

Education in Japan: Past and Present

The introduction of a modern education into Japan, taking several Western countries as models, began in the latter part of the 19th century. The arrival of modernization in Japan was therefore comparatively late, but education underwent very rapid development within a short space of time. In that time, the following particular socio-cultural conditions in Japan were favorable for the development of education.

Initial conditions favoring the development of modern education

(1) For the preceding 250 years of the Edo period, during which Japan followed a policy of keeping the country closed to the outside world under the Tokugawa shogunate (1603-1868), the country enjoyed a long period of peace and social stability. Under these conditions, the people of Japan were able to attain quite a high level of cultural maturity. There was a relatively wide diffusion of distinctively Japanese educational institutions. For the samurai warrior class, there were institutions for public education (*Hankō* or fief schools) in which to learn classic Chinese literatures (Confucian Studies). On the other hand, private academies (*Shijuku*), equivalent to secondary schools, developed and were open to all regardless of Social classes. And there were also a large number of popular learning houses called *Terakoya*, which concentrated on teaching the practical skills of reading and writing to the commoners. Among the merchant and the technician-worker classes, an apprenticeship system was developed. And among the people it was popular to learn the tea ceremony, flower arrangement, classical musical instruments and other traditional arts.

(2) Education had a strongly secular character, and the traditional religions such as Buddhism and Shintoism did not have their own distinctive educational institutions. Moreover, thanks to comparatively homogeneous cultural and linguistic traditions, there was no problem with making Japanese the sole medium of teaching from the start.

(3) As a result of the feudal system and the system of social classes, the formation of a common national consciousness had been held back. However, amidst the atmosphere of crisis in the face of external pressure at the end of the Edo period, there was a strong awareness that national unity and national consciousness could be formed through education. In the process of groping to modernize the nation in the mid-19th century, a consensus was formed with the aim of abolishing the traditional class system and offering an equal educational opportunity to all people of Japan.

(4) Near the end of the Edo period, a system that recruited people on the basis of individual knowledge and ability was introduced in place of the traditional class system. It became clear that the elite members of the society were being selected on the basis of their academic attainment. In this way, the initial conditions had been laid for the advent of a “academic-credentials society” in which employment and social status were decided on the basis of a person’s educational attainment.

(5) Japan maintained its independence and as it was not colonized by the great powers of the West, it did not have the colonial legacy in education introduced by former rulers, as was the case with many other developing countries. Consequently, at the time that the modern educational system was introduced, Japan was able to select at will and to try out various models provided by different developed countries.

1. Introduction of a modern education system: 1868-1885

Opening of the country and the Meiji Restoration

In 1868, a political revolution took place in Japan, marked by the collapse of the political power held by the Tokugawa shogunate, and the birth of a new system of political authority with the Emperor at its head. The beginnings of the modernization of Japan can be seen in this revolution known as the Meiji Restoration. (Meiji comes from the name of the Emperor Meiji) .

During Edo period, the shogunate government had adopted a policy of keeping the country closed to the outside world, but in the early part of 19th century, it faced a great pressure and military threats from a number of western countries that demanded that Japan open its doors. In the final stages of the Edo period, Japan fell into a state of civil war. The feudal system had hampered the emergence of a national consciousness. The new government under Emperor Meiji attempted to overcome this crisis by abolishing the feudal regime and turning Japan into a unified, modern nation-state. Adopting as its main slogans, “Civilization and Enlightenment”(*Bunmei kaika*), “Enrich the Country, Strengthen the Military” (*Fukoku kyôhei*), the new government introduced modern social and economic systems to Japan. Educational reforms were also included within this modernization package.

The concept of the Education System Ordinance

In 1871, the Ministry of Education was established and in the following year, 1872, the first systematic education regulation was promulgated in the form of the Education System Ordinance (*Gakusei*). The school system followed the American model of the time, which consisted of three levels of schooling, elementary school, middle school and university. On the other hand, the administrative system followed the French, with strong central control by Ministry of Education and the system of school districts. Under the Education System Ordinance, the plan for the establishment of schools took the following form. The entire country was divided into eight university districts, each of these was divided into 32 middle school districts, and each of these was further divided into 210 elementary school districts. In principle, all children were required to attend to elementary school, regardless of sex, parental occupation, or social status.

