



UNESCO IN ASIA
AND THE PACIFIC:
40 YEARS ON

In 1986 UNESCO celebrates its 40-year Anniversary and the Regional Office for Education in Asia and the Pacific its 25-year Anniversary. Everybody will agree that since its beginning the Office has made remarkable progress due to the dedicated efforts of the Directors and staff, as well as due to the positive co-operation of Member States in the region. During the past 25 years, educational standards have risen in all countries in Asia and the Pacific, and educational co-operation among countries in the region has intensified year after year. In particular, the joint efforts taken to develop the Karachi Plan and the Asian Model in the early 1960s and the noteworthy results of the APEID projects since the early 1970s are worthy of mention.

Though there may be distinct differences in educational development among countries, quite a few educational problems and issues are shared. These are, for example, the integration of general and vocational education; how to link education with employment/work; how to utilize television and radio programmes or new information technology in education; and how to promote adult education and lifelong learning. These are general problems, common in nature to every country regardless of the pattern of educational development. There are similarities too in the ways countries set out to discover solutions to the problems. It is on such matters that there exists a big role for UNESCO to play in promoting co-operation and exchange of information among Member States.

Needless to say, the educational system of individual countries reflects the

EDUCATIONAL
REFORM IN
JAPAN



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unique social systems and culture of each country, and no one believes that educational systems can be transplanted from one country to another. But there can be similar viewpoints and ways of examining common problems and issues, and exchange of information will greatly benefit the countries concerned. It is in this spirit that the following comments about some aspects of educational reform in Japan are offered.

What is the difference between educational reform and educational development? In my observation, it reflects a different way of evaluating the same phenomenon. Education in any country develops with the currents of the time. When it shows rapid development and the changes in direction are distinct, the term 'educational reform' may be used. In other words, one may say that reform implies an intention to seek development, and development is the outcome of the intention. It may not necessarily mean that reform is always accompanied by radical changes of direction. When education is not stagnant but in the state of development, one may say that education is in the process of constant reform. Consequently, this paper will describe the educational development of Japan when referring to educational reform in Japan.

Modern school education in Japan is usually said to have been launched by Gakusei or a Government Order of Education issued in 1872. This does not imply that school appeared instantly out of nowhere. Educational facilities for the children of commoners existed since the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries. During the Edo Period, from the seventeenth century, Clan's schools for the children of warriors and Terakoyas or commoners' schools became popular. The literacy ratio among commoners was pretty high in the Edo Period. As a result of such educational provisions in the society, the public school system was established. Educational undertakings during the Edo Period were extensively private provisions and the educational reform of the early Meiji Period which began in 1868 created a public, national educational system. It is a significant characteristic of educational reform in the Meiji Period that the public education system was developed on the sound foundations of education provided by the private sector during the Edo Period.

The Meiji Government began with the universalization of national basic education and the training of national leaders at higher educational institutions. It intended to expand the school system

gradually, but the master plan was of a grand scale. Originally it was intended to divide the whole country into eight university regions, to set 32 middle school districts within one university region, and to establish 210 primary school areas within each middle school district. One primary school area should establish one primary school, and in total there should be 53,760 primary schools throughout the country. Under this grand blueprint of the Government, 28,000 primary schools, 600 middle schools, 100 normal schools, two higher normal schools and one university were established within a few years.

One can see that the Government was firmly determined to build the nation by means of an educational undertaking. Though it is said that there were already more than 50,000 Terakoyas or institutions for primary learning for commoners during the Edo Period, the establishment of more than 50,000 primary schools was not an easy task for a newly developing nation. The Government permitted local authorities to levy for education, to collect tuition fees and donations. People also made huge efforts and collaborated with government policies.

In planning and implementing this educational development plan at the beginning of the Meiji Period, the Government acted on its own judgement while it sent senior staff abroad for research purposes and sought advice from foreign consultants. Textbooks of foreign countries were translated and used as part of the instructional materials, and the individual instruction methods practiced at Terakoyas were transformed into class instruction methods. This was essentially a trial and error approach which lasted for several years. Establishment of the unified school system was completed by 1890. The need to then establish a powerful organ to deliberate on basic guidelines for further development of school education emerged and in 1896 a Supreme Council on Education was established as an advisory organ to the Minister of Education.

This agency was the first to formulate the planning of educational policies in Japan. It was modelled after the French *Conseil superieur de l'Instruction publique*. All educational laws and regulations were sent to the Supreme Council on Education for perusal. The Middle School Order, a Vocational School Order, a Girls' High School Order, a College Order, a Library Order and others were developed during these years. In this way, the system of secondary

education was developed during the period from the end of nineteenth to the early twentieth century. Elementary education became free in 1900 and compulsory education was extended from four years to six years in 1908.

It took 40 years from the inception of Japan's modern school education system to completely install the systems of elementary, secondary and higher education. Once established they were immediately expanded. In 1917 a Special Council on Education was created in the Cabinet as an advisory organ to the Prime Minister. The Council examined all educational areas, from elementary to higher education including the degree granting system and social education. Within two years of its existence, the Special Council recommended further measures for expansion.

