How is Learning Understood, Constructed and Produced by Different Actors in Primary Schools in Japan in the Period of Globalisation?

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how learning is understood, constructed and produced by different groups of actors such as teachers, parents and children in the age of globalisation in Japan's primary education sector. While several educational reforms have been conducted in Japan since the emergence of globalisation in the 1980s, the voices of the actors above, especially the voices of children, are not reflected in the policy making process. This study, therefore, aims at giving a voice to them by analysing and interpreting their perspectives and everyday experiences.

In order to understand their everyday educational experiences, in-depth interviews were conducted as a main research method, along with participant observations as a subsidiary method. The analysis shows that there are some gaps between the ideal and the reality. Some teachers encountered dilemmas in that they could not conduct the lessons that they wanted to due to the rigid municipal teaching guidelines. They expressed concerns at an increase in low academic achievers, especially among children from poor families, due to a lack of repetitive practices in the lessons and an emphasis on active learning such as presentations and discussions in such a tight curriculum. Most of the parents also noted that education today seemed to be child-centred, which gave children more time for discussions and presentation, while some parents criticised that such learning styles would broaden the disparity between active and quiet children in terms of the quality and opportunities for learning. In reality, some children expressed that they felt imposed upon to conduct child-led lessons and only a few children actively participated in the lesson.

Although the most recent educational policy emphasises teaching children by meeting their individual needs in order to raise individual potential, the voices of the actors suggest that there are many obstacles to overcome before realizing ideal policies for everyday practice.

DECLARATION

I, Nobuko Terai, confirm that the thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means (www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means). This work has not been previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1. Motivation in Conducting Research

I went to a municipal primary school in Japan in the 1980s and the early 1990s, which was the time when many Western researchers focused on the Japanese educational system as the key for its economic success (White 1987, Tobin et al 1989, Peak 1991, Schoppa 1991, Stevenson and Stigler 1992, Lewis 1995, Benjamin 1997, Rohlen and LeTendre 1998. White 1998). Concurrently, it was the time when the Japanese government reflected on the competitive educational system. The mass media in those days gave a high profile to problems in Japanese schools such as bullying, school refusal and 'examination hell,' while fussing about juvenile crimes which were of a relatively low frequency in comparison with other countries (Fujita 2010, Kariya 2002, Okano & Tsuchiya 1999). Moreover, the inflexible and uniformed education was criticised that it deprived children of their learning initiative, creativity and originality which were considered to be necessary to compete in the global economy (Cave 2007:14-15). Those mass media reports and the sluggish economy introduced more relaxing educational policies and started to focus on individuality.

As long as I remember, children were vigorously taking lessons at the municipal primary school by raising their hands to express their opinions and by having group discussions. Primary school education taught me how to learn and did not seem to cram knowledge into children, although it assigned us repetitive practice on four arithmetic operations and vocabulary building/word practice every day with several review quizzes and tests to make sure everybody acquired the knowledge and the skills. What I was not taught was the skills and the knowledge on how to build a bridge between subjects or how to apply the knowledge to real life. The classroom teacher taught us each subject by using the authorized textbook, which did not show any thematic connections between subjects.

After completing the undergraduate program in Japan in the 1990s, I moved to Hawaii to receive a post-graduate education. During that time, I had a chance to observe a primary school there as a student teacher for one semester. It was really surprising that the Grade 1 children (aged 6 and 7) being observed were more strictly disciplined by teachers than the schools in Japan, since I had imagined the opposite case. In my impression, the noise level was much lower than Japanese primary schools. Also, I happened to have a chance to see a British primary school through my daughter for a year, an international baccalaureate school in Japan for eight years through my son

and also conducted a participant observation at the international school for half a year. The teaching styles were totally different from the ones I received in my childhood. Those experiences inspired me to learn about education policies and practices in the global era and their trends, and to investigate what influence the trends had on the Japanese educational system and how the educational system adopts and modifies the policies and practices globally acknowledged as effective to teach children the necessary knowledge and skills in the 21st century.

2. Research Topic

This thesis explores how learning is understood, constructed and produced by different groups of actors in the period of globalisation. In this research, three different groups of actors- teachers, parents and children were focused on in order to understand their perspectives on the current education system in Japan. The voices of actual educational practitioners, especially children's voices, are rarely listened to and reflected upon in the policy making process, so it is worthwhile listening to their everyday experiences and perspectives on particular educational practices.