Traditional educational institutions were transformed and incorporated into the new systems. Many *Terakoya* or popular learning houses for teaching reading and writing and practical skills to the commoners, became elementary schools and many *Hanko* (fief schools) for the samurai warrior class were transformed into local middle schools. Although the *Shôhei-zaka Gakumonjo*,

the supreme Confucian education institution established by the shogunate government, was abolished, two other Western-style educational establishments set up during the late Edo period, the *Kaisei-jo* (School of Western Studies) and a medical institute, continued to exist after the Meiji Restoration and eventually developed into the University of Tokyo. To modernize the contents and methods of elementary education, in 1872, the government invited a specialist in teacher education from the United States, and the Tokyo Normal School was established.

Employment of foreign consultants and sending students overseas to study

In the early years of the Meiji era, the government employed many foreign consultants while paying them exceptionally high salaries. In the early institutions of higher education, many courses were instructed by foreign professors. At the same time, the government sent large numbers of capable students to study abroad. After studying for a number of years, they returned to Japan and in a very short space of time replaced the foreign instructors. To finance these enterprises, the government was forced to invest large amount of its available funds. Under these circumstances, the government became largely dependent on local government funds, taxes on the residents of school districts, and tuition fees for the establishment and running of elementary schools.

A compromise with reality

The educational development plan formulated in the early years of the Meiji period was ambitious and magnificent in its scale, but it was too uniform and unrealistic. Of the eight universities that it had planned, by 1877, only one, the University of Tokyo, had actually been created. In 1879, the government, in an effort to come to terms with reality, abolished the Education System Ordinance and promulgated a new Education Order. The system of school districts was abolished, and schools were to be administered by the municipalities. The years of schooling were also shortened and school attendance rules were relaxed. However, under this “liberal” Education Order, attendance rates worsened still further and criticism mounted, so that after only one year, in 1890, a revised Education Order was issued. Under the revised Order, central control was once again strengthened, and the school attendance requirement was strictly set at a period of three years.

A clash of ideologies

Also around the end of the 1870s, changes began to appear in the ideological context of education. Opposing the course of Westernization that had been followed since the Meiji Restoration, a movement emerged, driven primarily by the conservatives in the Imperial Court, seeking a change in education policies. They alleged a decline in public morals resulting from excessive Westernization, and emphasized the need for a restoration of morals based on traditional ethics. In 1879, the Emperor proclaimed the Imperial Will on the Great Principles of Education (*Kyôgaku taishi*). In this document, emphasis was placed on Confucian ideas such as duty, loyalty and filial piety, and patriotism. In the revised Education Order of 1880, moral

education (*Shūshin*) took on a new importance.

2. The development and expansion of education: 1886-1945

Minister Mori's conception of the education system

In 1885, the cabinet system of government was introduced. As the first Minister of Education, *Mori Arinori* was appointed. He was an enlightened statesman with diplomatic experience in both Great Britain and the United States. He created the basic framework of an education system, which was to become the foundation of educational development in Japan. In 1886, Mori issued four separate school orders for different parts of the educational system, namely, the Elementary School Order, the Middle School Order, the Normal School Order, and the Imperial University Order.

The sole university, the University of Tokyo, was designated as an “imperial university”, which was identified as an institution with the purpose of training the elite leaders and technocrats who were to be equipped with the advanced Western knowledge and skills. The Imperial University received both privileges and a considerable amount of academic freedom. The middle schools were institutions that were designated to prepare students to enter the Imperial University. On the other hand, the elementary schools were identified as the training centers responsible for bringing up children to become loyal subjects of the Emperor. Attendance for the four years’ of ordinary elementary course was imposed as a duty on all citizens. Normal schools were identified as key institutions to inculcate all future teachers with a nationalist ideology.

Through these measures, Education Minister Mori aimed to harmonize the twin objectives of, on the one hand, modernizing Japan and, on the other hand, realizing the spiritual unity of the people by strengthening the national morals.

