Learner-centered philosophers believe that students learn through experience and meaning making, and that both soft social skills and less tangible skills like creativity, awareness (Phenix, 1974), freedom, interest (Tanner & Tanner, 1980), and individualism (Shiro, 2013) are just as important as traditional facts and knowledge; it stands to reason that great emphasis is put on play in Learner-centered educational centers. Play is seen as integral to the pioneering Learner-centered philosophers' work, such as Froebel, Montessori, and Steiner (Bruce, 2005). Tina Bruce (2005) extrapolates a few features of "free-flow play" from this early literature, including (play being) an active process without a product, (...) intrinsically motivated (by the students), actively using previous first-hand experience, including struggle, to create alternative worlds, may be solitary, and it may be initiated by a child or adult. (Bruce, 2005, pp.261–262). Play allows for students to direct their own experience and solve their own problems. Play, to Learner-centered educators, is a process like any other activity one may complete in class, only the terms, rules, and story are owned by the students themselves, giving them ownership, responsibility, and the control to take it where they please. Beyond this, play is fun and makes children happy. A state that is both intrinsically good, as well as required of students in order to be receptive to any learning that may occur.

Learner-Centered Philosophy and the Teacher

With all this covered, the Learner-centered educator herself must wear many hats. They are diagnostician to the needs of the student, facilitator of dialogue for self-assessment and

thought provocation, prompter of play, creator and compiler of assessment, establisher of safe and happy learning environments, curriculum designer, and author of contextually relevant lessons. Importantly this is all done in a way that is reactive to the needs and interests of the students and is flexible enough to change at the students' whims—a much busier occupation than the teacher as just transmitter of content.

The Origins of Learner-Centered Philosophy

The formal inception of Learner-centred education is often cited as Jean-Jacques Rousseau's treatise, *Emile*, in which he writes "O men, be Humane! It is your highest duty; be humane to all conditions of men, to every age, to everything not alien to mankind. What higher wisdom is there for you than Humanity? Love childhood; encourage its sports, its pleasures, its lovable instincts." (Emile, p.26). Emile is named of a fictional child from the work, the subject of tutelage that Rousseau instructs on how to raise as an ideal citizen. This work came at a time when education across the Western world was largely concerned with classical ideals that didn't like continuing in studies like History, Latin, and Greek, and coincided with the founding of the United States, with advocates like Benjamin Franklin, who believed that the curriculum "should be meaningful to the expansive middle class of business-oriented citizens who needed to deal with contemporary problems." (Schubert, 1986). Opposing Hobbes, Rousseau's perspective was that the governmental body was a corrupting influence on the pure-in-nature individual, and that education should bring us closer to our pure natural state, a state found in children. Educating children free from adult affairs is the key to a "renewed" society (Schubert, 1986). These ideas were purveyed through the 19th and 20th centuries by educators who would begin to put these philosophies to work. Key thinkers for this curriculum philosophy include Johann Pestalozzi, Frances W. Parker, John Dewey (McNeil, 2009), William Kilpatrick (Tanner & Tanner, 1980), Friedrich Froebel, and G. Stanley Hall (Schiro, 2013). Notably, this educational theory has also influenced both Paulo Friere's revolutionary text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) (Schubert, 1986) and some national curricula (Cubitt, 2006).

Learner-centred education as a curriculum theory has many key ideas which are emphasised differently by a range of writers, and as such goes by a range of names. John D. McNeil (2009) describes this set of ideas as a *"humanistic curriculum"*, Elliot W. Eisner and Elizabeth Vallance (1974) describe it as *"Self Actualization, or curriculum as consummatory experience"*, and Daniel and Laurel N. Tanner (1980) refers to it as *"New Education"*. References made in this text to the learning philosophy itself use Michael

Schiro's *"Learner Centred"* title. References I make to the historic implementations of this philosophy in schools I will generally refer to as *"Progressive Education*".

Student-Centred Learning In Context

The introduction of Japan's Gakusei coincides with the infancy of child-centred philosophy as a mainstream educational goal. With Japan clamouring for an educational system, the works of the German Herbart, Swiss-French Rousseau, and American Dewey were translated to Japanese, becoming 'key-vehicles' for Western educational thought to breach the Japanese education system (Yamasaki, 2017, p.11). 'Progressive education,' though commonplace in schools around Japan, still contended with a more commonplace national curriculum (Fujiwara, 2017 p.42–43). Nevertheless, many Learner-centred educators like Kobayashi were given the opportunity to travel to the West to learn directly from the forerunners of progressive education at the time. Progressive education saw its pre-war height in Japan in the 1910s and 1920s but subsided in the 1930s with the rise of an ultra-nationalistic and militaristic educational policy (Saito, 2009 p.5).

Chapter Two

The Values, Principles, and Strategies of Sosaku Kobayashi

This chapter will examine the values and strategies of Sosaku Kobayashi, what he does in order to teach his students, reinforce his beliefs of learning, and create a positive learning environment. This chapter is broken up into specific values or strategies; I will example where and how in the novel he employs them, examine outcomes or implications for the learning, and discuss why these values and strategies are important to the ideas of the Learner-centred curriculum philosophy.

In many ways, *Totto-chan: The Little Girl at the Window* is a personal account and expression of love for an educator that cared deeply for their students. Kobayashi's philosophy for learning is explored in dozens of ways throughout the novel and in many more ways than I have space to discuss here. The values all manifest as a teacher that is spontaneous and flexible in his work, fun-loving and engaging in his lessons, creative and thoughtful, passionate, and compassionate to the people around him. For as much as I will champion his philosophy for learning, the traits that define him as a person are the ones that obviously stuck with Kuroyanagi and inspired her to share her story. It is also these traits and values that embody what it is to be a Learner-centered educator. McNeil (2009) writes of the role of the teacher that

> "The teacher provides warmth and nurtures emotions while continuing to function as a resource and facilitator. He or she presents materials imaginatively and creates challenging situations. Humanistic teachers motivate their students through mutual trust. They encourage a positive student—teacher relationship by teaching out of their own interests and commitments while holding to the belief that each student can learn" (p. 5).

Instructional Strategies, Educational Gestures, and the Hidden Curriculum

Like all educators, Kobayashi and the other teachers at Tomoe have a range of tools to deliver their curriculum to students. These are often known as 'Instructional Strategies' (Ministry of Education, 2003) or 'Instructional Practices' (Block, 2012, p.4). Instructional strategies are how educators deliver the content of their curriculum. Kobayashi employs both formal instructional strategies and informal educational gestures to meet his ends. Formal

instructional strategies are commonplace in all curriculum ideologies. They help in student understanding, motivate students to think and apply knowledge and comprehend ideas at a deeper level (Block, 2012). Everything from asking students follow up questions or summarising ideas and modelling strategies to students (Silver et al., 2007), to assessment and feedback (Ministry of Education, 2003) are formal instructional strategies.

Informal educational gestures are pushes that Kobayashi makes that serve a more 'hidden curriculum.' They are unplanned, spontaneous, and informal in nature but help facilitate what Kobayashi himself deems important about education, and to create a positive milieu at Tomoe. The most prominent of these is possibly the gesture that Kuroyanagi admits had the largest effect on her life: Kobayashi constantly telling her "You're really a good girl." This wasn't a lesson; it was just something Kobayashi would tell her as often as he could in the hopes that she would not 'grow up with any complexes.' It came as a response to Totto-chan's expulsion from her previous school and as she recounts in the postscript, successfully resonated with her throughout her life.

In using both formal instructional strategies and informal educational gestures, Kobayashi shows a mastery of 'The Hidden Curriculum,' a term coined by Philip W. Jackson in 1968's *Life in Classrooms.* Whereas a formal curriculum is the end goal of what we set out for students, what we want them to learn and what we want them to be able to do—the hidden curriculum is the unseen learning of values, social dynamics, feelings, and knowledge that students actually come away from their school time with (Giroux & Penna, 1979). The interactions that Kuroyanagi has with Kobayashi, formal and informal, commonly had ulterior learnings. Often, Kuroyanagi muses over these with comments like 'what did he want me to know by this?' or 'and from that day on we…' An instance of this occurring is through Kobayashi's eurythmics class that saw students using chalk to transcribe a piece of music, following which students had to clean after themselves. Kuroyanagi comments that "Cleaning up after writing rhythms was quite a job. First you had to wipe the floor with a blackboard eraser, and then everyone joined forces to make the floor spick and span again with mops and rags. It was an enormous task. In this way Tomoe children learned what trouble cleaning off graffiti could be, so they never scribbled anywhere except on the floor of the assembly hall. Moreover, this class took place twice a week, so the children had their fill of scribbling" (Kuroyanagi, 1981, p. 168). Here, the intentional curriculum content for the lesson was musical, but the implicit learning was an exercise in respecting property and the environment of the school.

In the following section, I will discuss many such cases of Kobayashi's use of formal instructional strategies, informal educational gestures and hidden curriculum influence as I dissect his educational values.

Embracing and Catering for Learner Uniquity

As mentioned above, possibly the defining characteristic of the Learner-centred educational philosophy is that every student is taught as a whole, unique person. It's a philosophy where "capacity for self-fulfilment is good, that the ability of humans to command their own educational destinies is good, that a child's search toward fuller understanding is normal, natural and good" (Schiro quotes Rathbone, 2011, p.155). The lessons taught in a Learner-centred school don't necessarily always lead to an academic outcome either, they often have humanistic themes, or implicit objectives for students, and are framed in a way to make it exciting or relevant to the individual students. It is the educator's job to identify what these lessons could look like to cater to the students in their class. To a Learner-centred educator, these lessons are just as important to the development of the human as those confined to academic pursuits, as the 'point' of education is the holistic development of each human (the students). Though this doesn't mean rote, or academic learning sits by the wayside at Tomoe; Tetsuko mentions that some of the students in her class were copying the letters of the alphabet. Sakko-chan, the girl sitting next to Totto-chan on her first day, already knew the alphabet, and chose to practise by writing the alphabet into her book without visual aid. Other times we see students encouraged to read on their own, more so with the arrival and establishment of the library car. In contrast to traditional schooling, at Tomoe rote learning is student-driven, partly enabled by the unique classroom timetable.