It may be hard to imagine how the educational policies and practices especially in the primary school sector are affected by globalisation, but they are actually affected by the flows of globalisation. For example, the universal educational standardized criteria, PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) significantly affects educational policies and reforms in the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development) member and partner countries (Liss 2013, Reimers 2013, Sellar and Ligard 2014, Hartong 2012, Danju, Miraly and Baskan 2014). The result of PISA always attracts public attentions through the mass media and often agitates further educational reforms. Especially the result of PISA in 2003 had a tremendous impact on education as the "PISA shock" in Japan. The ranking of mathematical literacy fell from the 1st in 2000 to the 6th in 2003 and that of reading comprehension from the 8th to the 14th (OECD 2006), although the scientific literacy ranking remained the same; the 2nd. After that, the policy makers focused on the reading comprehension of PISA which evaluated the skills of not only retrieving information from the text but also understanding, evaluating and discussing the contents. Accordingly, they started to introduce some reading activities to cultivate these 'critical reading' skills in daily practice (MEXT 2005). Shortly after the introduction of this policy, another PISA was conducted in 2006. What was worse, the ranking of mathematical literacy fell again to the 10th, that of reading comprehension to the 15th, and even that of scientific literacy to the 6th (NIER 2006). Those test results caused more reforms. In 2007, the government reviewed *yutori* education (relaxing education) and revived the national assessment of academic ability. Moreover, in

2008, the national curriculum guidelines were revised, which actually went back in the direction taken prior to the 1980s reform, to a more classical, subject-centred approach. The lesson hours were increased by 10 percent in math, science and gymnastics[1]. Also, the hours of foreign language activities were introduced (Fujita 2010:26).

Learning has been changed, tested and modified over the past decades along with consecutive educational reforms in response to globalisation. The Japanese government now places importance on problem-solving skills, autonomous learning and active learning. Although it appears to be a new trend to cultivate children's problem-solving skills and to conduct active learning, it seems to me that primary school education has been cultivating these skills from decades ago. People should have been using different words to describe such an active and autonomous learning. In that case, what has been changed after the emergence of globalisation? This thesis inquires into the following questions:

1. What kinds of skills and knowledge do children, parents and teachers emphasise in the learning process in the Japanese primary education system in the contemporary period?
2. What are the reasons for this emphasis placed on these skills and knowledge domains?
3. What strategies are adopted to ensure children acquire these skills and forms of knowledge?
4. How do these views and practices correspond with global and national processes in the primary education sector?

3. Possible Contributions to Knowledge

This research sets out to contribute to existing knowledge in the following ways: First, it seeks to reveal everyday educational practice of the subjects by examining their experience and opinions, which survey research is hardly able to obtain. Qualitative researching like the in-depth interviews "aims to produce rounded and contextual understandings on the basis of rich, nuanced and detailed data" (Mason 2012: 3). Although the PISA and the national assessment of academic achievement conduct the survey research on children's learning environments in order to take effective measures to improve the educational system, they have some limitations on obtaining the detailed data of individual educational experience. By contrast, this research can gain rich data on the subjects' everyday experiences and perspectives on the policies and practices, which is expected to inform the policy makers of their real voices.

Moreover, this research seeks to give voice to children. The previous literatures on Japanese

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[1] In terms of gymnastics, Fujita (2010:26) describes that a particularly influential political leader's concern for the perceived decline of physical strength among children contributed to the increase of gymnastics hours (26).

primary school education written by western researchers are mainly based on their observational data at schools, the interview data with adults and/or the analysis of official documents (Peak 1991, Stevenson and Stigler 1992, Tsuneyoshi 2001, Goodman and Phillips 2003, Cave 2007). A few include some interview data with children, but mostly secondary school children or older (White 1987, Okano and Tsuchiya 1999, Fujita, Kariya and Letendre (Eds.) 2010). Those literatures rarely reflect on primary school children's voices and perspectives on their school experience. Although researchers can interpret the children's world through observations, there is a limit to grasping the meanings and the realities of their world. Hardman (2001:513) points out that "children may have an autonomous world, independent to some extent of the worlds of adults," and that "children's thoughts and social behaviour may not be totally incomprehensible to adults, so long as we do not try to interpret them in adult terms". Thus, in order to examine their world, we should have children as informants to obtain first-hand information on the meanings and the values of their everyday lives from their perspectives.

Lastly, this thesis aims to identify the differences in perspectives on the skills and the policies necessary for children to build up, between the policy makers and the educational practitioners: teachers, parents and children, and among the practitioners themselves. These perspectives are influenced by their own educational experiences, their wishes, their common-sense created by the mass media reports and interaction with other people, and their own social and cultural backgrounds. By identifying their common meanings, it enables us to capture a general picture of how learning is interpreted by each group of actors. Kariya (2002:7) criticises that educational reforms have been forged ahead repeatedly without a sufficiently critical examination of its possible effects. The reasons of the failure of educational reforms are ascribed to, as Kariya (2002:38-39) states, 'misunderstanding,' 'going to the opposite extreme," and "incomprehension." Accordingly, it is worth examining how each group of actors understands the educational policies and put them into their daily practice. Although policy making is a macro level issue, even individuals are not passive participants. By analysing their interpretations and understanding on primary school education at a micro level, this research also aims at obtaining a big picture of the Japanese educational system in the global era at a macro level.