The Imperial Rescript on Education

The second objective was greatly strengthened by the proclamation of the Imperial Rescript on Education (*kyōiku chokugo*) in 1890. Basing its stance on ideas drawn from Confucian culture and the Japanese classics, the Rescript set out the standards of behavior expected from the Japanese people and strongly emphasized the virtues of patriotism and loyalty to the Emperor. For the next 50 years, right up until the end of World War II, the Imperial Rescript on Education continued to have a great influence on Japanese education.

The diversification of the education system

In 1893, the government issued the Vocational Supplementary School Regulations and in 1894, the Apprentice School Regulations, thereby aiming to provide an elementary industrial education. In addition, in 1899, the Vocational School Order was enacted, and applied to secondary schools for industry, agriculture, commerce, mercantile marine, and practical vocational skills. In 1903 the government issued the Professional College Order. In the

Professional Colleges (*Senmon gakko*), graduates from middle schools and girls' high schools took specialized training courses in such disciplines as medicine, pharmacology, law, engineering, and commerce. In 1897, a second imperial university was established in Kyoto, and others followed, in 1907 in Sendai, in 1910 in Fukuoka, and elsewhere.

Extension of compulsory education

In the 1890s, a steady improvement was observed in the school attendance rate. By 1898, the school enrollment rate during the compulsory education period reached 69%. In 1900, it was decided that no tuition fees would be required for attendance at elementary school. Also in 1900, the system of automatic promotion through grades was adopted and grade-repetition and dropouts from elementary school steadily decreased. Then in 1907, compulsory education was extended from four years to six. In a wider social context, the arrival of a new adult illiteracy had practically disappeared by the early years of the 20th century.

The expansion of secondary and higher education

Stimulated by the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05) and World War I (1914-1918), Japanese capitalism underwent rapid development. At the same time, popular demand for education increased, and there was rising call for expansion and reorganization in the education system. In 1918, the University Order was promulgated. Under this Order, approval was given for the establishment of single-subject universities and private universities. Professional Colleges and higher secondary schools also saw an increase in numbers. At the same time, normal schools gradually advanced to the level of professional colleges, or grew closer to the higher education level. By this time, the enrollment rate of compulsory education had reached 99%. It is fair to say that a modern education system had been effectively established in Japan by around 1920.

The rise of ultra-nationalism and militarism

In the area of educational theory and methodology, the 1910s and the 1920s saw the introduction of the ideas of John Dewey and other educationists, and the influence of the global movement known as the New Education Movement was also felt here. But as Japan moved into the 1930s, ultra-nationalist trends gradually became discernible in Japanese education policies. In 1937, with the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, militarism became increasingly prominent, and following Japan's entry into World War II, militarist education was strengthened, as was control over ideas and academic content. In the final stages of the war, students were mobilized to produce foodstuffs and military supplies. Teachers were also drafted into the armed forces, and children in urban areas were evacuated into rural districts to escape from air raids. At the end of the war, in 1945, Japanese school system had been almost completely paralyzed.

3. Education reforms after the end of World War II

Defeat, and education reforms under the occupation

After its 1945 defeat in World War II, Japan was occupied by the Allied Forces. From that time to 1951, Japan was placed under the control of the General Headquarters of the Allied Forces (GHQ). Under this system, de-militarization, democratization, and the rebuilding of the country were all taken forward. In 1946, a new Constitution proclaiming pacifism and democracy was promulgated. GHQ requested the U.S. to dispatch a United States Education Mission to Japan to examine the country's postwar education reforms. The Education Mission arrived in March 1946 and issued a report containing a series of recommendations. The large-scale postwar reform of the Japanese education system was carried out on the basis of the recommendations of this mission.