In the chapter *Lessons at Tomoe*, Kuroyanagi describes how students at Tomoe were given a list of learning activities to do in one day. Each activity can be completed in any order and students are given autonomy on which they would like to pick first. One may be a mathematics task, a scientific undertaking, or practising the alphabet. Of course the teacher would curate these tasks for the ability of the students involved. This is stated when Tetsuko mentions "This method of teaching enables the teachers to observe–as the children progressed to higher grades–what they were interested in as well as their way of thinking and their character. It was an ideal way for teachers to really get to know their students" (Kuroyanagi, p.29). This returns us to the idea that Learner-centered educators take on the role of diagnostician, which informs a more relevant classroom curriculum.

The implications of a classroom itinerary set out like this are massive. First, students have power and choice over what they want to learn, when. Students making decisions over how and when learning occurs allows for students to take ownership of their own learning based on their preferences and ability. Students become a part of the curriculum design process, and curriculum becomes a democratic process. Education as a democratic process creates students who are “unique, autonomous, and authoritative subjects who acknowledge and know themselves” (Moos, 2024, p.41).

Second, as mentioned, curriculum and pedagogical design is catered toward the student by the teacher. Students learn in a way that is suitable to their needs at the time. Should a student need instruction in a way that is relevant to their extant knowledge, the teacher can help to convey or show the information in a way that makes sense to the individual. This requires that a teacher gets to ‘know’ their students, but also quickly builds rapport and trust between teacher and student, making it easier for the teacher to design classroom activities that are more effective and memorable. As Friesen notes (2008, as cited in Dunleavy & Milton, 2009), “Authentic intellectual engagement requires a deeper reciprocity in the teaching-learning relationship where students’ engagement begins as they actively construct their learning in partnership with teachers, work toward deep conceptual understanding, and contribute their own ideas to building new knowledge or devising new practices in activities that are ‘worthy of their time and attention’” (p.8, as cited in Dunleavy & Milton, 2009, p.14).

Third, should a student not be feeling well, mentally or physically; the student has the choice to slow down on their work and prioritise themselves instead of getting dragged through the content and compromising their learning. This humanistic and democratic approach to education caters for the students at Tomoe, some of whom have a range of learning hindrances, while also acknowledging that other aspects of a student’s life, (physical, social, or emotional) may affect their education. With a more free-form teaching style, more attention may be given to students who would benefit from one-on-one teaching, and less given to students who are currently comfortably self-motivated.

Finally, should a student excel in a subject or topic due to prior interest, the teacher has the authority to build upon their understanding, or even take ownership over their learning by giving them the mantle of an expert in the learning community. Dewey (2008) wrote on this style of education saying “An educational aim must be founded upon the intrinsic activities and needs (including original instincts and acquired habits) of the given individual to be educated” (p.130). When all students are learning by way of rote or transmission from the

teacher, all students are dragged up (whether successfully or not) or down to the level of information being given by the educator at the time. Of course, in this teacher-centered case neither the relevance of the information nor the interest of the student is taken into account either.

Freedom of Expression

Emile, Or On Education, Learner-centred philosophy's arguable conception, begins with "Coming from the Hand of the Author of all things, everything is good; in the hands of man, everything degenerates" (Rousseau, 2011, p.11). What Rousseau means here is that the child is innately good and natural, and it's the job of the educator to guide and celebrate rather than mould and teach (as has been a pervasive theme throughout the history of education). Schiro writes that "Learner-centered educators believe individuals should participate in determining the directions their education will take, by responding to their own innate natures, felt needs, and organic impulses" (Schiro, 2013, p.124). Kobayashi mirrors these sentiments almost exactly in Tetsuko's postscript, claiming that he would tell kindergarten teachers in his employ 'not to try and fit the children into preconceived molds' and "Leave them to nature (...) Don't cramp their ambitions, their dreams are bigger than yours" (Kuroyanagi, 1980).

This cultivation of the individual manifests in a few ways at Tomoe Gakuen. Because the Learner-centred educator's goals are to let children learn through experience, cultivate a 'whole' self, and have authority over what and how they learn, extra free time is also given to the students at the end of every day for students to do with as they please. The novel lists a few examples of how students spent this time, chatting, playing ball, continuing experiments in the classroom, with one student even scrutinising a stray cat that he had found. The list exemplifies how the learning continues to take place even if unguided, and the individuality of each of the students at Tomoe Gakuen, for each student chose their own path of activity, and is encouraged regardless of what that may be.

Encouragement to experience is extended to even which clothes Tomoe students wear. "The headmaster was always asking parents to send their children to school at Tomoe in their worst clothes. He wanted them to wear their worst clothes so that it wouldn't matter if they got muddy and torn. It would be a shame for children to worry about being scolded if their clothes got dirty or to hesitate joining in some game because their clothes might get torn" (Kuroyanagi, 1980, p.84). She then compares her clothes to the uniforms of the more traditional schools in her area, sailor uniforms for the girls and high collared jackets for the

boys. The juxtaposition hints at a difference in philosophy, where Tomoe students are encouraged to experience (regardless of attire), other schools' students are taught to dress formally for their transmissional learning. Even with his heedings, Totto-chan in the story very much enjoyed exquisite clothing which would become part of her 'brand' as an adult. As a child, Totto-chan's first friend at Tomoe came of the clothing she wore. On her first day, Totto-chan chose to sit next to the girl wearing a pinafore with a long-eared rabbit on it. Though small, this bit of self-expression from the girl was a gateway for a friendship to grow, an avenue that would have been closed off to her at a school with stricter attire regulation.

Inclusive Education

Tomoe Gakuen, as presented in *Totto-chan: The Little Girl at the Window,* is notable for having quite the diverse array of students. True to Learner-centered education, all students were treated as unique individuals and fully included even when their differences made inclusion challenging. The book names three examples of students whose circumstances and conditions would have had an effect on their learning. However, Kobayashi's inclusive and often highly creative approach meant these students all enjoyed their time at Tomoe and even excelled in some educational scenarios.

Kobayashi is always shown to model inclusive practice. He introduces new students kindly as 'new friends' to their peers. He makes time to listen to students and facilitate discussion between one another, and many of the full school activities like the camping trip and trip to the hot spring break the students into groups where the older students help the younger ones. The intention is to foster a feeling of unity and create a learning environment where all students feel important and listened to. Of course, a teacher cannot expect students to be kind or inclusive if they aren't modelling the attitude, so Kobayashi does consistently.

Yasuaki Yamamoto, or 'Yasuaki-chan' to Totto-chan is a boy in her class. On her very first day, Totto-chan notices that this boy drags his leg as he walks around the classroom. She bluntly inquires like any six-year-old would, and he reveals that he moves the way he does because he was afflicted with polio. Not a lot is described in how Kobayashi's design for learning facilitated the needs of Yasuaki-chan directly. But the inclusive modelling from Kobayashi undoubtedly allowed Yasuaki-chan to thrive at Tomoe. Yasuaki became Totto-chan's friend. Later in the story, in the chapter *The Great Adventure*, Totto-chan and Yasuaki come to school during the holiday period without telling their parents with the goal of getting Yasuaki up a tree. Kuroyanagi explains "The children considered 'their' trees their own private property, so if you wanted to climb someone else's tree you had to ask their

permission very politely, saying, “Excuse me, may I come in?” Because Yasuaki-chan had had polio he had never climbed a tree, and so couldn’t claim one as his own. That is why Totto-chan decided to invite him to her tree. They kept it a secret because they thought people were sure to make a fuss if they knew.” (Kuroyanagi, 1981, p. 61). This becomes an ordeal for the two, and a dangerous one at that, but the pair are persistent and eventually Yasuaki-chan is able to join his friend on her tree. Totto-chan is an inclusive and kind student, though this adventure may not have happened if not for the culture of inclusivity that Kobayashi fostered at Tomoe Gakuen.

A new student, Miyazaki-chan, arrives at Tomoe towards the end of the novel. Miyazaki-chan spoke little Japanese as he had grown up in the United States, which was, by this time in the story, Japan’s greatest enemy. Miyazaki-chan is welcomed at Tomoe however, with no mention of the war or discussion of how Miyazaki-chan's previous life is one to be ashamed of. Indeed, quite the opposite occurs. Miyazaki is introduced as an expert to the other students by Kobayashi. “He’s one of you now (...) I said he wasn’t very good at Japanese, but he’s very good at English, get him to teach you some” (Kuroyanagi, 1981, p.160), Kobayashi tells the students. Miyazaki-chan’s expertise in a subject is held up as both a positive and a means of getting to know other students, his difference is celebrated by Kobayashi, regardless of how this difference will impact his learning, or what his difference means in the context of the time he lives.

The most prominent example of Kobayashi’s inclusivity is with the student Akira Takahashi. Takahashi moves to the school from Osaka. He is described as ‘bow legged and short’ to the reader, but is explicitly mentioned as having dwarfism in the book’s epilogue. Regardless of this, the other students are kind and accepting of Takahashi, they excitedly show him around the unique layout of the school.

A few chapters on, Kuroyanagi describes the sports day of that year. All of the events other than the three-legged race and tug of war are unique to Tomoe, designed by Kobayashi. Notably, many of the events require more than physical prowess or dexterity. One event described is the ‘Find-A-Mother’ race where students are tasked with racing to an envelope with a specific person from the community of the school (usually a mother) and then hunting them down in the crowd. At first it seems many of these events are designed as silly, have random elements that decide the winner to even the playing field, and are less competitive than your average sprint or relay. The events are designed so students who are less physically capable, or interested in physical education can find joy in participation and not

feel insecure in underperformance. Regardless of performance, every student went home with prizes of homegrown vegetables, to which they can feel pride in providing for their family. Students all helped in preparation for and the running of sports day as well, through the creation of decoration for the event and event management. The tug-of-war event was run by Yasuaki-chan, who though unable to participate, was able to cheer on and judge a winner by watching the handkerchief tied to the middle of the rope. Sports day at Tomoe, though still competitive, had underlying themes of fun, inclusion, teamwork, and taking pride in providing for your family rather than athletic domination.