4. Thesis Structure

The next chapter will focus on the overviews of globalisation theories on education. The first chapter examines the discourse on the origins of globalisation and defines which one to be applied to this thesis. Then, the discussion moves on to the main global theories, Appadurai's five scapes

to examine cultural flows of globalisation and neoliberal globalisation, by analysing how each of the flows are related to each other, how the flows and some phenomena are explained by those five scapes, and how neoliberal globalisation started and pervaded around the world. Another section of the chapter discusses education in neoliberal globalisation. Under global economic competition, capital, goods and people were interconnected transnationally. This section examines how neoliberal globalisation affects educational policies and practices around the world, what the consequences of neoliberal educational policies are and the resistance of educational practitioners/actors to such policies.

The third chapter examines how the Japanese educational system is fitting into neoliberal globalisation. Before jumping into the topic directly, the background of Japanese educational system after the World War II is explained. After that, one of the unique educational policies, *Yutori* education (relaxed education) is discussed. Why was such a policy introduced at the time when the Western countries started to adopt more rigid, academic-centred educational system? How did the Western researchers interpret the Japanese educational system in the *yutori* education era? In 2010, another reform was conducted and the educational system has become tighter and more inflexible, induced by the discourse on the failure of *yutori* education causing the decline of children's academic achievement. The last section examines the recent educational trend in Japan.

The fourth chapter focuses on Methodology. This thesis is based on qualitative approaches to examine people's everyday educational practice. Why were the approaches chosen? Which qualitative research methods were used? Who were the research participants? How many hours/months/years have been spent to conduct the research? First, this chapter explains why the qualitative approach is appropriate for the research by examining the strength and the weakness of the approach. Then, the following section tells how the methods were applied and worked, and how the data was proceeded. After that, the discussion moves to some ethics issues including the specific methodological concerns on researching with children. Finally, this chapter illustrates the practical challenges and limitations on the research.

The fifth and sixth chapters are data analysis chapters. Chapter 5 focuses on the issues on active learning, one of the key themes generated from the voices of the participants. Active learning was interpreted and experienced differently from person to person. How do teachers teach children? How do parents see the practices? How do children perceive the policy, act and resist it? This chapter examines the voices of different actors and analyses the positive and the negative

sides of such a policy. Then, chapter 6 focuses on two main themes: uniformization and stand-ardisation of educational policies and practices, and children as social becomings. The former discusses how the educational system in the research site has become uniformed and standardised and how each group of actors interprets and experiences such an educational system. The latter analyses how children are educated to be social becomings in the future workforce. How does each group of actors support or resist such a goal-oriented education? What do children think about it? Those two chapters analyse how each group of actors experience, perceive, resist and modify the educational policies in their everyday lives.

The last chapter will be the conclusion. The chapter answers the research questions written in this chapter, by summarising the participants' perspectives on the skills and knowledge empha-sised in contemporary education and on the reasons why they stressed such skills and knowledge. Also, it argues the gap between the ideal and the reality of the polices and the practices. Then, it moves on to the discussion on the key contributions of this thesis. Finally, the thesis finishes with a brief reflection on the weakness of the study and a few suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 2: GLOBALIZATION AND EDUCATION

1. Introduction

What is globalisation? Is there a single definition of globalisation? How does it affect educational policies and practices around the world? To understand the perspectives of different actors in Japan, it is necessary to grasp the processes and the patterns of globalisation broadly. Definitions of globalisation vary depending on the field. Also, educational policies and practices are, to some extent, influenced by global educational policies and practices such as the universal educational standardized criteria, PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) known as one of the major global educational frameworks, although the elements of globalisation may not be clearly visible in daily school practices. The result of PISA always attracts public attentions globally through mass media and the key competencies supposed to be acquired in school ages are defined by the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development) and other institutes in order for children to survive in the fast-changing global society. All those elements of global pressure often agitate the further educational reforms around the world (Danju, Miraly and Baskan 2009, Hartong 2012, Fernando 2013, Sellar and Ligard 2014, Liss 2013, Roger 2014, Laundahl 2020).

Additionally, transnational flows of people, information and networks in education also have a great influence on educational policies, systems and curricula around the world. Through the process of globalization, highly developed information technologies and international transportation systems allow people to access various kinds of information including the ideas on educational theories and practices in other countries. Also, along with the expansion of global markets, several major leading corporations both domestic and international, have branches and affiliated companies around the world. Consequently, it is necessary to have, "the uniform worldwide standards" for terms of employment which may require a single educational platform (Liss 2013).