The Council's recommendations were warmly welcomed by the Government and carried out. The Law concerning the National Treasury's Share of City, Town and Village Compulsory Education Expenses (1918) provided for the national government to share the personnel expenditure for compulsory education with municipal authorities. Various types of schools at secondary level were established and expanded. It was an epoch-making period for higher education which was rapidly strengthened and expanded by the newly promulgated University Order and Higher School Order. Up until this order, universities had been established only by the national government. Afterwards local governments and the private sector were allowed to establish universities. Specialized college universities were brought into existence. Quantitative development of higher schools was made. In order to implement the recommendations of this Special Council, the Government established several other councils. The measures submitted by this Special Council on Education established the basic frame for educational development until the period of post-war reform of Japan. The various measures implemented were designed to further promote the educational development attained since the inauguration of the school education system in Meiji Period.

A Council on Education created in 1937 in the Cabinet aimed at educational reform to meet war-time needs and it recommended extension of compulsory education to eight years, consolidation of secondary schools, and the upgrading of normal schools to college

status. But because of the war, the extension of compulsory education was suspended.

Loss of the war in 1945 forced Japan to face radical educational reform, implemented under the control of the Allied Forces. A Japan Educational Reform Committee (JERC) was established in the Cabinet to make suggestions for the Cabinet to implement. The suggestions of JERC were always under the supervision of the Allied Forces; and this was an educational reform under special conditions. Members of JERC paid particular attention to developing reform guidelines so that a reformed education would assist in reconstructing the nation as an independent, democratic and peace-loving country. Their efforts led to reform measures that met the realities of Japanese society and formed the basis of today's development. Japan was lucky in that sense.

Educational reform after the war covered all fields of education, both school and social education. The basic principles, to change the thoughts and life styles of the people by means of educational reform and to contribute to the construction of sound foundations for new Japan, were the same as those of the reform that the Meiji Government executed 100 years before. The scope and significance of reform in the post-war period was comparable to that of the Meiji Period. The Meiji reform came to be regarded as the first reform, and that of the post-war period as the second one. Educational reform being planned today on the basis of the post-war attainments is now being called the third reform of education in Japan.

The term 'Third Educational Reform' was first used by Dr. T. Morito, President of the Central Council on Education, an advisory organ to the Minister of Education which recommended 'Basic Guidelines for the Reform of Education' in 1971. Dr. Morito referred to a third educational reform in comparing the characteristics of the report with the previous educational reforms. It is also widely thought that the deliberations of the National Council on Education Reform created in the Cabinet in 1984 are aimed at launching a third educational reform.

In order to explain current deliberations on the reform of education, it may be necessary to clarify some points of the significance and development of the second educational reform. The

second educational reform was framed by several basic laws such as the Constitution, the Fundamental Law of Education, the School Education Law, and others. There were two basic categories of change: reform in educational aims and objectives, and reform of the educational system.

With regard to the basic aims and objectives of education, the reform guaranteed the right of people to receive education on the basic principle of freedom and equality expressed in the World Declaration of Human Rights. The specifics included the respect for the parental rights for education, respect for the people's will for educational administration and respect for the local autonomy. It was a quite reverse characteristic of the first reform which aimed at education for the nation. Education which aimed to train people, changed to an education which aims at 'completion of personality development'. It was a shift in objectives from education under the control of the state to education by local autonomy, autonomy of private institutions and university autonomy.

The reform of education after the war introduced the 6-3-3-4 system, extended compulsory education to nine years, and produced a co-educational system amongst other changes. The real significance of the new 6-3-3 system was to simplify secondary education which was formerly more complicated. By this reform, an ideal 'Secondary Education for All' was realized within quite a short period of time and consequently, higher education rapidly became more popular. Today, the enrolment ratio to upper secondary school is more than 94 per cent and the proceeding ratio to universities has reached 37 per cent. These changes in the education system, in fact, can be seen as part of the continuous development of education since the first reform. There was no real break in pattern, in contrast to the changes made in educational principles. Extension of compulsory education; simplification of the secondary education system and expansion of higher education — these continued to be issues of education from the first reform. The second educational reform was successful in the area of the educational system, building on the patterns of the past.

On the contrary, the reform in educational principles was a radical change in thoughts and there was a break between the two. Though laws and systems can easily be changed, the ways of thinking do not alter so quickly. Thus there was a discrepancy between the

principles and the actual operation of systems. Local autonomy of the boards of education and autonomy of private institutions and universities did not materialize as stipulated in the laws and regulations which framed the system.

It must be admitted however, that the second educational reform contributed enormously to the reconstruction and development of the nation, in particular by achieving universalization of secondary education and increasing the enrolment for higher education. Supported by the economic and social development of the society, education also enjoyed its full development. In consequence, the question could be raised whether the second educational reform was quite satisfactory or not.

On a comparative basis, in quantitative terms the educational development of Japan has produced educational standards that are quite high. In the such matters as the degree of universalization of education, enrolment ratios at various levels, the standard of equipment and facilities, the qualifications of school teachers and their salary scales, the literacy ratio in the population, the average levels of scholastic achievement in mathematics and natural sciences; Japan is seen by scholars in other countries with feelings of envy, and many wonder why there is so much talk about the need for educational reform. Some advise that if Japan introduces freer systems of teaching content and methods, it may face the problem of lower educational achievement levels. We should be modest enough to listen to such advice, and take care not to allow the educational standards so far achieved to deteriorate.