Takahashi “who had the shortest arms and legs and was the smallest in the school” (Kuroyanagi, 1981, p.103) won every event at sports day. The other students audibly concluded that they must beat Takahashi, but to no avail. Kuroyanagi explains that “(the other students) could outrun him on the straight stretches, but lost to him on the difficult bits.” (Kuroyanagi, 1981, p.103). Kuroyanagi suggests that these events were designed around the strengths of Takahashi specifically, his ability to speedily traverse thin steps with ease, or his small stature that made crawling underneath or through things much easier. Regardless of whether Takahashi’s extraordinarily overwhelming victory was coincidence, careful planning on the part of Kobayashi, or a mix of the two, Takahashi got his chance to shine that day. Kuroyanagi muses “No doubt he (Kobayashi) was thinking especially of Takahashi–whose dinner table would be overflowing with First Prizes–and hoping the boy would remember his pride and happiness at winning those First Prizes before developing an inferiority complex about his size and the fact that he would never grow.” (Kuroyanagi, 1981, p. 105). A student who would have stood out at a glance, got an opportunity to be held on a pedestal, and be the hero thanks to the inclusive planning that Kobayashi employed in his sports day activities.

Inclusive practice, while mostly targeting students who may be outliers academically or have barriers to fitting in, is encompassing of the entire school. In all given passages of the text, we are never shown a disparity of opportunity for either gender. All students are given the opportunity to perform in the school’s play of Kanjincho, notably with Totto-chan originally intended to play the male (though often classically depicted as femininely beautiful) (Schmidt-Hori, 2022)) role of Yoshitsune, though the part was eventually given to another male student as Totto-chan kept going off script.

An earlier chapter gives us a slight insight into the gender disparity of the time. After having Totto-chan’s hair pulled in an earlier chapter, the boy ‘Oe’ is made to apologise to her by

Kobayashi, lecturing him on how girls are to be 'looked after' and that boys should be nice to them. Totto-chan is shocked by this sentiment, she laments "Boys were always the important ones. In the families she knew where there were lots of children, it was always the boys who were served first at meals and at snack time, and when girls spoke, their mothers would say 'Little girls should be seen and not heard'" (Kuroyanagi, p.120). There is some disparity in the culture of favouritism towards boys, but this culture is not perpetuated at Tomoe Gakuen, creating a more inclusive environment for all of its students.

Kindness, Optimism, and Openness

Kobayashi's disposition is almost always kind and happy. While he is described as the type of person who is naturally cheerful and takes great pride in his work, he most definitely modelled this with the purpose of creating a happy and healthy environment for students to work in.

In a handful of moments Kobayashi is shown to not be in his usual, chipper state. In the chapter *Tails*, Totto-chan and her new friend Oe sneak into the assembly hall to watch as Kobayashi scolds someone. Upon arrival, they realise it is Totto-chan's teacher. Kobayashi is enraged as he happened to be in the room earlier that day when the class had been discussing the vestigial nature of the coccyx. The teacher had asked Takahashi "wouldn't it be cute if you had a tail?" Totto-chan admits that she would have loved to be asked that question, but that Takahashi had stopped growing and could have been self-conscious or offended by such a question. Kobayashi felt very strongly about how students with disabilities were treated and he did all he could to make them feel at home and comfortable with themselves. To Kobayashi, the question undermined his inclusive philosophy. The teacher says that she did not mean anything by the question, but understands why Kobayashi is upset.

Another time we see Kobayashi not portrayed in an optimistic light is in the chapter *Yasuaki-chan's Dead.* The morning of the first day of school back from the spring vacation, the students of Tomoe are assembled on the school grounds. Kobayashi addresses the students briefly. He is described as having a 'bright red face' and 'having tears welling up.' He announces the death of Yasuaki-chan to the school. Kobayashi cares deeply for his students and while this chapter focuses on Totto-chan's first hand, formative experience of experiencing the death of a friend for the first time, Kobayashi makes the decision that school is to be put on hold for the day and the students were to attend the funeral. This choice is humanistic rather than academic. In making the large educational gesture of

choosing to scrap the school day in favour of attending Yasuaki-chan's funeral, Kobayashi displays the belief that his role is to educate and comfort the 'whole child.' As Schiro (2013) puts it, "(children are) an inseparable conglomerate of intellectual, social, psychological, and physical dimensions" (p.133), not the sum of their academic knowledge. Kobayashi's goal was to have the students see off their friend, as this is a more important aspect of human life and what education is really about to a Learner-centred educator.

During this occasion, Kobayashi did not hide how he was feeling. Whether he intended it or not, this modelled to students a lack of emotional inhibition, giving them permission to express how they felt too. We know now that the inhibition of negative emotions may not provide relief (Gross & Levenson, 1997). This is also a glimpse at the kind of man Kobayashi was: in tune with and honest about his own emotions, and deeply caring about his students.

Other than these two occasions, Kobayashi is consistently optimistic, kind, and open in all stories he appears in. In doing so, we can deduce he aims to both 'set the tone' for his school's learning environment, as well as model the behaviour he wants to see from the students at Tomoe. Creating a supportive learning environment is integral to fostering the wellbeing and learning of the students (Rusticus et al., 2022) and role-modelling values is instrumental in the development of students' own value education (Arthur, 2011).

Giving Students Autonomy

Students at Tomoe are granted autonomy for their learning in a range of interesting ways, this is a guiding tenet of student-focused education. Giving students choice over what or how they learn helps to guide the curriculum, gives students ownership and responsibility over their learning, and helps to create a more engaged student (Reeve & Jang, 2006). Autonomy at Tomoe is not limited to the itinerary-style classroom timetable discussed earlier, it is observed even outside of the classroom setting. An example of an informal educational gesture that exemplifies his belief in student autonomy is seen in the chapter *Put It All Back!* In this story, Totto-chan accidentally drops her favourite purse down the toilet before school begins. Refusing to give up, Totto-chan grabs a large ladle from the caretaker's shed and takes it to the cesspool where the school's waste ends up and begins to ladle piles out next to her in an attempt to save her purse. The bell rings for the beginning of class but she decides to continue scooping. Kobayashi happens upon her and asks what she is doing. When she explains, his response is simply 'I see' before continuing his stroll. He returns after some time and inquires as to whether she had found what she was looking for. She hadn't, but all he asks is that she 'puts it all back.' She cheerfully responds but then realises

that while the solid contents could easily be returned, the liquid contents were quickly seeping into the ground next to her. Contented by her own effort to do all she could, she begins scooping it back before heading to class. Tetsuko makes no attempt at guessing why Kobayashi did not stop her, though Totto-chan's mother does express admiration for the decision. This example gives us further insight into Kobayashi's teaching philosophy.

First, it tells us that Kobayashi believes that even great, personal lessons can come from experience that takes place outside of the intended, formal curriculum. We can assume this is why he allowed it to continue; with the knowledge that for whatever reason Totto-chan was doing this, she will take away some valuable learning from the whole ordeal. This ordeal itself is just as important a learning experience as anything she could gain from her class, hence he doesn't send her back immediately. It is an individualised lesson of sorts and a challenge for her to overcome that she has set herself. Kobayashi allows her to continue and grants her autonomy in her actions. To Learner-centred educators, lessons like this are critical to the development of a child's unique self. It's evident that Kobayashi displays a trust in both Totto-chan's childlike reasoning for attempting what she was, and in her person. He trusts that her reasoning will follow through to a conclusion or a learning. To which she does, as "after the incident, Totto-chan never peered down the hole any more after using the toilet" (Kuroyanagi, 1981, p. 46). This might appear to be a small, insignificant, or stupid takeaway, but to a young child, and to Kuroyanagi specifically, it was formative to her character. Giving her this autonomy was also handing her the responsibility, and the consequences for the choice she made. Had Kobayashi interjected, scolded, made her clean it up, then made her clean herself up (which wouldn't have been totally unreasonable), Totto-chan wouldn't have come to the conclusion that she had done all she could on her own. She could have felt resentment or confusion as a scolding would have conflicted with her own world understanding of the situation. Totto-chan could have even understood why what she was doing was dangerous if she were to be scolded, especially had Kobayashi explained it to her, but it is unlikely Totto-chan would have drawn the sense of satisfaction she did, or taken away a feeling of ownership and completion that she did from the endeavour.

Second, as mentioned before, Kobayashi displayed trust in Totto-chan's character that she would be careful, clean up after herself, and show respect for the school environment. Kobayashi chose not to scold her for making such a putrid mess, rather, he trusted that she would do her best to 'put it all back.' He understood her well enough to know that Totto-chan did not mean to damage school grounds or purposefully make a mess, and while her doing what she was may not have made sense to him, we can infer through the relationship

building exhibited on her first day at school, he knew her well enough as a courteous student. Even if it was not the case that he knew her well enough, his decision would have been fundamentally bolstered by his belief that children are naturally good beings. Schiro (2013) writes that to Learner-centred pedagogues “a child’s innate nature is one of goodness” (p.133), this philosophy is mirrored in the novel’s postscript when Kuroyanagi writes “I have tried to describe Mr. Kobayashi’s educational methods in this book. He believed all children are born with an innate good nature (...) His aim was to uncover that ‘good nature’ and develop it, so that the children would grow into people with individuality.” (Kuroyanagi, 1981, p.191).

Shared Student Responsibility

Often, as a community, the students of Tomoe are given responsibility over events or activities pertaining to their own education. As Nuthall (2007) attests “Effective activities are managed by the students themselves” (p.38). One such occasion is the day before sports day where it was the children’s job to create and hang decorations around the school before their community descends upon it to watch the events. Another occasion is a small field trip the entire school takes to Todoroki Keikoku, a small parkland area in Tokyo that houses a waterfall, a stream and a wooded area. The trip to Todoroki Keikoku culminates in a cookout. All the students separated themselves into groups by playing paper, scissors, rock and each group member was allocated a job to contribute to the group’s meal. The jobs included chopping vegetables, washing the rice, creating the fire, and cooking the soup. This gave Totto-chan, who was one of the younger students an opportunity to don the mantle of the expert, who critiqued another student’s careless chopping and went above and beyond to create makeshift pickles by slicing eggplant and cucumber thinly and rubbing the slices with salt, impressing her group members. Tetsuko attests “Until then, hardly any of the children had ever watched something cooking or had to regulate the heat. They had merely eaten what was put before them on the table. The joy of cooking something themselves, with its attendant traumas—and seeing the various changes in ingredients have to undergo—was a whole new experience to them” (Kuroyanagi, 1980, p.140). The whole undertaking of the cooking of the meal was due to the relinquished responsibility of the teachers at Tomoe. The onus belonged to the children, but with it came learning, self-management, and satisfaction. This atmosphere of mutual respect contributes to student’s feelings of ‘belonging’ (Ross et al., 1993, p.268).