This chapter explores the literatures on how globalisation affects educational policies and practices around the world. It consists of four main sections. Following this introduction, the next section examines the discourses on the origins and the definitions of globalisation. The origins and the definitions are discussed differently depending on which academic field and discipline scholars belong to and what ideology they believe in. Thus, reviewing several definitions, it is clarified which definition to be used in this thesis. To define the term, this section deals with four

main themes: the origins of globalisation, Appadurai's five scapes, uneven prevalence of globalisation and neoliberal globalisation. Appaduri's five scapes explain five different dimensions of global cultural flows: ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, ideoscapes and financescapes. After reviewing these five scapes, the discussion moves on to how globalisation pervades around the world, including the brief discussion on neoliberal globalisation.

Following the overviews of the origins and the definitions of globalisation in Section Two, the chapter moves on to the next section, 'Education in Neoliberal Globalisation'. Although the consequence of neoliberal globalisation is contentious, educational policies and practices around the world are somewhat influenced by neoliberalism (Green 2006, Launder et al. 2006, Portnoi 2016, Shield 2013, Thomas and Yang 2013). First, it is described how and why education around the world becomes convergent, which is one of the characteristics of education in neoliberal globalisation. Then, the discussion expands to the influence and the impact of PISA on educational reforms across the globe. Although educational convergence is a global trend (Shields 2013), not everybody welcomes the situation. Accordingly, the final two sub-sections analyse the consequences of neoliberal educational policies and the discourses on the resistance to the policies. Some people such as national elites, local school officials and teachers resist the global educational policies and practices (Stephens 1995, Spring 2015 and Lingard 2017). What are the outcomes of neoliberal educational policies? How do the educational practitioners interpret, resist and modify the educational policies and practices in their everyday lives? Are there any groups or organizations challenging the educational trend? The last section is a conclusion to summarise all the discussions above. The following section commences with the origins of globalisation.

2. What is Globalisation?

The Origins of Globalisation

Globalisation does not have any fixed definition. Firstly, its origin is debatable. Shields (2013) points out, referring to Feder (2006) that the origins of the term are found in the 1960s when international flows of trade and finance started to increase. Portnoi (2016) states that some scholars see globalisation starting from the 1970s, when the global economy emerged with an increase in the flow of capital, goods, and people, while others trace its origins back to the rise of colonialism or even further back to prehistoric periods. Liss (2013) defines that globalisation began in the 1980s owing to advanced technology such as computers and communication and further expanded with information technology such as the internet in the 1990s.

As seen above, there is no agreed or comprehensive definition of globalisation because the process of globalisation is uneven and its consequences are different for individual, group and nation (Lauder et al. 2016). The origin of globalisation is uncertain and its meaning and definitions vary. Several phases of globalisation may also exist in the human history. However, globalisation can be characterized by global interconnectedness and interdependence of nation-states and people, and by the flows of goods, people and culture caused by colonization, immigration and international trades (Inda and Rosaldo 2008, Portnoi 2016). In current globalisation, following the emergence of a global economy in the 1970s, new technologies in the 1980s intensified international flows of money, goods, people, ideas, information and communication, which connect nations in various fields such as economics, politics and culture in a complex manner (Shields 2013, Inda and Rosaldo 2008). Even at individual levels, interdependence and interconnectedness of people and places were accelerated by the new technology (Portnoi 2016). Moreover, since the 1980s, globalization has become one of the core academic fields of study (Inda and Rosaldo 2008). In this way, the 1980s seems to be the key period for globalisation. Since this thesis deals with neoliberal educational policies and practices, it refers to globalisation as the current global phenomenon of interconnectedness and interdependence caused by the intensive flows of money, goods, people, ideas and information due to advanced technologies of transportation, communication and information, starting from the 1980s.

Appadurai's Five Scapes

As seen above, globalisation has been brought about by several factors such as the escalation of the global economy (e.g. transnational capital and personnel) and advanced technologies from the 1980s. It may well be said that many aspects of globalisation are all intertwined, interrelated and interdependent of each other (Inda and Rosaldo 2008). Some scholars explain such a global mobility with the theory of Appadurai (1996)'s five dimensions of global cultural flows: ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes and ideoscapes. (Kendel et al 2009, Portnoi 2016, Reid 2015, Spring 2015). Summarizing their discourses, this section examines how the five scapes look in Japanese environment.

According to Appaduri (1996:33), ethnoscapes imply the flow of mobile people such as "tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers and other moving groups and individuals" who affect and change the politics and the cultures of nations. After World War II, people moved from less affluent parts of the world to major affluent urban areas of developed and developing countries (Inda and Rosaldo 2008). As a result, people around the world experience the juxtaposition and