The main points of education reform

What came to form the core of education reforms was the Fundamental Law of Education, enacted in 1947. This law clearly set out the fundamental principles of postwar education in Japan, and effectively replaced the prewar Imperial Rescript on Education. Following this, a number of educational laws that determined the structure and management of the education system were passed, including the School Education Law (1947), the Board of Education Law (1948), the Social Education Law (1949), and the Private School Law (1949). The basic framework of the new education system was as follows: (1) a shift from the prewar, dual school system to a single track system, known as the 6-3-3-4 system; (2) the extension of compulsory education to 9 years, including primary school and lower secondary school; (3) the adoption, in principle, of the co-education of boys and girls; (4) the establishment of boards of education at the prefectural and municipal levels; (5) the abolition of normal schools and the establishment of a university-based teacher training system. For an impoverished country coming off of its defeat in war, it was no easy task to implement these reforms, but it was decided to press ahead with their full implementation.

The democratization of educational administration

In the area of educational administration, American-style local boards of education were introduced. However, implementation of this system faced various problems in the Japanese social context, such as difficulties with the methods of electing and nominating members of the boards, and the relationship between general administration and educational administration. In 1956, to adjust the board of education system to Japanese conditions, the "Law concerning the Organization and Management of Local Educational Administration" was enacted. The boards of education system remained, but the authority of local boards of education was somewhat curtailed. At the same time, the superior-subordinate relationship linking the Ministry of Education, prefectural boards of education, and municipal boards of education was strengthened.

Laws related to improving the school and learning environments

From the 1950s on, a series of laws were enacted with the aim of improving the school and

learning environments. In 1954, the “Law for the Promotion of Education in Remote and Isolated Areas” was enacted with the aim of improving educational conditions in mountainous areas or on remote islands. Special financial provisions were made available for the purpose of upgrading facilities and equipment in schools in these areas, and special allowances were paid to teachers who worked in them. Also in 1954, the “School Lunch Law” was established, setting forth criteria for the improvement of school lunches,. In 1958, the “School Health Law” was approved with the objective of making provisions for maintaining children’s health, establishing a more hygienic environment in schools. Finally in 1963, the “Law concerning the Free Distribution of Textbooks in Compulsory Education Schools” was promulgated.

Promotion of industrial education and science education

Also enacted were two laws which aimed to promote specific areas of education, namely the “Industrial Education Promotion Law” in 1951, and the “Science Education Promotion Law” in 1953. These laws set out national criteria related to the laboratories, facilities and equipment needed for industrial education and science education. All schools, public and private, that wanted to improve their scientific facilities to satisfy these criteria could apply for a national subsidy that would meet all or part of the costs.

4. Success and Problems

Expansion of popular demand for education

The education system underwent rapid quantitative expansion from the 1950s onward. By 1950, the extension of compulsory education to 9 years was virtually completed. There was an increase in the number of people who wanted to continue on to further education. In the first place, this affected upper secondary education, and subsequently, higher education. The advancement rate to the upper secondary schools stood at 42.5% in 1950, and rose to 57.7% in 1960, reaching 82.1% in 1970, and rising again to 94.1% in 1980.

The number of students continuing on to junior colleges and universities also increased. In 1960, the percentage of students advancing to higher education was a mere 10.3% of that year’s graduating class (15.3% of boys, 4.6% of girls). Higher education was still tinged with a sense of elitism. However, by 1970, the figure had reached 23.6%, and by 1980, it had risen even further, reaching 37.4% (41.3% of boys and 33.7% of girls). It was clear that, just as in the United States, the massification of higher education was becoming a reality.

Japanese growth and the role of education

Japan’s educational results have also been affirmed by international comparative studies on educational achievement. In international investigations such as those by the IEA (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement), Japanese students have placed among the highest ranked in the world in both in mathematics and in science. There can be no doubt that education has provided the driving force for economic, social, and cultural

development in Japan. Taken as a whole, Japanese education has produced a large number of people who have acquired the qualities demanded by the industrial world and Japanese society. Specifically, it has produced people who possess the basic knowledge and skills to respond to technical changes and innovations, who are disciplined, diligent, and constant and who have the collaborative skills needed to work in a group.