Musical Education and Eurythmics

Eurythmics class is notable at Tomoe as it's the only class that Kobayashi steps in to teach on his own. Music was Kobayashi's educational *raison d'etre*; he grew up 'conducting' in nature by the riverbank near his home before he formally studied musical education both in Japan and under Eurythmics' inventor Émile Jaques-Dalcroze. Eurythmics itself is a holistic method of education that aims to create a connection between the mind and body through sensory activation. It employs the movement of students to musical rhythms to create knowledge. To a Dalcrozian, rhythm is naturally created by humans: walking, jumping, and breathing are all rhythmic movements. The brain turns the kinesthetic feeling of these movements into knowledge of the qualities of movement: pace, trajectory, weight, angles etc. (Abramson in Urista, 2016, p.3).

In the book, we see two examples of Eurythmic education directly taught by Kobayashi, the first is the aural transcription seen in the discussion around the use of chalk above; the other is closer to the platonic ideal of a eurythmic lesson. Students began by walking and moving their arms to the beat of Kobayashi's piano. Students were asked to walk as they naturally would but Kobayashi would change time signatures and tempos so students would need to adjust their pace and cadence to keep up. The arm movements would require a different set of commands depending on the time signature. 4/4 was 'simple enough' for Totto-chan but the constant changing did make it difficult. With practise came improvement however; Kuroyanagi does describe students who came to find it easier to add variation in flourishes to their movement or challenge themselves by closing their eyes. Urista (2016) describes moving to music as "stimulating all the capacities we use to engage in music: the aural, visual, tactile, and muscular senses; our reasoning faculties; and our ability to feel and act upon our feelings (p.2)." The name 'Tomoe' is an ancient Shinto symbol shaped like a comma. Generally this shape is presented with one or more tomoe to create a full circle shape. Kuroyanagi writes that Tomoe Gakuen itself adopts the double, black and white tomoe symbol (similar to the yin-yang symbol) to represent Kobayashi's ultimate aim for students; harmony and synchronicity in mind and body.

Eurythmic education shows another example of the sharp contrast to the transmissional education of the day. Kuroyanagi (1981) describes how Kobayashi deplored focusing on the written word, rather than a student's reception to the world around them, from which real discoveries and artistic inspiration can be more easily derived from. Kuroyanagi does although also professes that she (at the time) just liked to jump around like Isadora Duncan. Regardless of whether she had any idea of the philosophy guiding the lessons at the time,

something should be said of the enthusiasm that a lesson like that generated. In this way, Totto-chan was taking on the role of another and Eurythmics became play.

Though never mentioned, eurythmics lessons at Tomoe would have had to account for the students with physical disabilities. One can imagine that Kobayashi would have seen it as of utmost importance that students like Yasuaki and Takahashi take part in eurythmics lessons. This would have been for both muscle and body development as well as the primary objective of a mind/body connection. It is worth noting that Kuroyanagi (1981) claims that "The headmaster had included Eurythmics in his school curriculum because he felt it was bound to have good results" (p.79) more recent studies have shown that there is a benefit to eurythmic therapy (Lötzke et al., 2015) and (Büssing et al., 2008). With such emphasis placed by Kobayashi on the wellbeing and actualisation of each individual student, it begs the question about how these students actually felt about eurythmics education. A lesson like this puts vulnerable students' bodies on trial regardless of its positive intent. There are a few factors mentioned that remedies these frets. First, the eurythmics lessons at Tomoe saw students working parallel to one another, not cooperatively (they were asked not to talk, just to concentrate). Students were to be focused on themselves, not the movements of others around them. Next, the difficulty of eurythmics classes themselves would have helped to contribute to a learning environment where students are focused on their own projects, rather than the judgement of others. Finally, the positive environment and inclusive practice Kobayashi employs throughout the rest of his pedagogy would not stop at the door. Though one can only imagine the words of praise and celebration Kobayashi would give to all students in his eurythmics class for trying their best, he most assuredly would have done so.

Beyond Eurythmics as a programme for education we see a few instances of Kobayashi integrating musical education into other areas of school life. The chapter *Chew it Well* describes a jingle Kobayashi wrote to the tune of *Row, Row, Row Your Boat* that students sing before partaking in their lunches. Kuroyanagi believes it is to remind students to eat properly, savour their lunches, and enjoy discussion while they eat (p.35).

Learning From Experience

As mentioned before, a large idea in Learner-centred education is immersing students in an experience or context, rather than directly drilling knowledge into them. Giving students the opportunity to do, try, and become in a real-world context is invaluable learning (Whitebread & Jameson, 2005). In Learner-centered education, knowledge and understanding is not transmitted from teacher to student, it's created through the senses. This isn't a new idea,

Aristotle famously wrote that “anything we have to learn we learn by the actual doing of it: people become builders by building and instrumentalists by playing instruments” (Aristotle, 2004). This central tenet of modern Learner-centered education, has been bolstered by psychological and epistemological findings, modern ideas around counselling, and theories surrounding the *whole language* movement (Schiro, 2013).

If quality learning is experiential, then contexts provide both a subject of observation and new outlooks and frameworks to view said subject from. Students studying the weather use the tools and formulas of the meteorologist to discover truths about the world. Students learning about statistics will interview and gather data to present, rather than merely examine graphs in books. Students who come to a conclusion about the world through experience both exercise logical inference to come to this conclusion and take ownership over the conclusion they came to, regardless of the accuracy. Amineh and Asl (2015) describe this conclusion as “building an internal illustration of knowledge, a personal interpretation of experience. This representation is always open to modification, its structure and linkages forming the ground to which other knowledge structures are attached” (p. 11). Totto-chan’s ‘pistil’ conclusion about the flower is solidified in her memory after forty years as the information she was given has an anecdote tied to it, the conclusion she came to was (at the time) incorrect, but the misunderstanding gave her a connection to the knowledge that she built herself.

In *Totto-chan: The Little Girl at the Window*, we see a number of both formal instructional strategies and informal educational gestures where Kobayashi employs both experiential learning and the celebration and cultivation of the student's own conclusions. These are seen in the chapters *The Farming Teacher, A Railroad Car Arrives,* and *The Health Bark*.

In the chapter *The Farming Teacher* the Tomoe students spend a day learning from and working with the farmer on his field near Kuhonbutsu Temple. The students learn about the importance of weeding the field, how to do it, and how to use farming equipment to hoe and furrow the ground and then fertilise it. One boy encounters a snake which turns into a lesson on local fauna. The chapter ends discussing the shared pride that the students had in the field they helped sow. On this day, books and stationary are left to the wayside and the field becomes the classroom. Tomoe’s students got to experience both the toil and the satisfaction of farmwork, a real and important role they could have taken up once they came of age. Through their education, a path or choice is opened up to them early, this is what a career or hobby in growing produce entails. This opportunity could have sparked a passion

for some students (one student from Tomoe notably grew to become ‘Japan’s foremost authority on far eastern orchids) (Kuroyanagi, 1981). To those it did not, it would have cradled a further understanding about farming, the science it involves, and the lifestyle of the people that do it. Regardless of the outcome that a lesson like this would have had for the individual, the students created their own knowledge through first-hand experience, from the perspective of a master of their craft.

Coming to Their Own Conclusions

On two notable occasions, Kobayashi personally takes a back seat to giving students the answer, giving the students the opportunity to come to logical conclusions based on the knowledge they currently have. These come in the chapters *A Railroad Car Arrives* and *The Health Bark*. Both times, in making such a decision, his aim is to both increase student self-determination (Chan et al., 2014), and for students to exercise soft and intangible skills like mentioned earlier, all the while further building their knowledge base through meaningful exploration.

Early in the story, Kobayashi’s daughter and Totto-chan’s classmate Miyo-chan informs the school that a new railroad car will be arriving that night; it was going to be the library car. The students begin to ponder about how exactly they get a train car onto the school grounds. Totto-chan herself thought that they would lay rails down, but then could not fathom how they would lay tracks through the houses between the closest station and Tomoe Gakuen. Miyo-chan is elected to go and ask her father if the students were able to stay at school until the train arrives so they can see how it arrives. Kobayashi thinks this is a wonderful idea and sends the students home that afternoon with an invitation for a sleepover evening at Tomoe. Not once did Kobayashi tell the students how the train car will arrive, he let the students discuss, deliberate, and come up with their own theories before giving them an opportunity to see the answer on their own.

On one trip to school, Totto-chan happens past a man selling ‘health bark’. The man explains that if you chew on the bark and it tastes bitter, it means you are sick. Totto-chan, fascinated by the bark, begins asking around the school for money to purchase the bark with. This got to Kobayashi, who heard her out. In Kobayashi’s office he began questioning her about the bark, concluding that he would lend her the money on the condition that he would get to have a bite of the bark too. The next day, Totto-chan, the new school doctor, held up her end of the bargain and let Kobayashi chew on the bark, who found it had no taste at all, much to the relief of his students. Kuroyanagi professes in hindsight that

Kobayashi grew up around Mount Haruna and would have known that bark would have no taste in particular. This chapter takes place much later in the story.

At this point the war effort was having a clear effect on the people of Japan. People were going hungry from rationing, young men were leaving for war, and Totto-chan's own father was debating playing wartime propaganda music over the radio. The bark salesman likely resorted to these tactics as a means to put food on his own table. Kobayashi could have warned Totto-chan of the snake oil salesman, but he chose to indulge her, and give her the opportunity to test the theory. Once again giving her the chance to come to her own conclusions.

The Influence of Sosaku Kobayashi

To his students and to Tetsuko Kuroyanagi, Sosaku Kobayashi had a great influence on their lives. Kuroyanagi stresses this, detailing conversations she has with former students, as well as dedicating *Totto-chan: The Little Girl at the Window* to him. Formally though, his personal pedagogical influence before the novel was published stemmed only to those who had met him. Kobayashi never published work and information about his life is scarce, but Learner-centered education did continue through the 20th century, and still does purvey through education systems worldwide.

Chapter Three

Kobayashi's Philosophy of Education and his Contemporaries

Progressive Education Now

The educational gestures made by Kobayashi were guided by a personal philosophy of education, which was intentional, even if inexplicit, to his learners. Kuroyanagi picked up on these educational gestures as she wrote her book and often attempts to explain the meaning or intention behind them. Kobayashi's gestures were informed by his own education, his teacher education at Seikei Elementary and under Dalcroze, his experiences and personal beliefs, the context of the day, and the students themselves. As I have argued above, the educational gestures featured in the novel slot Kobayashi in the 'Learner-centred' curriculum philosophy camp.