the mixture of cultures which are formally located in different parts of the world (Inda and Rosaldo 2008). In contrast, some people and places are marginal or excluded from the global mobilities and interconnections. (Inda and Rosaldo 2008, Kendallet al, 2009, Lauder et al. 2006, Portnoi 2016). Global mobility and interconnections are limited and restricted by political and economic decisions and socio-political impediments such as cultural and/or ideological difference, and also regulated by immigration laws and policies, international trade-agreements and so forth (Lauder et at 2006, Inda and Rosaldo (2008). In the case of Japan, it has been more than 150 years since the opening of the country to the world. Japan has nearly 3,000,000 medium, long-term and permanent foreign residents (Ministry of Justice 2020). Since Japan's total population is about 126,000,000 people (Statistics Bureau of Japan 2020), foreign residents account only 2 percent of the total population. Japan does not have as many immigrants as other countries do, but has an increasing number of international students and foreign workers. Ethnoscapes indicate 310,000 international students (JASSO 2020) and nearly 1,660,000 foreign workers from China and several developing countries (MHLW 2020). Parts of the reasons of increase in foreign workers and international students are the change of immigration laws and the shortage of labour (JASSO 2020, MHLW 2020). Those ethnoscapes may vary in accordance with the national laws and circumstances. What brought people to other countries? The following financescapes may explain some of the main reasons.

Financescapes reflect the flows of global capital such as national stock exchanges, currency markets and commodity ventures, which are more rapid, unforeseeable and complicated than before. As a familiar example in our daily lives, we see several brands produced by advanced countries such as Coca-Cola, Calvin Klein, Microsoft, Nike and Toyota everywhere, even in local cities around the world (Inda and Rosaldo 2008, Portnoi 2016). Those multinational corporations have grown rapidly since the mid-1970s (Lauder et al. 2006). They are originally from advanced countries such as the United States, western Europe and Japan. Those countries shift their production lines and service work to low-wage sites around the globe such as Taiwan, Mexico, Indonesia, Thailand, China, the Philippines and so forth. (Inda and Rosaldo 2008, Launder et al. 2006, Shields 2013). Thomas and Yang (2012) criticize that it is exploitation of the natural resources of weaker countries by economically strong ones and impediment to the local economy by the overflow of markets with cheap products. The situation also creates challenges and instability even for the exploiting stronger countries because relocation of jobs causes uncertainty in employment and a reduction in the amount of taxation, which prevents the governments from ensuring sufficient and comprehensive social security safety nets (Shields 2013). Financescapes are

often associated with ethnoscapes. Reflecting the characteristic of the postcolonial world, transnational flows of capital, commodities and people have become more mobile across nations than before (Stephens 1995). As Launder et al (2006) mentions, people in developing countries migrate to the West to look for jobs, which increases the productivity of the west while the developing nations lose their skilled workers. Those flows of people can be seen not only in cosmopolitan cities but also rural areas. In the case of the Australian labour market, rural provinces invite transnational professionals in different fields to compensate for its shortage in labour force. Consequently, the globalisation of the rural area "transform[s] traditional labour markets and produce[s] new mobilities that are reshaping social relations" (Reid 2015: 729). As seen above, financescapes show the change of the labour markets in both economically strong and weak countries. The former countries face a decline in manual work, a rise in low-paid work and an increase in unemployment, which intensify the problems among young people in working-class areas. Even worse, if the multinational corporations continue to seek skills at the cheapest price, the situation expands higher education in those economically weaker countries, which may bring an age of high-skilled, low-waged work (Lauder 2006). Japan is not exceptional. Several companies have their business hubs in developing countries to have cheaper labour and land and expand their markets in the third world (JETRO 2019). As seem in the description of ethnoscapes written above, there are an increasing number of international students and transnational workers in Japan today. International students come to Japan to seek better education and opportunities for better employment. In reality, many foreign students from developing countries aim at working even with a student visa, up to 28 hours a week, since the salary is much higher than the one in their own countries (AERA.dot 2018). Japan also invites foreign workers to compensate the labour shortage as Australia does. Ever increasing foreign workers may face several problems such as cultural frictions between themselves and Japanese people, illegal stay after the expiration of their working visa, language and cultural barriers and so on. The workers may bring their children with them, which possibly affects the Japanese education system as well. AERA.dot (2018) states that the government has enacted the policy to have a huge number of international students and workers, but they have not built enough social infrastructure to accept them yet. Those international students and workers from developing countries once had a big dream to come to Japan and paid a large amount of money to heinous brokers even by borrowing money. Although they are now able to gain the information on the reality of those foreign students in Japan via SNS before making decision, they still come to Japan for better working opportunities (AERA.dot 2018). What is different from the past is that they can envisage what life in Japan will be like before leaving their own countries. That is a scene of mediascapes as well as financescapes.