The emergence of educational problems

On the other hand, Japanese education has faced a number of problems. Criticisms have been leveled at its excessive uniformity and rigidity as leading to an imposition of excessive control over children's behavior. In addition, the excessive competition for entry to the best schools and to top-class universities has inflicted psychological stress on both children and parents. This intensified competition has often referred to in the media as "examination hell". Criticisms have also been put forth that compulsory rote memorization and educational force-feeding rob children of the spirit of inquiry and creative thinking. Attention has been drawn to the increase in the number of children who are unable to keep up with their lessons, the so-called "*Ochikobore*", or the children left behind. To supplement or to catch up their studies, many children commute to "cram schools" known as "*Juku*", on evenings and/or weekends.

In addition, the so called "desolation of education" has frequently reported in the media, as a phenomenon whereby some students refuse to attend school (*Futōkō*) by reason of "dislike for school", in-school violence, bullying (*Ijime*) among pupils, and apathy on the part of the student.

On the other hand, there was a general impression that once students have cleared the entrance examination hurdles to get into a university, Japanese higher education institutions do not demand strict study from their students. There is perceived to be no particularly great effort required to move up a grade, and students are seen as being able to expend their energies on club activities, recreation, and part-time jobs. In contrast to the high-quality level of primary and secondary education, the mediocre quality of higher education has become a major issue.

5. Discourses for Educational Reform

The Central Council for Education and the Third Educational Reform

With Japan's entry into the 1970s, an increasing number of voices advocated the need to reform the whole education system. In 1971, the Central Council for Education (CCE), an advisory body to the Minister of Education, submitted a report consisting of "a fundamental policy for the comprehensive expansion of the education system". It contemplated a comprehensive reform aimed at restructuring all levels of education from kindergarten through university and called itself "the third major educational reform".

The report engendered a fierce debate. In particular, the Japan Teachers Union adopted a clear oppositional stance, claiming that the CCE put forward reform proposals without making a

critical examination of postwar reforms. In addition to opposition, the economic retrenchment and budgetary cutbacks following the 1973 oil shock made it difficult to implement large-scale education reforms.

A law to secure capable education personnel

While in 1974, during a period of rapid economic growth in Japan, saw the enactment of a law with such a long title as the “Law Concerning Special Measure for Securing Capable Educational Personnel in Compulsory Education Schools for the Maintenance and Enhancement of School Education Standards”. Its aim was to recruit people of outstanding talent into the teaching profession, in opposition to the tendency for such capable young people to be concentrated in private companies. There was a stipulation in the law that the salary of the teachers in the compulsory education schools must be treated more favorably than the salary level of the general civil servant. Following the enactment of this law, during the period from 1974 to 1978, the salary of teachers in compulsory education schools was revised three times, and came to be higher than the salary paid to the general civil servant. After these measures, the traditional image of teachers as being low paid was shaken off. The number of the applicants for teaching positions increased sharply and the examination for appointment of teachers organized by prefectural boards of education became more competitive. In economic terms too, the teaching profession became an attractive job option among young people.

Prime Minister Nakasone and the NCER

At the end of 1982, Prime Minister Nakasone came into power, and showed a great eagerness to bring about education reforms. In 1984, an advisory body under the direct jurisdiction of the Prime Minister, the National Council on Education Reform (NCER, *Rinkyōshin*) was launched. Great interest was shown by the mass media in the launching of the NCER. It remained in existence for three years and issued a total of four reports.

In August 1987, the final report was published. Fundamental perspectives on educational reform were presented in the form of three principles: (1) the principle of emphasizing the individuality of the students; (2) the move to a system of lifelong learning; and (3) the response to changes such as internationalization and advancements in information technology.

6. Education reform in the 1990s

Many of the principles and concepts put forward by the NCER were passed over to the Ministry of Education, and as Japan moved into the 1990s, educational reform came to assume a concrete shape.

Reform of University Education

In 1991, the Standards for the Establishment of Universities were revised. Under this revision, the basic principles for university curriculums were outlined, specially, the requirement for a

definition of subject areas was abolished, the practice of requiring students to obtain a minimum number of credits in each subject area was discontinued, and the formulation of the curriculum was made more flexible. Each university was given greater discretion to construct a curriculum independently. Taking the opportunity presented by this revision, universities adopted measures such as abolishing the general education requirement in the curriculum or reducing teaching of foreign languages or physical education. As the other side of the coin to the expansion of discretion, universities were placed under an obligation to maintain and report their educational and research activities, in a detailed self-monitoring and self-evaluation system.