To his students and to Tetsuko Kuroyanagi, Sosaku Kobayashi had a great influence on their lives. Kuroyanagi stresses this in her epilogue and postscript, detailing conversations she has with former students, as well as dedicating *Totto-chan: The Little Girl at the Window* to him. Formally though, his personal pedagogical influence before the novel was published stemmed only to those who he had worked with directly. After the destruction of Tomoe Gakuen in bombing raids during World War II, Kobayashi had a hand in other educational projects. He started a kindergarten on the site of Tomoe Gakuen, while lending aid to the establishment to both what is now the Child Education Department of Kunitachi College of Music and Kunitachi Elementary School. Kobayashi however never published work, nor did he pursue larger scale curriculum reform, probably by choice. It is clear by how Kuroyanagi paints him that he's a character who loved being 'on the ground' in the profession.

If the outcomes we see for students like Totto-chan and her friends are so positive, it then begs the question why Learner-centred philosophy isn't the norm in the 21st century. Since Kobayashi's time, progressive education has waxed and waned across the world; Learner-centred philosophy has influenced national curricula, academic discourse, and local curricula, while also standing up to scrutiny from advocates of the other curriculum theories, and cost cutting with 'back to basics' educational policy meddling (Moos, 2024).

Learner-centred educational philosophy's establishment was as a reaction to a more traditional form of education. Often traditional education is characterised by scholarly-academic or socially-efficient curriculum ideologies, ideologies that solely aim to transmit academic knowledge or mould students to contribute to society. Focus in these philosophies is placed on content, and success in these schooling systems is often the ability to recite facts, complete tests, and perform activities and competencies that will perpetuate the functioning of society (Schiro, 2013). Teachers are often transmitters of knowledge to the students, curriculum design emphasises perceived student needs that are decided by politicians, committees, or academics with little input from students, and the nature of the knowledge tends to be either literal facts about the world, or the successful performance of tasks (Schiro, 2013).

Lejf Moos (2024) discusses these styles of education as being part of an 'outcomes discourse' and argues that this philosophy is one that finds its basis in governance and the economy. He continues that "Proponents of these theories are fundamentally concerned with effective and efficient governance and thus with centralising power." The 'point' of this rigid style of education (at least since the Second World War) is to propel the status quo and grow students who generate income. No attention is paid to any student's individuality, thoughts, feelings, or backgrounds because what matters is the transmission of status quo knowledge. Children are receptacles to receive knowledge, not unique agents that generate and co-create knowledge through their self-directed experiences. Who the children are plays no part in the educational processes in the grip of 'outcomes discourse'.

By design, educational success is an easily measurable metric in outcomes-based, traditional education. Students perform on a test, or students do not. Teachers have little incentive to stray from the test content supplied to them. When designing outcomes-based curricula it is less productive to let students explore a topic, create meaning from a context, let students come to their own logical conclusions, think critically about a topic, or learn from physical experience because many of these are not directly related to answering the specific, all-important test that solely determines educational success.

That is to say, while traditional, outcomes-based education is the most prominent found around the world (Hawkins, 2007) it has not had a complete stranglehold on education. Both national and local curricula have been influenced by progressive education. National curricula born with this influence often have interpretive or open-ended learning objectives for students, and it is the job of the school, who has access to the local community, and the

teacher, who knows the students, to create individualised lesson plans for their classrooms. This is not to say that any national curriculum has ever pulled completely in the direction of progressive education though.

For its 2007 revision, New Zealand's national curriculum's guiding philosophy was a vision for students as individuals that will grow to be 'confident, connected, actively involved, lifelong learners' (Ministry of Education, 2007). It's a vision that places importance on the wellbeing of the student, it cares for who they are and what their place in society will become before it concerns itself with what skills they will acquire or how they will perform at a given subject area. The principle here most aligning with progressive education is the aim of cultivating 'lifelong learners', where "in their school years (students), will continue to develop the values, knowledge, and competencies that will enable them to live full and satisfying lives" (Ministry of Education, 2007). This humanistic grounding leans into progressive educational values and advises giving students tools to navigate their own lives, rather than giving them skills to serve academia or a specific trade. Tomoe Gakuen seemed to carry a similar view of what education should be, which shone through the local curriculum it had designed for Totto-chan and her friends. As explored earlier, values of inclusivity, kindness, exploration, reason, responsibility, and autonomy all underpin Totto-chan's time at Tomoe Gakuen.

Included in the aims of the national Danish Curriculum 'Folkeskole' (people's school) is: "in cooperation with the parents, to provide pupils with the knowledge and skills that will prepare them for further education and training and instil in them the desire to learn more; familiarise them with Danish culture and history; give them an understanding of other countries and cultures; contribute to their understanding of the interrelationship between human beings and the environment; and promote a well-rounded development of the individual pupil." (Ministry of Children and Education, 2023). Once again we see a want to 'instil' enthusiasm in students and encourage them to continue learning beyond what is taught to them in an educational setting, have students cross-examine their own culture with those around them, and think critically about their own place in the world. According to this philosophy, learning is taking on a more humanistic, balanced and exciting role in the classroom. This is similar to Kobayashi's resistance to imperial propaganda and celebration of students like Miyazaki, the English-speaking student who had moved from the United States.

Another notable value in the Folkeskole is that of understanding the interrelationship between human beings and the environment. Environmental education continues to grow as a field of inquiry in education since the 20th century as more information comes to light about the effects of climate change. (Hart & Nolan, 1999) Environmental education is a broad subject. The teaching of this concept could have students examining both themselves in relation to the world they live in, the effects the actions of human beings have had on the world, the ethics of conservation, or on a range of natural ecosystems found on Earth. Regardless of the angle or focus an educator would take with the concepts surrounding environmental education, the scope is broad enough to incorporate and connect many of the aims the Folkeskole has for the individual child. Kobayashi hoped to foster a love of nature within his students and employed it as a powerful teaching context with teaching tools like school walks, farming education, and giving students opportunities to play in the beautiful campus of flowerbeds and trees.

Responses to Progressive Education

Difficulties for and criticisms against progressive education for a multitude of reasons. Progressive education places children and students as the main stakeholders for education, the 'point' of progressive education is that children grow up happy, healthy, and intelligent. While the learning philosophy is not always at direct odds with other stakeholders, friction does occur. As mentioned above, proponents of traditional schooling styles argue for a more controlled amount of content, arguing progressive education to be 'nebulous' or 'unmeasurable'. Moos (2024) argues political reform meant to drag education systems closer to a traditional standard often "describe in detail, every step that schools, teachers, and students must follow' and that 'In this orientation there is a focus on 'back to basics' and 'back to the skills' because that is what is easily measured" (p.37). Reforms of this nature are often justified by select data found in reports made by international benchmarking organisations like the OECD and their Programme for International Assessment (PISA). Moos accuses these reforms of being an attempt at attaining political ends, not being for the betterment of all students nationwide.

Another difficulty for progressive education is class size. Getting the most out of progressive education requires smaller class sizes. Progressive teachers must be informed about their students, get to know them, what they like, how to engage them, what their family values, what barriers to education they may have, and how they want to celebrate their learning. A seeming impossibility if any given student is one of 40 in a class. As mentioned above, Totto-chan's class was comprised of nine pupils, allowing her teacher enough time to check

in, help with, and guide all of her students, every day. Such a small class also allowed for the implementation and management of her freeform class routine. Without such a small class, the benefits of student autonomy afforded by the task selection system would fall to a lack of resources, noise level, and teacher conference time. As mentioned by Ehrenberg et al. (2001) however, there are obvious barriers to even having enough quality teachers and fully equipped classrooms in the form of cost, time, and training.

Educational policy plays the most important role in mean classroom pupil numbers—though this requires immense government investment in education, an economic philosophy that many outcomes discourse proponents already wish to dismiss. Regardless of the teaching methods employed in a school, or the way outcomes are measured, studies have shown that lowering class sizes (if implemented properly) does "yield positive returns, as measured by increases in student performance" (Akerhielm, 1995, p.239). To politicians with the belief that education is transmissional, class sizes matter far less. In their eyes, an educator's primary tasks are to give information and mark assessment. It matters not how many students are in the class because, if a teacher can give information from the front of a class, anyone who can hear them is receiving the information and gaining knowledge. This is an optimistic thought that does not account for ease of engagement or the relationship dynamics between students.

An argument levied against child-centred education from traditionalists is that *what* to teach children should be decided by people at the top of their academic fields. Children should not have a say in what they are taught because they do not know what is important to learn (Lipson, p.43). Additionally, children may have a preference for one subject or context that, although they may like, will not serve them as they grow older, perhaps especially if they are taught about one topic or through a particular context too often. A student infatuated with dinosaurs cannot *only* learn about dinosaurs, it would leave a serious imbalance in their knowledge and practical skills. This argument diminishes the role of the child centred educator to someone who 'gives in' to the whims of the children and is unwilling or unable to create a classroom curriculum that creates a balanced classroom knowledge set. But it is a fundamental misunderstanding to think that children 'run the show' in a progressive classroom. In the case of Tomoe, students get the ability to pick the *order* in which they learn, but not fundamentally *what* they learn. Traditional lesson styles like independent reading and practicing letter formation are all tasks set for students in Totto-chan's class. Though it is not ever brought up, had a teacher at Tomoe examined a gap in any student's knowledge, one can only imagine they would have intervened with extra help, guidance, a

new angle or approach, or further practice material rather than just letting the student ignore or fail in that subject.

Child centred education still accounts for the input of experts, though it incorporates more perspectives from a larger range of educational shareholders more equitably. Politicians and academic consultants should not be solely responsible for curriculum design. Ideally, teachers, parents, students, and the local community should also have a say in the content of the classroom, creating a more democratic and collaborative curriculum that students learn from. This extends to themes of personhood and less academic but more life-applicable skills that families or the local community may want schools to incorporate that a national curriculum may not account for.

Are There Schools Similar to Tomoe Gakuen?