Mediascapes are, according to Appaduri (1996), the flow of information disseminated by mass media such as newspapers, television, magazines and films. In these days, social network services such as Twitter, Instagram and Facebook can be included as devices of medicascapes. In the age of globalisation, people enjoy speedy communications within and across nations and have access to huge volumes of knowledge and information. However, some countries do not have such ICT infrastructures, so they get fall further behind economically (Lauder et al. 2006). Accordingly, mediascapes also show uneven prevalence of images, information and knowledge. In Japan, ICT infrastructures are quite well developed so people enjoy the huge volume of information every day. On the other hand, people seem to be passive receptors of those vast amount of information and do not see the forest for the trees. The images and the narratives are created by those media, which are also interpreted and reconstructed by the audiences as well as some people who own and control them. The image can be distorted by the producer's perspective and his/her interests. Also, those images are often emphasized with repetitive media reports and remain in people's minds with great impact. Accordingly, people tend to take the images as real without careful examination. In the era of globalisation it is necessary for people to cultivate the skills to examine the bias of this information.

Those mediacapes have been enabled by modern information technology, which is what Appaduri (1996)'s calls Technoscapes. Technoscapes show the flow of mechanical, information and transportation technology. Those technologies change the speed of interaction and communication of people around the world and enable the flows of capital, goods and ideas across the world (Inda and Rosaldo 2008, Portnoi 2016). As seen in Ethnoscapes, after World War II, modern transportation technology made people more mobile around the world. The section of Financescapes discussed why multinational companies locate their factories in developing countries to have cheap labourers, while high-skilled labourers in developing countries move to advanced countries to search for a better life. As a result, technoscapes show the odd distribution of technology around the world (Appaduri 1996, Inda and Rosaldo 2008, Lauder et al. 2006, Shields 2013). Nowadays, modern technology enables people to work and study remotely across nations. Also, the progress of Information and Communication Technology is remarkable. In Japan, ICT education has become compulsory from primary school. In the era of globalisation, the ICT technology may totally change the global cultural flows from the past.

With the mass media, the ICT and transportation technology, the images and ideas flow across

nations. Appaduri (1996) regards the flows of images, ideas and terms as ideoscapes. He mentions that they are usually political and originally disseminated elements of Enlightenment views such as democracy, freedom, welfare, rights and sovereignty. Inda and Rosaldo (2008:5) describe it as "the global circulation of western ideology" which causes cultural interconnections and tensions between local and foreign cultures. The ideas brought by global flows are interpreted and can be misinterpreted within and between different cultures and countries due to different semantic and pragmatic nature and distinct historical and political backgrounds (Appadurai 1996). Inda & Rosaldo (2008) portray ideoscapes of cultural globalisation, focusing on two interrelated discourses on cultural imperialism. First, globalisation is seen as a process of cultural imposition, dominance of a (predominantly American) culture over the remainder of the globe and absorption of peripheral cultures. The second discourse is that the world is getting modified by the image of the West. In this view, culture becomes uniformed and homogenized so that cultural diversity may be disappearing. For example, Lauder et al. (2006) indicates that the US economic and political ideologies such as liberal democracy and free market economics are imposed on other countries through multilateral agencies such as the World Bank, the World Trade Organization and other major international organizations in the process of globalisation. That can be said in the field of education as well, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Uneven Prevalence of Globalisation

As seen in the five scapes above, globalisation prevails unevenly around the world. In reality, in the 1980s, 88 percent of the total capital of the world flew limitedly in the Triad: North America, Western Europe and Asia, so some people and places in certain areas are marginal or excluded from the global mobilities and interconnections. (Inda and Rosaldo 2008). However, globalisation is not a one-way westernizing affair, but sometimes flows in opposite direction from the periphery to the West. Also, the flow of cultures sometimes takes place within the periphery itself, circumventing the West such as Chinese immigrant communities in Southeast Asia and other non-western countries and the flow of people from India to South Africa and other Third World countries.

Cultural absorption can be seen in smaller scale countries by polities of larger scale ones nearby like Indonesianization for Irian Jaya and Sri Lankans (Appadurai 1996). People ruled by dominant cultures and/or countries with giant economic force are not the passive receptors, but interpret, translate, customize and appropriate the foreign culture to their local cultures and sometime make a hybrid form of global and local cultures. (Inda and Rosaldo 2008 and Portnoi 2016). The

enormous cultural power of other non-western or economically strong countries nearby is also sometimes a threat, but on the other hand, it generates interconnections between different people and cultures which give individuals the opportunities to construct new identities in the society (Inda and Rosaldo 2008)   Reid (2015) also states that these flows prevail in both urban and rural areas and they become a power to produce new social, economic, political and cultural conditions. In sum, globalisation does not take place equally everywhere and causes some inequality between countries. Besides, it cannot be simply described as Westernization or homogenization. The West or advanced countries may not have unchanged cultural hegemony over the peripheral anymore. Those uneven prevalences of capital flows and cultural absorption and integration are highly affected by neoliberal globalisation. What is Neoliberal Globalisation? The following section will summarise theories of Neoliberal Globalisation.

Neoliberal Globalisation

Neolibralism became salient in the 1970s and culminated in the 1980s when Prime Minister Thatcher in the UK and President Regan in the US seized political power, and the ideology is often associated with capitalism (Portnoi 2016). Although the consequences of neoliberalism are controversial, globalisation cannot be discussed without it.