Ikiru chikara and Yutori

In July 1996, the Central Council for Education submitted the first report of its deliberations in “The Model for Japanese Education in the Perspective of the 21st Century”. In this report, the Council set out a vision of Japan’s future, forecasting intensified internationalization, the further spread of information, the further development of science and technology, global environmental and energy problems, also the rapid advancement of the aging society coupled with the declining birthrate. It foresaw that Japanese society would face “a difficult period of rapid change, in which the way ahead will be difficult to discern.” From this perspective, the Council pointed out that the children who would have to live in such society would need to be equipped with following qualities:

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

The Council summed up the abilities and qualities outlined here in the phrase “*Ikiru chikara*”(competences for positive living or zest for living). The Council stressed that for children to be able to cultivate this “competences for positive living”, it was important for the school, the home and the community to collaborate together. In addition, the Council said, in order to develop these competences, it was important for children, for their schools, and for the whole of society, embracing the family and the community, to have “*Yutori*”(latitude or relaxed feeling). For some time after this, “*Ikiru chikara*” and “*yutori*” were taken up and used as the key words in any debate about education reform.

The reform of school education

With regard to school education, the CCE made the following recommendations. (1) The content of education should be carefully reviewed to reduce the teaching of the mere knowledge

or rote memorization material, and that contents should be strictly selected to ensure that children have a firm grasp of the fundamentals. In order that children could have more latitude “*Yutori*”, the number of teaching hours should be shortened; (2) With a view to encouraging individual children to develop their own distinctive personalities, more flexibility should be promoted in the curriculum and efforts should be made toward creating schools that have their own distinctive characteristics; (3) In order to help children cultivate a rich sense of humanity and a vigorous physique, hands-on activities such as volunteer work, contact with nature, and work experience should be upgraded; and (4) With a view to promoting cross-curricular, comprehensive studies such as international understanding, information education, environmental protection, and experience in nature, “school periods for integrated learning” should be established. The integrated studies period (*Sôgô gakushû no jikan*) is a time slot in which each school is expected to develop their own learning activities without using textbooks. A further recommendation was the proposal for the phased introduction of a five-day school week (introduced one week a month from 1992, and two weeks a month since 1995).

Establishing and implementing the new curriculum

In December 1998, the Ministry of Education announced new Courses of Study for elementary and lower secondary schools. Under the new Courses of Study, the educational content was cut by around 30%. For example, the teaching hours for the 6th grade of primary school were to be reduced from 1015 to 945 hours, and for the 3rd grade of lower secondary school, these were to be cut from 1050 to 980 hours. The periods of integrated studies would be three hours a week in primary school and two to three hours a week in lower secondary school. The new Courses of Study and the five-day school week were completely implemented starting from April 2002.

Reorganization of educational administration

In January 2001, in the reorganization of the central government authorities, the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture and the Science and Technology Agency were consolidated and new MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology) was established.

Concerning the administration of higher education, in 2003, by enactment of “Law concerning Reorganization of the National Universities as Corporations”, national universities were given legal status as a particular type of corporation. In education finance, in the context of the global reforming of financial relationship between central and local governments, in 2008, “Law concerning the National Treasury’s Share of Compulsory Education Expenditures” was revised and the central government’s share of compulsory education expenditures was reduced from the ratio of 1/2 to 1/3.

7. Academic ability debate and announcement of new curriculum

The debate about academic ability

When faced with the implementation of the new Courses of Study, however, criticism began to be openly voiced about the premise of latitude or “*Yutori*” which had underpinned the educational discourses of the 1990s. A number of university science and engineering professors expressed their dissatisfaction and anxiety over the new curriculum. They alleged that the level of knowledge in science and mathematics among present university students had clearly gone down when compared to that of the previous generation, and they warned that any further reduction of teaching hours or of the educational content would result in a larger drop in academic ability. On the other hand, it was also argued that there was no objective data demonstrating that children’s academic achievements had fallen.

