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CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF TEACHER EDUCATION COLLEGES AND INSTITUTIONS IN JAPAN

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1. INTRODUCTION

School education in Japan is currently in disarray: bullying is rampant; students refuse to attend school; classroom discipline is in chaos; and children lack desire to learn (for a review of the problems, see Suzuki, 2000). In this context, some parents are vitally concerned with the new curriculum guidelines released by the government, of which reduce the content of school lessons by 30% (Asahi News Paper, 28 November 2001).

In the guidelines for reforms at universities prepared by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (hereafter referred to as the Ministry), the emphasis is on consolidating and streamlining facilities (Asahi News Paper, 4 December 2001). And teacher education institutions are prime targets for the axe due to the current problem of teacher’s over-supply. Other schools are openly questioning the need for having specialized institutions to educate teachers, reflecting that there is now a concern that faculty members of those teacher education institutions are themselves the largest source of surplus labor that should be cut in order to save overall personnel costs (Asahi News Paper, 5 December 2001).

What is to be done? Consolidation for efficiency is the response by the Ministry’s own council on national teacher education colleges and institutions. The council’s proposals, if implemented, would result in the consolidation of the nation’s 48 such institutions into fewer regional institutions, drawing upon both students and faculty from neighboring prefectures (Asahi News Paper, 5 December 2001). This is a departure from the post-war tradition of having one school for teachers in every prefecture.

In this context, described in this chapter are the historical context of universities of education for teacher education, as well as the major features and characteristics of these universities in academic programs, staffing and resourcing, and graduates. An attempt is made to address a question: “what are the major differences between these universities for teacher education with other comprehensive universities?” Moreover, the strengths, concerns, and future developments of these universities of education are reviewed. Furthermore, some implications for the international...
audience interested in the reform of teacher education at the institution and system levels are drawn.

2. THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF UNIVERSITIES OF EDUCATION

Japanese education did not suddenly reach its present high level. To appreciate it historical development, one needs to refer to its philosophical and theoretical basis.

2.1 Philosophical and Theoretical Basis

In the Meiji era, Japan had eight university blocks. The establishment of this orderly nationwide school system constituted the basis of centralized control of education by the Meiji government. The ancient cultural heritage and the absorption of elements of the advanced cultures of such close neighbors as China and Korea had been the sources of influences on Japanese education. Then, the national education system of Japan, featuring the educational principles, had also incorporated into it elements of the French public educational system (International Society for Educational Information [ISEI], 1986). In brief, Emil Durkheim (1858-1917) was introduced in the 1900s by Japanese sociologists to some Japanese educationists, long before the works of Durkheim being shared by scholars in other parts of the world: for example, his educational writings did not become available in French until the 1920s; and not until the late 1950s and early 1960s did these works appear in English.

To some scholars, the ideology of science was actually based on a new teaching method for science developed in Germany; such an education in Japan began to take clear form under the efforts to transplant a German educational theory into the school system (ISEI, 1986). Then, as the number of teacher education institutions expanded, courses of study modeled after the curricula in Germany, France, and the Netherlands were also introduced. The course of study and most of the textbooks adopted for use in schools mirrored those in use in Western nations.

The ideas of both William James (ISEI, 1986) and John Dewey in the USA were introduced to Japanese as early as 1898. During the following 30 years, enthusiasm for pragmatic ideas developed on the part of some Japanese educators and philosophers. Dewey’s educational ideas were particularly popular during this period, and several of his books were translated into Japanese. His Outline of a Critical Theory of Ethics appeared in 1900 and School and Society in the following year. Democracy and Education was published in Japanese in 1918. In actual teaching situation, some educators proceeded during this period to apply both Dewey’s ideas and progressive educational ideas from other sources.

Notwithstanding, the Japanese educational system continued to function in ways that were more in keeping with the tenets of Confucianism and traditional Japanese culture than with those embedded in Western pedagogical thoughts. To optimize pedagogical benefits, some graduates of normal schools tried to mix the Western approach and the Eastern culture. There was a movement toward democratization in the 1920s and for a time an upsurge in the activities of liberal