Pro-neoliberalists believe the flow of capital will produce the greatest social, political and economic good in the free-market economy and create efficiency, leading economic growth and an upsurge of technological innovation which improve the lives of individuals, while anti-neoliberalists criticize that it creates inequality both between and within countries and exploits human and natural resources of some other countries as discussed in the previous sub-section. (Inda and Rosaldo 2008, Kendallet al, 2009, Launder et al. 2006, Portnoi 2016).

As a benefit of neoliberal globalisation, Portnoi (2016) mentions that some scholars point out that East Asian countries have benefitted from a global economy and many countries also have seen an improvement in standards of living. Also, individuals gain more fair and equitable chances regardless of country of birth, but with the value of their credentials, skills and knowledge. In this way, individuals can manage the risks and uncertainties caused by neoliberal globalisation. (Shield 2013, Launder et al. 2006). Kendall et al. (2009:2) argue some scholars see globalization as "a potentially positive means" "to spread wealth and freedom around the globe", while others see it as "corrosive force" to the Third World.

As a negative side, Green (2006) describes the following discourse. Some scholars regard that globalisation is "the end of the national economy and the end of the nation state" or "the emergence of a borderless world" (Green 2006:192). In this discourse, the world becomes more individualistic and pluralistic but less collective or solidary (Green 2006). In the end, what the government may face under the impact of global capitalism is a dichotomy between the state or barbarism. Even if globalisation does not go to that extreme, Thomas and Yang (2012) indicate that it weakens the state control over business transaction. Moreover, Lauder et al. (2006) point out, as discussed in the section of the five scapes, the world may be digitally divided, so countries and regions which do not have sophisticated ICT infrastructure cannot win over wealthy countries without the speedy access to information and knowledge. Some international agencies such as the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, USAID (United States Agency for International Aids) and JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) may reinforce existing global inequality. Those institutions are considered the global think tanks for wealthy countries to support the knowledge economy by aiding to the education in the Third World (Launder et al. 2006). The World Trade Organization establishes a system of intellectual property rights (IPRs) that ensures a monopoly in the manufacture and sale of the goods and the services which wealthy countries produce, while the World Bank offers funds to developing countries to promote the privatization of state services such as welfare, health and education and to open domestic markets to global competition (Launder et al. 2006). The next section will examine how these global flows and neoliberalism affect educational systems around the world.

3. Education in Neoliberal Globalisation

Section two discussed the key themes of globalisation using the theories of Appaduri's five scapes and neoliberalism. This section examines how the educational policies are constructed and modified in the neoliberal globalisation in different countries.

Educational Convergence

The 2018/2019 statistics of the Higher Education Statistics Agency shows that during the 2018-2019 school year, 2,383,970 international students enrolled in higher education institutes in the UK, which is a 2 percent increase from the previous year (Studying- in-UK.org 2020). The students coming from outside the EU countries are from China, India, the United States, Canada, some commonwealth countries and others. In the case of the USA, during the same school year, 571,562 international students study there, 377,943 of which are international graduate students. That accounts for over one third of the total number of graduate students in the country. They are

from China, India Korea, Saudi Arabia, Canada and some other Asian countries (Statista 2020). In the case of Japan, according to JASSO (2020) 228,403 international students enrolled in higher educational institutes in 2019. Nearly 40 percent of the students are from China, but others are from Vietnam, Nepal, South Korea, Taiwan, the United States and other countries. These are examples of only three countries, but those statistics tell us how mobile students around the world are in order to pursue their degrees in different countries.

The reasons to study abroad may vary, but as seen in the first section, globalisation has intensified global economic competition and people seek better academic credentials to have better jobs transnationally. As seen in the previous section discussing financescapes, job markets are open internationally and several major leading companies especially western ones have their branches, affiliated companies and production factories around the world. People tend to move not only from the periphery to the West, but also from poor to more affluent countries such as the South Asia and the South East Asian countries to Malaysia to look for a better life (Inda and Rosaldo 2008, Zigras and Law 2006). Also, according to Zigras and Law (2006), the advanced countries accepting international students have some benefits. The students may become well-trained human capital for the countries to fulfil the shortage of young workers due to the decline in the birth rate and to an increased aging population, which is a typical phenomenon in advance countries. Moreover, in relation to the low birth rate, these international students save the financial difficulties of the universities in the advanced countries. In fact, at the University of Sydney in Australia, nearly a half of the revenue comes from international students (SBS News 2020).

