Prospects of the third educational reform in Japan

In July 1967 the Central Council for Education, of which the author had the honour to be the president, was requested by the Minister of Education to define and develop basic policy measures for general expansion and improvement of school education, and after four years' deliberation it submitted to the minister in June 1971 a report entitled *Basic Guidelines for Educational Reform*.

The report is an epoch-making document containing basic ideas and proposals for the over-all reform of school education in Japan. The reform proposed is widely referred to as the 'third educational reform', following the first reform in 1872, and the second reform in 1947. The third reform is not only significant in the context of the world-wide trend of educational development, but it is also worthy of special attention in that it is taking place in Japan, a non-Western country situated in East Asia.

The council analysed and evaluated the educational practices and achievements during the past hundred years since the early Meiji era in order to identify the problems involved, and on the basis of its findings presented certain central problems to be solved for restructuring Japanese education for the future, indicating at the same time the direction to be taken in solving these problems. The council also examined a range of administrative and financial measures that the government should take for successful implementation of a comprehensive plan for the expansion and improvement of school education as a whole.

Although the author was involved from the beginning to the end in the work of the council as president, what he writes in the present article is neither an official commentary on the part of the council nor the official views of the educational authorities responsible for implementing the reform, but it is mostly the personal opinions and views of the author.

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The first two educational reforms

The year 1972 marked the ‘Centenary of the Education System’, and the inauguration of the first educational reform, four years after the Meiji Restoration, which marked the turning point in the modernization of this country.

The first reform was aimed at the equalization of educational opportunity and the conversion from abstract to pragmatic education. The new education system followed the French example, while the educational content and praxis was largely influenced by the American example. The education system first adopted in Japan comprised, as in France, three levels of education: primary, secondary and higher education. On the other hand, the Ministry of Education invited an American educator to teach at a newly established normal school so that teaching methods in American primary schools might be introduced into this country. It also employed an American specialist as consultant to put the new system into operation.

Three-quarters of a century after the first educational reform was initiated, Japan undertook the second educational reform, which was carried out immediately after the termination of the Pacific War.

The salient features of the reform were: (a) In place of the Imperial Rescript on Education, which had long provided the guiding principles for education in Japan, the Fundamental Law of Education was laid down in accordance with the universal principles of mankind. (b) The board of education system was introduced and the autonomy of the university was expanded in order to remedy the extremely centralized rule of education by the Ministry of Education. (c) The single-tracked 6–3–3–4 year school system was inaugurated to ensure equality of educational opportunity, with compulsory education extended from six to nine years and educational discrimination largely removed or minimized. (d) The educational approach was changed from the textbook-centred method of knowledge cramming to self-study and self-learning approach, while the state monopoly of textbook production was abolished in favour of a State authorization system. (e) All schools, government, municipal and private, are treated equally without distinction. (f) Parent-teacher associations, professional teacher organizations, and student bodies were given freedom of activity. (g) Out-of-school education, with adult education as its central activity, acquired high importance and emphasis. (h) Unesco activities for promoting education for international understanding and co-operation were introduced into school education.