Progressive education does not lend itself to a single definition (Kohn, 2015, p.2). Generally, it is reactive to a student's interests and needs, rather than proactive in the information it wants to feed them. As such, Tomoe Gakuen's uniquity draws from a range of factors: the context the school was set in (its time and location), what Kobayashi himself deemed to be important for the students to learn, and what the children wanted to know about. Kohn (2015) discusses how "Any two educators who describe themselves as sympathetic to this tradition may well see it differently, or at least disagree about which features are the most important" (p.2). As such, progressive education centres like Tomoe will each have their own flavour of pedagogy. In this section I will discuss similar philosophies for progressive education and compare them to the educational standards displayed in *Totto-chan: The Little Girl at the Window*. It is also worth noting that the novel itself makes no direct references to any famous pedagogues or pedagogical styles other than Dalcroze.

Steiner Schools

Waldorf (or Steiner) schools are special character education centres inspired by the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner that emphasise and attempt to train the body, soul, and spirit of the child in a way that is natural and empowering for the individual students (Foster, 1984, p.228). Many characteristics of Steiner education stem from his personal philosophy of epistemology, one that sees learning as a "generation of knowledge by the learner" (Rawson, 2021, p.19) and the use of Steiner's own Anthroposophy, an approach to understanding spiritual knowledge in conjunction with the physical knowledge that can be made sense of by perception and reason (Rawson, 2021, p.19). Before the age of seven, students attending Steiner education focus on 'imitation and doing,' programmes that

encourage imaginative play, body movement, creative and constructive play, and oral language through singing and story. Between the ages of seven and fourteen, students focus on ‘imagination’ where students are taught through a multisensory curriculum that explores literature, music, art and the natural sciences. In the high school years, education shifts to a focus on ‘intellect’, where social responsibility and subject specialisation become the modus operandi of education (Edwards, 2002, p.5). Students in late high school are tasked with a year-long project of their choosing that they have interest in to work toward. They are encouraged to get help from outside the faculty of the school if it suits the project and acts as a cumulative exercise of the student’s interests, skills and abilities (Rudolf Steiner School of Ann Arbor, 2025). For example, a student might build their own go-kart or guitar, write a novel, or put on an art exhibit, often with the help of an expert adult.

Steiner was born in 1861 in a small village that was then Austria-Hungary. At the age of two his father became the railway station master in Pottschach, a small village situated in the alps of eastern Austria. Dahlin describes how the area let a young Steiner experience the “beauty of untouched, pristine nature” as well as the railway igniting his interest in technology and engineering (Dahlin, 2017, p.17). In 1919, the first Waldorf school opened in Stuttgart. At its opening ceremony poetry, classical music, and eurythmics performances were all held for those in attendance (Rawson, 2021, p.2). Reflections can be seen between the backgrounds and the educational philosophies of Steiner and Kobayashi. They both grew up in the foothills of mountains surrounded by nature, which seemed to have a profound influence on their own schools, which emphasise being in and learning through nature (De Bruycker, 2015). They both recieved financing for their educational endeavours, (Kobayashi with Baron Iwasaki and Steiner with Emil Molt, the financier and founder of the first Waldorf School). They both travelled around Europe for education. And they both incorporated Eurythmics into their school curricula.

As of 2020, there are 1,958 Waldorf Kindergartens in 70 countries and 1,187 Waldorf Schools in 64 countries (Paull & Hennig, 2020 as quoted in Rawson, 2021, p.2).

Montessori Schools

Perhaps the most prominent educational philosophy to inspire local curricula for schools is Maria Montessori’s, whose method is employed in over 5,000 schools in the United States alone (Lillard & Else-Quest, 2006, p.1893). ‘The Montessori Method’ is most notable for its implementation in kindergartens and early primary education. It sees classroom groupings that span three years (three to six, six to nine, etc.) that join activities that resemble ‘playful

learning' (Lilard, 2013, p.140). Teachers in Montessori classrooms weave between these groups, interacting with a few students at a time, helping to facilitate their own independent learning, rather than delivering the content from the front of the room (Fleming et al., 2023, p.2). The curriculum for the Montessori method is delivered in organised and sequential lessons for students, with catered manipulables for each lesson. Though there's a perception that Montessori education is 'free range' or 'loose' in design, this could come from the (though structured) playful learning that students engage in (Lilard, 2013).

Montessori was born in Chiaravalle, Italy in 1870, at five the Monetssori family moved to Rome, where Maria would be schooled (Gutek, 2004). Possibly influenced by her father's work as an accountant, Maria took an interest in mathematics and at twelve years of age, decided that she wanted to attend technical school. Her youth was characterised by a time of Italian optimism and progressive thought following the Italian unification (Kramer, 2017). Education at this time however had not had such an influence. Her schooling was a rote syllabus learned and memorised through a textbook (Kramer, 2017). Beyond school—in a move unfathomable at the time—Montessori managed to be the first woman to enrol in the medical college in Rome. Transitioning into education, Montessori opened her *Casa Dei Bambini* (Children's House) in 1907 as a means to apply her learnings from working with children with disabilities as a medical researcher to a school environment (Trabalzini, 2011). By 1912, her book *The Montessori Method* was widely published in the United States (Kramer, 2017).

Outdoor Education

A notable recent trend in education is the increased emphasis on outdoor learning. This philosophy goes by a range of names, outdoor education, outdoor classroom, and adventure classroom, but all fall under a general philosophy according to which the physical space of the traditional classroom is exchanged for immersive lessons conducted in an outdoor setting. Juliet Robertson (2014) explains that these lessons can range from "adventurous activities, environmental education, team challenges, an international expedition or a playground game" (p.2). As Smith et al. (1972) explains, it is "Learning happens in and for the outdoors" (p.20).

More so than any of the other alternative philosophies for education, outdoor education is rooted in the idea that learning is experiential, that it takes shape by doing and acting upon,

rather than listening to or reading information. Part of the appeal of outdoor education is that it offers possibly the sharpest contrast in educational design to traditional, academic-focused schools by virtue of the classroom environment, offering a more enriching education for students who perhaps find little enjoyment or engagement in traditional schooling. Peter Becker (2008) chastises textbooks in education that are unable to emulate genuine experiences that outdoor education is able to evoke, writing “the attempts of the school to compensate the loss of sensuous experiences by reimporting instructional materials like coloured films or pictured textbooks are more than helpless. Talking about nature and being in nature are two different things” (pp.106–107).

In outdoor education, emphasis is placed on adventure, exploration, and creation (Robertson, 2014) as vehicles for learning. With the exchange of classroom for environment, there naturally comes an alteration of lesson styles. Featured less are paper and pen, more so found are mud, sticks, rocks and the movement of the bodies themselves that students will use to feel, manipulate, and construct with. Students often work collaboratively towards a singular goal, encouraging the use of social skills like negotiation and cooperation to complete a task. Robertson (2014) proposes lessons like building dens, scavenger hunts, orienteering, and cartography as examples of lessons in outdoor education.

Outdoor education advocates often express benefits to children’s physical wellbeing. Outdoor education is naturally physical, a remedy to the rise in childhood obesity (Ansari et al., 2024). Whereas traditional physical education classes often present competitive sports as a means to physical wellbeing and motor skills development, outdoor education offers “exercise in a form that can be accessible to all children at all levels” (Knight, 2009). Emphasis is taken off competition or skill acquisition that may turn off some students from the lesson, and more focus is put onto choice of task, parallel play, or collaborative efforts toward one goal. Of course, advocates do not stop at physical wellbeing, arguments can also be made about the benefits of outdoor education on the social and emotional dimensions of children. Research from the United Kingdom found that students attending ‘Forest School’ gain confidence, social and cooperative skills, enthusiasm about nature, and sometimes also a calmer disposition in their regular classroom (O’Brien & Murray, 2007).

Though not attributed to an individual philosopher, outdoor education saw its contemporary roots in Scandinavia in the 1950s. Following Norway’s separation from Sweden in 1905, Arctic explorers such as Fridtjof Nansen and Ronald Amundsen who embodied the Norwegian philosophy *friluftsliv* (open air life) and a romantic view of being out in nature,

became symbols of Norwegian masculinity (Gurholt, 2008, p.132). Through various means, a philosophy of *friluftsliv* as a natural good persisted in both the bourgeois and working class of the country. The formal education of *friluftsliv* began in the late 1960s when both mountaineer Nils Faarlund established a private college of Norges Høgfjellsskole (Norwegian Seminar of Nature-Life and Mountaineering) and Oslo's Norges Idrettshogskole (Norwegian University of Sport and Physical Education) were established. *Friluftsliv*'s education was a response to a perceived lack of understanding and safety in outdoor areas at the time, most notably a reaction to a number of missing skiers that took place during Easter in 1967 (Gurholt, 2008, p.136). While not formally taught initially, *friluftsliv* had had a major influence on the education of boys in Norway since the early 20th century.

How does Tomoe Gakuen compare?

Interestingly, in what we know about Tomoe Gakuen from *Totto-chan: The Little Girl at the Window*, whether coincidence or not, Tomoe Gakuen includes in its learning philosophy aspects found in Steiner Education, The Montessori Method, and outdoor education. From Steiner, Tomoe shares education around Eurythmics, and an encouragement of imaginative play and movement. With Montessori, Kobayashi shares a class structure that facilitates a range of activities, learning and emotional needs, and that may be completed with the help of peers. Kobayashi at the same time celebrates being outdoors, manipulating nature, learning within, and learning from the natural world.

Though these learning philosophies are similar in many of their guiding principles to Kobayashi's, they also differ in ways that characterise them. For instance, take Steiner's own personal philosophy of Anthroposophy that guided the development of (among many other things) Steiner's education system. Anthroposophy is a deep and complex system of knowing that makes many esoteric claims about knowledge, notably claims like: a spiritual world not only exists, but also interpenetrates the knowing world (Uhrmacher, 2014) and 'knowing' is "the soul's living entrance into this reality of being" (Steiner, 1951, as cited in Uhrmacher, 2014). In *Totto-chan: The Little Girl at the Window* Kobayashi is discussed as having beliefs about the physical movements and breathing patterns children (Kuroyanagi, 1990) (manifesting in his eurythmia lessons) and it is possible Kobayashi had such large and broad ideas about the make-up of the universe that informed his teaching, though these are often presented as naturalistic in nature rather than spiritual. The way his philosophy of education is presented in the novel is closer to the cultivation of nature, or a freedom of expression for children rather than something built upon an esoteric way of understanding.