Education should not be viewed in isolation from its social environment of the time, but examined always in relation to the growth in the economy and social and cultural changes. In 1967 the Minister of Education asked the Central Council on Education to review the progress of education for the 20 years after the second educational reform and consider prospects for the years ahead. This resulted in the recommendations presented to the Minister in 1971. Unlike the first and second educational reforms, the review of that time was not due to the external factor of political changes of the nation but it was with a view to adjusting educational systems to the internal changes of the society.

As the enrolment ratio became higher and almost all young people proceeded to upper secondary schools, the educational content and instructional methods of upper secondary schools could not remain unchanged. When higher education became more popular than the secondary education of 20 or 30 years before, it was a matter of course that a demand for diversification of higher education should emerge and policies to improve the quality of higher education called for. It was a time of technological innovation and rapid industrialization, urbanization and internationalization in social areas. The Central Council on Education in 1971 recommended measures to adjust education to such social developments. The changes suggested were not fully implemented, though some improvements such as the upgrading of teacher's salary scales, changes in the university entrance examination, and establishment of new universities and research institutions were gradually made.

Since then there have been radical changes in the international situations, economically and politically, and many rapid changes in social and family life due to technological innovations and progress in information technologies. As a consequence, the educational world has been exposed to various new problems and faces important new demands.

One request came from industrial circles, and others emerged as problems within the world of education. Industry strongly demanded that education produce manpower full of creativity and high ability in international activities so that it may better survive in international competition and handle international conflicts which threaten Japan. From this standpoint, industry demanded that education should improve upon the stereotyped instruction and the entrance examination and stress the respect for individuality. At the same time, the number of children who cannot adjust to the changes in school and family life has increased. Growing school and home violence, and other juvenile delinquencies have come to the attention of the public.

Does education today somehow contain defects within itself? Is it possible for educators to improve the situation by themselves? Such fears expressed by the general public led to the establishment of the National Council on Education Reform within the Cabinet in 1984. This Council was asked to prepare a prescription for educational reform within three years. These are the reasons that today

loud voices calling for the need and the means of educational reform are raised in Japan.

The National Council on Education Reform has so far submitted two reports to the Prime Minister. The reports stress the principle of respect for individuality, and suggest all aspects of education be reviewed and transferred to a lifelong education system. In addition, the National Council wants to recover educational ability of family life, to reform elementary and secondary education, to reform higher education, to promote scientific studies, to revitalize social education activities, to take measures to meet internationalization of the society, and to take corresponding measures for an information technology-based society. Furthermore, the reports indicate a desire to improve the authorization system in educational administration, to promote decentralization of educational administration, and to improve school management amongst other things. There is no space for detailed description of the changes proposed. It is expected that more important recommendations will come from the Council later and it is not appropriate to foresee the contents of future proposals.

Rather, the characteristics of the current educational reform in comparison with previous reforms will be discussed. The latest educational reform is still being deliberated while the first and second reforms have already materialized. It is not yet clear how recent proposals will be implemented. So far, various government advisory councils have made a very large number of suggestions and recommendations and not all of them were necessarily implemented. It does not imply however, that the deliberations of the National Council have not been fruitful. The publication of the process of deliberation itself has strong relevance to, and is an important characteristic of, the current educational reform.

The first and second reforms were caused by exterior political factors and executed through positive measures of the Government. The third reform is to improve co-ordination between education on the one hand, and the economy and society which form the educational environment on the other. The cause is internal itself. The facts which necessitate current reform cannot be solved by orders of central government or simply by reform of the system. The educational issues involved on how to treat children who cannot adjust to their family and school life, or how to make children develop

creativity, cannot be tackled without the conscious and concerted efforts of parents, teachers, other people in the community and at work, and above all without the positive efforts of the individual children concerned. To solve such problems will require the efforts of everyone in society. In this sense, widespread publication of the deliberations of the National Council on Education Reform has big relevance for educational reform.

The first and second reforms were to develop the society and to build the nation by means of education. There were attempts to lead the society by education and to a fair extent they were successful. The third reform involves an education which is far behind changes in the nation and society and calls for education to catch up with the societal changes. The relationship between education and society is the reverse of what it was in the two previous periods of reform.

There may be a view that education should always lead the society. Basically education is to transmit the existing culture, that is, education is an undertaking to transfer the product of one society to the next generation. Education is supported and influenced by the cultural and social environments that were produced by human beings in the past. It could be said that the educational reforms in the past were successful because of the attainment of previous generations. Thus, education has to select what should be transmitted and what should be developed among the attainments of previous generations. The new generation thus educated becomes the initiator of the social development to build a new culture for the society. The next generation will be affected by that culture and grow. This will be the matured relationship between education and society.

From this view, we may conclude that the third educational reform is a movement to make people deeply consider what is the true nature of education and to realize its original mission.

(Translated by Toshio Kanaya)

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