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## EDUCATIONAL REFORMS TO COPE WITH THE SOCIETY OF LONGER LIFE SPAN

by  
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Many countries in the world are now moving towards inaugurating educational reforms. In Japan the Provisional Council on Educational Reform recently made its proposals in relation to general aspects of education, first in June 1985 and secondly in April 1986, with a view to allowing the country's educational system to cope with the social changes arising in the near future.

Although the Council is to continue its activities for years to come, I would like to state at this juncture that the Council's Second Report made in April 1986 contains two indications worthy of the most careful attention: firstly its emphasis on the necessity for reorganizing the educational system into a lifelong learning system, and secondly the importance of taking measures to respond to the upcoming information age.

The first issue with regard to the reorganization of the whole educational system into a lifelong learning system, is in large part a response to the many changes in the social environment. Technical innovation has rapidly advanced in many fields, including information technology. The elderly have come to occupy a much larger share of the total population of the country, inducing many changes in the employment situation and domestic living conditions. It is estimated that in the first quarter of the 21st century, while the population of children will decrease, the elderly of 65 years and upward will occupy more than 20 percent of the population. It is also estimated that the ratio of the dependent population to the working-age population will increase one and a half times from 43 percent to 65 percent in the next fifty years. In order to maintain, or raise, if possible, today's living standards until then with such a large dependent population, labor productivity must inevitably be increased one and a half times or more. Faced with such a rapid changes in the social environment, the concept of education must be reassessed and necessary reforms in the educational systems inaugurated.

The life pattern currently prevailing, where one gets a job after finishing school education and is then granted leisure time after retirement will no longer prove effective. While employed in a firm, one will have to devote his spare time to further education, and the amount of time for study will be increased by initiating a reduction in total working hours. Even someone of advanced age must continue engagement in some amount of work with the aid of education. Thus, in the society of increasing longevity, everyone will have to receive education throughout his life, beginning from childhood and continuing through his adolescence, adulthood and old age. It therefore becomes important that an appropriate educational system is designed to enable anyone to study whenever he wants. This is a major issue in regard to lifelong education.

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The purpose and importance of education will inevitably change in line with the adoption of the lifelong education system. In early education, then, more consideration than ever should be given to the fostering abilities for self-learning and the ability to select a suitable job. Higher education institutions should be open to adults for whenever they want to study, so as to provide them not only with so-called general cultural education, but also with the abilities to cope with new types of occupations and professions. At the same time vocational guidance should be further strengthened to enable them to find jobs or continue in their present occupations.

With regard to the second problem pertaining to the educational reform, coping with the upcoming information age, an issue emphasized in the Council's Second Report, it may safely be said that the future advancement of information technology will bring about a great changes in all the aspects of social life including education, employment, etc. The computer will permeate many areas of daily life, and it will become necessary for everyone to be able to make use of this information apparatus. For that purpose, a program system which will make the computer more useful should be developed. The computer will not be able to demonstrate its full potential until the software is developed that can store the required amount of information. Such apparatus is after all a means which intended to serve that purpose. The more powerful the means, the more important it becomes to clearly understand the purpose, so that the means can work at optimum efficiency. In this sense it becomes increasingly important to reassess the innate purpose of education to cope with the upcoming information age.

I would like to conclude my short speech by stating that the most important task at this state is not only to consolidate the fundamentals of education to prepare for the rapid development of information technology, but also to make constant and widespread appeals to this effect.