Montessori education shares the most similarities in pedagogical style and background philosophy to Tomoe Gakuen and would make the closest surviving analogue to Kobayashi's educational style. A key idea that makes up Montessori education "is that human development is the result of an unconscious creative activity of the individual, and this process is only possible in association with others." (Montessori Jr, 1976, p.20). Most examples of Totto-chan's learning follow such a protocol. Another key idea of Montessori philosophy is 'freedom within limits' the idea that students work "within parameters set by their teachers and learning community, students are active participants in deciding what their focus of learning will be" (American Montessori Society, 2019). Naturally we can see similarities to the layout of Tomoe's agenda here with its choice of which order to complete tasks. An interesting difference does come from possible limitations of the space Tomoe had and access to tools usable in the classroom. Tomoe is still described as having only desks facing the front of the (albeit locomotive) classroom. Classroom lessons at Tomoe are seldom discussed, though the implication is that students there (as discussed earlier) are still tasked with rote and practise-centric tasks, or as Lilard (2013) claims "conventional direct instruction" (p.143). Montessori schools in contrast often use a range of modalities for learning. Actions like finger tracing and tools like wooden cylinders are manipulated by students to solve problems (Lilard, 2013). Perhaps had Kobayashi the budget he would have scouted similar tools for his students and encouraged their use in his classrooms, though it is unclear.

Without extensive education tools on hand, Kobayashi instead encourages the use of the local environment for play and exploration, though it wouldn't be correct to categorise Tomoe Gakuen as a fully fledged Outdoor education school. On two occasions the students at Tomoe taught a formal lesson outdoors. First on Totto-chan's first day when they visit Kuhonbutsu Temple (though whether this lesson was planned or a spontaneously spurred discussion of flowers isn't clear) and the day the students worked with the farmer in his field. The rest of the anecdotes that take place outdoors see the students in free-time, field trip, or play. While Tomoe utilises its surroundings, most education seems to take place within the confines of the classroom walls.

Tomoe's flavour was distinctly musical and natural, an extension of Kobayashi's own interests, education, and philosophy. Its pedagogy mirrors aspects from a range of these educational philosophies but stands out from all of them in one important way; context. Tomoe Gakuen, while influenced by European thought, is both seeped in the history of, and a reaction to traditional Japanese education. It would have done the students of Tomoe a

great disservice to teach them in a strictly European manner, for them to have moved on to a society that was not European. Many of the educational gestures made in *Totto-chan: The Little Girl at the Window* indulge in a local curriculum. ‘Something from the sea and something from the land’ is an educational gesture that takes advantage of the ready availability and cultural proclivity toward seafood. Regular trips and learning around the Buddhist Kuhonbutsu immerses students in local history and the Japanese way of being. Learning first hand from the local farmer at the local farm introduces students to a context that is both very real and important to their own lives, that being local food production, as mentioned above this also becomes a lesson in flora and fauna of the area the students themselves live. All of these contexts are relevant and important to the students of Tomoe.

Chapter Four

Tomoe Gakuen Allowed to Flourish - What Would Kobayashi's Philosophy Look Like in the 21st Century?

Tomoe Gakuen is a product of its environment. This does lead one to ask however, what a philosophy like Kobayashi's would look like given time to flourish and expand outside of its context. Had 'Kobayashi-ism' gained traction and expanded across the world and survived into the 21st century, what would it look like today? Where Steiner's philosophical focus on the nature of knowledge through anthroposophy and Montessori's was a push for hands-on learning through play. Both of these seem to differ from Kobayashi's work.

With massive leaps in technology and changes in our understanding of humans in relation to the world, the issues students will need to be prepared for are wildly different to those of Kobayashi's day. With a substantial amount of writing to supplement the absence of Rudolf Steiner and Maria Montessori, followers of these educators are able to interpret their works and adapt them for a 21st century student. *Totto-chan: The Little Girl at the Window* is the closest account we have to Kobayashi's design for learning. Below I will examine three changes in focus that the 21st century has brought about. Using the evidence we have, I will determine how a modern 'Kobayashi school' would teach in the context of these changes.

The Kobayashi School and Technology

The most evident change since the early 20th century has been that of technology and the rise of the internet. Computers have taken an increasingly larger role in the classroom with advocates arguing that computational thinking and technology manipulation are skills to teach the modern student (Mills et al, 2024). Much of the world's accumulated knowledge is now available instantaneously, questions are now raised about what kind of content is worth building a curriculum around (Jaramillo, 2024). What is the point of the rote memorisation of significant dates when such information is so readily available at a moment's notice? Some educators propose that critical thinking skills, life skills, creativity, and emotional intelligence activities should take a more prominent role in the classroom over rote memorisation (Howard, 2018).

In all of this though, there are genuine fears around the impact technology is having in our lives. Screen time makes up a significant portion of young people's days, which may have adverse effects on their wellbeing in many ways, ranging from extended device use causing sleep problems, contributing to childhood obesity, and emotional and behavioural problems (Liu et al., 2022), to social media algorithms delivering negative but engaging content to the user's timeline (Weijers & Munn, 2024). With this rise of machine emphasis, some progressive education centres are marketed to parents as sanctuaries from these issues, a perceived emphasis on play, explorative learning, and an immersion in nature is seen as a panacea by parents to the ailments that 21st century technology brings about. (UNESCO, 2025; The Informer, 2024).

Technology manipulation by students featured in *Totto-chan: The Little Girl at the Window* is basic and primitive for a range of reasons. Tomoe Gakuen was an especially humble school that upcycled even its classrooms in a social context that demanded frugality. During one specific chapter, students from surrounding schools in the area walk by Tomoe while its own students are playing outside toward the end of the day. The passing students chant that Tomoe is 'shabby' (Kuroyanagi, p.146) much to the chagrin of Totto-chan especially. The pretensions of the other students fail to grasp that Tomoe is partly homely by design, though (especially to an outsider) this wouldn't make the comments any less true. This is to say that, even before the war, the school probably was not particularly 'well off' with abundant access to modern educational technologies of the time. We can infer that Tomoe had little access to technology beyond stationary, making it difficult to infer what Kobayashi might have thought about the incorporation of technology as teaching utensils. The most advanced item we see students use is when Totto-chan's intelligent classmate Tai-chan lights up a bunsen burner for his science task in class (Kuroyanagi, p.171).

We do know that he had an affinity for being and learning in nature, and that a guiding philosophy of his is letting children be children, making mistakes and learning from doing. It's likely that had Kobayashi's philosophy for learning formally survived into the 21st century, proponents of it would argue that extended technology use is 'unnatural' and would stunt the growth of students in a range of ways. The eurythmics espoused by Kobayashi teaches students to move naturally, freely, with control, and with a mind-body connection. Kuroyanagi quotes him as saying "(eurythmics) is a sport that refines the body's mechanism; a sport that teaches the mind how to use and control the body; a sport that enables the body and mind to understand rhythm. Practicing eurythmics makes the personality rhythmical. And a rhythmical personality is beautiful and strong, conforming to and obeying the laws of

nature" (Kuroyanagi, p.77). While not speaking directly for Kobayashi's philosophy, it is worth noting that modern Steiner education, an education philosophy with a similar outlook on students tends to take a technophobic approach to the use of digital devices in class (Fyvie, 2015). This stance is justified through interpretations of Steiner's own writings and philosophy (Turós, 2022), though this does lend to the appeal to some parents of sending their own children to a Steiner school.

This is not to say however that Kobayashi's philosophy would completely prohibit the use of computers or the internet from his schools. He also paid great attention to the interests of his students. Had a Kobayashi-ite educator sat a child down and had them talk about their interests today (just as he does with Totto-chan upon first meeting her) it is more likely than not that a given student today would relay their experiences or interests with videogames or YouTube videos from their home life (Alanko, 2023; Neumann & Herodouto, 2020). Children now have developed genuine interest in media through digital technology, and to discourage its use entirely in the name of naturalism is to argue against the student's own autonomy. Not only this, giving students the opportunity to learn through technology can help prepare them for challenges and skills they may need in the future in ways that could be more relevant to them than many other subjects. The student interested in marine biology, who does her research then presents and shares her learning to her peers on a digital platform is engaged in profound amounts of deep learning about a subject that may not be readily available to them at all times. For a Kobayashi-ite to deny their students the use of technology for the sake of naturalism is to deprive them of avenues for learning and creating that are both interesting and relevant to the student.

If I was to wager at what a modern Tomoe Gakuen would make of technology in the classroom, I would imagine a restrained use of computers. Programmes and lessons that would allow for individualised research and creative presentation of information. Goals for learning that encouraged studying beyond the context of the local curriculum, information that couldn't be immediately experienced by students, and that brought about the natural wonder of the world. Nature documentaries, immersive diagrams, and interactive satellite photographs would all be instrumental as explorative tasks, where graphic design apps, artistic creation apps, and possibly even sandbox video games could be used to present and share information. Such an approach would align with Kobayashi's philosophy of nurturing curiosity, student interest and enthusiasm, and independent thinking through experiential and student-driven learning rather than being outright dismissive of digital education.

The Kobayashi School and Environmental Education

Since Kobayashi's time, many different growing concerns surrounding the health of the environment have been discovered. From these concerns, education for young people around the environment to be recognised and implemented into some curricula around the world (Hart & Nolan, 1999). Environmental education is taught through a range of contexts and academic subjects. For instance, the most traditional framework would be through that of science class. The formal classification of 'science' as an educational subject has been a staple of an academic outcomes-focused education system since its practical conception. Science education means to equip students with the tools to investigate, understand and explain our natural, physical world and the wider universe (Ministry of Education, 2007, p.28), naturally this encompasses the 'how' of problems like climate change. Some curricula have established education for sustainability as its own subject and aim to teach students the values around why sustainability is important. Taking it one step further is the green school movement, schools built to "operate in harmony with the natural environment" (Okasha et al., 2016) around the philosophy of sustainability with the intention of educating through a curriculum steeped in environmental themes (Zhao et al., 2019). As opposed to the hard facts that science will offer, a more rounded sustainability education offers a 'hybrid concept' with many variations of definition, though most featuring themes of cooperation, reconnection, and a forward thought to the needs of future generations (Scoffham & Rawlinson, 2022, pp.13–14) as motivators for children to ask 'why?' before asking 'how?'

Both of these styles for environmental education benefit from firsthand experience and pair well with outdoor educational styles. In the field, the science class is able to take a logical and investigative approach to examining their environment and using tools and methods they have learned from their class to reach logical conclusions. A class learning about waterway pollution could examine the pH level of their local waterway or stream, or a class learning about air quality could compare readings in monitors between their classroom, the city, and out in nature. A more integrated approach could look similar to Totto-chan's teacher's 'pistils' lesson, in which students learn these concepts through discussion, play or artwork, all while enjoying time outdoors.