On the other hand, the Ministry of Education emphasized that the Courses of Study are the “essential minimum” and that teachers should extend their students’ abilities through more advanced study depending on their interests and abilities. However, there is no clear guidance in the Courses of Study themselves in relation to the contents or levels of more advanced study. The Courses of Study have been fully implemented since April 2002, but this type of controversy has continued.

Some are anxious over the results of the OECD-PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment). According to the 2003 results, Japan’s 15-years olds were highly ranked internationally. However, in reading literacy, the Japan’s rank dropped, and such students were not considered to be among the top in the world in this area.

Establishment of the ERC

In October 2006, Prime Minister *Shinzo Abe* established a new advisory body called the Education Rebuilding Council (ERC, *Kyōiku Saisei Kaigi*), emphasizing his government’s intention to tackle educational problems. In the mid-term reports, some of the ERC’s recommendations included policies such as a 10% increase in curriculum contents and school instruction-hours in primary and secondary schools, introduction of a system of renewal for teaching certificates, and speedy treatment for bullying problems in schools. The possibility of introducing an education voucher system to Japanese education was also discussed. However, the ECR lost momentum with the abrupt resignation of Prime Minister Abe in September 2007. The final report of ERC entitled “Education Rebuilding by Society as a Whole” was presented on 31 January 2008. In its final report, which was not very notably reported by the mass media, the previous radical tone of discussions in the ERC had weakened, and some all-purpose recommendations were presented.

In 22 December 2006, the new Fundamental Law of Education was promulgated.

New Curriculum

On March 28, 2008, the Ministry of Education announced new Courses of Study for primary and lower secondary schools that would be implemented starting from April 2011. According to the Ministry’s explanation, even in the new curriculum, basic idea of *Ikiru chikara* would be

maintained as a principle of education. However, there are some changes in the new curriculum, as follows:

1. In primary school and lower secondary school, the total number of teaching hours would be increased by around 10%.
2. In primary school, two teaching hours in a week would be increased for 1st and 2nd grades and one teaching hour a week would be added for grades 3 through 6.
3. In lower secondary school, one teaching hour in a week would be added for all three grades (Grade 7 through 9).,
4. In primary school, one hour of foreign language (English) activities would be introduced in 5th and 6th grades.
5. In primary school, the integrated studies period would be reduced from three hours to two hours a week
6. Also in lower secondary school, the integrated studies period would be reduced from 2 or three hours to 1.4 to two hours a week.

The Ministry of Education discussed moving up the implementation of certain parts of the new curriculum from April 2009.

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<Yasuo SAITO>

日本の教育: 過去と現在 (記述内容の要点)

教育の発展に寄与した日本に特有の社会文化的条件

- ・江戸期の文化的成熟と伝統的教育の遺産
- ・教育の世俗的性格と单一言語による教育
- ・教育による国民統合の課題の認識
- ・学歴による人材登用システムの萌芽
- ・植民地教育遺制の不在と多様なモデル選択の可能性

1. 近代的教育の導入と試行の時期 (1872~1885 年)

開国と明治維新、学制の公布、お雇い外国人と留学生の派遣、欧米学校の模倣と就学の低迷、現実との妥協、イデオロギーの対立。

2. 教育制度の確立と拡充の時期(1886~1945 年)

森文相の教育制度構想、教育勅語、義務教育の発展と年限延長、中等・高等教育の拡張、超国家主義・軍国主義の台頭。

3. 第二次大戦後の教育改革導入の時期(1945~50 年)

敗戦・占領下の教育改革、戦後教育改革の要点、教育行政の民主化、学校と学習環境改善のための立法、産業教育・理科教育の促進。

4. 成功と問題

民衆の教育要求の拡大、日本の成長と教育の役割、教育問題の顕在化。

5. 教育改革論議

中央教育審議会と第三の教育改革、人材確保法、中曾根内閣と臨時教育審議会。

6. 1990 年代の教育改革論議

大学設置基準大綱化、生きる力とゆとり、学校教育の改革、1998 年学習指導要領の告示。

7. 学力論争と教育課程の改訂

学力論争、教育再生会議の設置、2008 年学習指導要領の告示。