The lengths that national curricula have gone to incorporate environmental education as subject matter vary from place to place. Some national curricula have loosely incorporated environmental education by proxy through open-ended learning objectives. British Columbia for example has "(Students will understand that…) Water is essential to all living things, and it cycles through the environment" (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016) as a

learning objective for its students. While not inherently addressing environmentalism and sustainability, it is open-ended enough that it could be interpreted by teachers as and constructed into lessons about water pollution and its consequences. Some national curricula have pushed for sustainability as a key value that guides the rest of the curriculum, for instance New Zealand's 2007 curriculum revision heralds 'ecological sustainability' as a value for education that is to be 'encouraged, modelled and explored' by teachers (p.10). In this way, sustainability education is to be considered and plays a role in any decision made by teachers, though it isn't required to be taught directly to students.

Some proponents of environmental education claim current implementation in schools is far too scant, or misguided. Bonnett (2007) argues that formal curricula (specifically the United Kingdom's) aiming to teach sustainability is far too anthropocentric, in that it focuses almost solely on students' investigative skills and their ability to test scientific ideas. While he does agree with the importance of those skills, he argues it neglects the severity of the problem at large and the issues that environmental education aims to tackle. The conservation of nature in and of itself is barely mentioned, and emphasis is placed on how nature benefits humanity. Kobayashi would likely agree with this sentiment, discussion about Kobayashi's philosophy of nature from Kuroyanagi in *Totto-chan: The Little Girl at the Window* is from a very appreciative and contemplative point of view, one that places emphasis on the intrinsic value of nature.

In *Totto-chan: Little Girl at the Window*, Kobayashi and his fellow educators at Tomoe show interest in educating students around, through and about nature. Taking place before the large push for environmental education from the late 20th century, Kobayashi's philosophy on the matter extends from a place of love, rather than a push for change or worries about the future. Kobayashi's championing of the environment comes from a holistic viewpoint, in the postscript Kuroyanagi writes that '(Kobayashi) loved nature (...). His younger daughter Miyo-chan, told me her father used to take her for walks when she was small, saying, "Let's go and look for the rhythms in nature." He would lead her to a large tree and show her how the leaves and branches swayed in the breeze; and he would point out the relationship between the leaves, the branches, and the trunk and how the swaying of the leaves differed according to whether the wind was strong or weak. They would stand still and observe things like that, and if there was no wind, they would wait patiently with upturned faces, for the slightest zephyr. They observed not only the wind, but rivers, too. They used to go to the nearby Tama River and watch the water flowing. They never tired of doing things like that, she told me.' (Kuroyanagi, p.191-192). This love of nature did extend to the pedagogy of

Tomoe as described in moments like the school walk that Totto-chan takes on her very first day and was deeply entwined in Kobayashi's view of the importance of naturalism in all things.

Had then a Kobayashi school continued to exist into the 21st century, what would it make of climate education? This question is far more clear cut than that of technology. Not only is much of Kobayashi's philosophy focused on naturalism, it also emphasises empathy and kindness, and asks students to take responsibility for the environment around them. Naturally this philosophy backs up many of the values of and arguments for environmental education. Naturalism in play and learning through nature cannot exist if there is no environment to do it in. As Kobayashi does so much to cultivate naturalism in his school, it is easy to imagine Kobayashi wanting to do more so students can understand the threat that climate change and environmental dangers pose. Much of his nature-focused education would be done through appreciation-enhancing, hands-on, and socially focused work like the work done for the local farmer. Rather than from a deficit point of view, the learning happening around nature would be framed as positive, and good-in-and-of-itself rather than from a desperate need to implement sustainability for our own sake. We can infer this through both Kobayashi's view of nature, but how he remained optimistic through the war, shielding his students from its harsh realities for the sake of his students growing up having a childhood.

The Kobayashi School and Politics

Tomoe Gakuen quietly made a political stand through its Western influences at a time and in a context in which political suppression was rife. By virtue of continuing to function the way that it did, when it did, and in its own little way, Tomoe became a quiet anti-war statement. This was not the idea at the time, or at least nothing Kobayashi left behind argued this sentiment, but we can imagine that the 'point' of Tomoe was the children, not making a political statement. And it was *all* of the children, no matter which country they were coming from. Following the writing of Tetsuko Kuroyanagi, she herself points at the deplorability of war and the injustices that children face as a consequence of war (Kuroyanagi, 1998). A sequel to *Totto-chan: The Little Girl at the Window* is now penned, 42 years after the original publication (Sainowaki, 2024) picking up immediately where *Totto-chan: The Little Girl at the Window* ends, with Totto-chan's evacuation from Tokyo to Aomori. Spurred on by both a culmination of her work for Unicef and the Russo-Ukranian war, (NHK, 2023) Kuroyanagi intends to tell her story as a child war survivor (Sainowaki, 2024). Kuroyanagi argues that children's lack of freedom during times of war is problematic (NHK, 2024) a sentiment

undoubtedly stemming from how her time at Tomoe that sits in complete juxtaposition to her post-Tomoe life.

Kobayashi was outwardly apolitical, a sentiment that assured the survival of himself and his school. Kobayashi was held in high regard as an educator at the Ministry of Education (Kuroyanagi, p.192), though beyond this and beyond his educational style, little more evidence is given as to his political beliefs.

Moreso now, pedagogical beliefs are political beliefs. In many democratic countries there is a constant competition of tug-of-war happening in the education sector involving political reform. The proposed abolition of the Department of Education in the United States (Hutchings-Tyron, 2025) and Teach the Basics Brilliantly policy (National Party, 2023) in New Zealand are examples of two politically charged educational reforms that limit opportunities for underprivileged groups of people, or shape the education system in a way that denies or devalues certain areas of knowledge or ways of learning. With such sweeping, cost-cutting decisions made that have direct effects on the outcomes of students, apoliticism in education is becoming harder and harder.

Education with the primary aim of social reconstruction is highlighted by Schiro as its own curriculum ideology from the Learner-centred, socially efficient, and scholarly academic learning philosophies. Its implementation is based on the assumption that society is in need of reformation, and education is a key tool in reconstructing society from these ailments (Schiro, 2011, p.151). Schiro lists contexts for education, ailments of society, injustices of people that students learn about: “These problems include, among others, racism, war, sexism, poverty, pollution, worker exploitation, climate change, corporate exploitation, crime, political corruption, population explosion, energy shortage, illiteracy, inadequate healthcare, and unemployment” (p.151). This social reconstructive curriculum ideology shares many of its educational methods with Learner-centred education (for instance a focus on personal experience as learning, collaboration, and self-motivated learning) (Schiro, 2011, p.157-159) but differs in the outcomes for understanding and vision for learning, with focus taken away from knowledge for the sake of student betterment, and emphasis put on knowledge for the sake of societal reconstruction.

Barring an arguable modelling of empathetic thinking and an emphasis on environmental learning, nothing mentioned in *Totto-chan: The Little Girl at the Window* ever featured Kobayashi ever explicitly demonstrating anything politically charged. To do so at the time

would have been risky. Post this era of her life however, Kuroyanagi has grown to be a deeply politically motivated individual in her work and writing. Had Kobayashi been given the opportunity to take a more political stance, or had his formal pedagogy survived through others, would it have embraced a political vision, or denounced an 'angle' entirely?

The epilogue of the story details 'what happened' to each of the students mentioned in the story. Each took a different path in life and followed their passions in their own way. The chapter ties together this theme of liberty and freedom in the way that students were taught at Tomoe. Kobayashi's philosophy was primarily concerned with cultivating the interests of the individual, and while politics probably concerned him, he would have understood that this is not the case for every student. Kuroyanagi grew up to be politically charged, though the epilogue paints a portrait of individualism for each of the students. Takahashi grew to manage personnel at a large electronics company (p.202), Miyo-chan taught music like her father (p. 204), and "Tai-chan, the boy who said he wouldn't marry [Kuroyanagi] became one of Japan's leading physicists" (p. 205). Politics wouldn't have been a big concern for every student at Tomoe, like it isn't for many people. To teach or push this agenda would be antithetical to the personal philosophy of Kobayashi. While Kobayashi would have been proud of Kuroyanagi, he would have been proud that he gave her, and every student at Tomoe the opportunity to choose to become what they did. Environmentalism remains the outlier here, as explored above, there is evidence to believe this is an issue he or his proponents would have addressed in their education as it's critical to the naturalism that Kobayashi's philosophy espouses, as well as being a beautiful context in which to teach about the natural world to students. This is all to say though, had a student shown an interest in a specific political debate or moral quandary, Kobayashi would have leapt at the idea to let them explore this or softly challenge their argument with thought provoking questions.

Conclusion

Totto-chan: The Little Girl at the Window is a sometimes-funny, sometimes-sad, but deeply compelling novel that sits as a window into how learner-focused education was used to help and bring comfort to students who needed it in a time of potential strife and horror. Kuroyanagi spends many moments in the novel guessing at what Kobayashi meant to do, or analysing what these anecdotes ultimately ended up meaning to her, shaping who she became. In telling stories like these, in the same way, educators reading the novel can do much the same: draw from these anecdotes and apply these to the 'why' and 'how' of their own pedagogical beliefs. Undoubtedly, other educators with different beliefs in what education means to them would glean different nuggets of wisdom from the novel than I did. Tomoe-like schools never popped up worldwide, and Kobayashi-ism never flourished as a popular curriculum philosophy, but through *Totto-chan: The Little Girl at the Window* we do see glimpses of his real, informed curriculum philosophy come to life. In the epilogue we also learn of the successes of those who studied under it, these being testament to the worth of his curriculum philosophy. The book can be understood ultimately as an argument for these types of autonomy giving, Learner-centred schools.

Kobayashi's philosophy for learning ran parallel to ideas that flourished in other curricula that sprouted up around the same time around the world. Many of these ideas found their way into modern progressive national curricula, where they would find their widest reach. Often in this space, this learning philosophy comes up against policy that aims to put economic ideals before the wants, needs, and desires of the people the education systems aim to teach. This invites discussion around what the aims of education should be for the outcomes in society, It's clear by the way she writes about her time at Tomoe, and in contrast on the wars and devastation happening to children in the world, Kuroyanagi is convinced that education like this is integral to a more peaceful and kind world.

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