The mobilities and interconnectedness trigger "a social convergence on common cultural values, social practices, economic structure and governance" across nations (Shields 2013:62). Although this transnational flow of students is a part of the reason, global flows of people, information and networks in education have a great influence on school policies, systems and curricula around the world. Arnove (2013) explains that extra-territoriality units like the European Union erode national boundaries and cause the expansion of the flow of people, capital and goods. As one of the by-products of the union's educational system is the intergovernmental agreement in compatible qualifications and degrees of higher education among the EU countries, called the Bologna process signed in 1999. It started with 29 countries, but has now expanded to 48 countries including non-EU countries (EAECA 2018). Also, international academic assessments such as PISA and TIMSS are taken around the world and educational policy makers of each nation refer to the

objectives and the standards established by the organizations such as OECD and IEA[2]. In this way, education systems around the world become globally standardized and uniformalised to produce global human resources in neoliberal globalisation. This tendency is seen not only in metropolitan cities, but also in local cities of various countries (Kendall et al. 2009, Liss 2013, Portnoi 2016, Reid 2015, Roger 2014, Saito 2010, Sobe 2009, Spring 2015, Thomas & Yang 2012).

On the top of that, in the discourse of neoliberalism, the convergence of educational systems is inevitable for countries to adopt the best or the most efficient policy and practice to compete in a global economy. According to Shields (2013), in neoliberalism perspective, competing each other in global economy, education systems are converged and try to adopt what is universally considered as the best policy and practice. Referring to the Secretary of State for Education in England and Wales in 2010, a report of the World Bank in 2009 and the words of US President Barack Obama in 2011, Shield (2013:6) points out they showed the common discourse of world class education and shared the common set of understanding; that is "education is associated with economic benefits and purpose, free market economics and international competition are accepted as the natural order of the world." Arnove (2013) also mentions, recently there is a belief that excellent educational systems, what Shields (2013) calls world-class education, brings the economic success of a country in global economic competitions. In neoliberal globalisation, the convergence of educational systems is essential in that every country should search for the universally best educational policy and practice to win over in the competitions. As a result, educational systems around the world come to be similar. The next subsection will discuss how each country modifies its educational system to adopt what is believed to be the best policy and practice in the age of globalisation.

Influence of PISA on Educational Reform

It is not new for each nation to modify its educational policy and practice referring to other countries. For example, in the 19th century, academics from the United States studied at research-oriented post graduate schools in Europe and introduced the system to their own country. At the turn of the 20th century Japan established a modern educational system referring to that of the West (Arnove 2013). However, in the era of globalisation, there is a global trend in educational reforms. With the acceleration of global economic competitions, national educational systems

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[2]It will be discussed how these international academic tests influence on educational policy makers in each country later in this chapter.

and their reforms get great attention in the world. By doing so, many countries try to secure human capital by cultivating children's competencies and skills such as the key competencies and the 21st century skills to survive in the rapidly changing competitive global society.

In 1997, OECD, which consists of mainly Western countries except for a few countries in the Middle East and Asia including Japan, defined the key competencies[3]. They place importance on literacy to analyse, communicate, interact with others in different backgrounds and solve and interpret various kinds of problems effectively in a complexed world. Also, it aims at promoting children's lifelong learning to motivate them to learn autonomously (OECD 2005). Moreover, the Assessment and Teaching of Twenty-First Century Skills Project launched in London in 2009. Five countries such as Australia, Finland, Singapore, Portugal and the UK were involved in the project and the US joined in 2010. This project was sponsored by some of the major IT companies such as Cisco Systems Inc., Intel Corporation and Microsoft Corporation, and the headquarters of the project was founded at the University of Melbourne. This project was aiming at promoting global educational reform to "empowe[r] students to succeed" in an information-age society. Accordingly, they identified 10 important skills and established the KSAVE Model (Knowledge, Skills, Attitude, Value, Ethics) which settled the measurable aspects of 10 skills[4]. (Griffin, McGaw and Care 2012:18-19). Since the 21st century skills were sponsored by the major IT companies to conduct the project, they seem to value the information technology and its literacy, and creativity and invention first in order to promote global human resources development. However, both the 21st century skills and OECD competencies emphasize that it is essential to cultivate children's communication skills, collaboration skills with people from different social and cultural backgrounds, problem-solving skills, IT skills and personal and social responsibility to live in a global society. These concepts are mainly framed by the Western countries described above, but these educational concepts and testing results such as PISA have been greatly influencing education all over the world.

Shields (2013:63) calls it isomorphism in education systems around the world, depicting "[s]tudents study a standard curriculum that varies little according to their own national and cultural context." As seen in above, as globalisation progresses cultural values, social practices and economic structures and governance are converged and international organizations and multinational agencies such as the EU, OECD, IEA and others have a great influence on the social and

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[3] The details of the key competencies are described in Appendices.
[4] The details of the 21st century skills are described in Appendices.

the political processes above and beyond the level of the nation-state and their governments. Thus, educational systems are losing national distinctiveness replaced by a one-size-fits-all universal and standardized education (Roger 2014).

As one of the universal educational standardized criteria, OECD (organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development) has established PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) in 1997 in order to assess cross-national achievement of children's skills and knowledge on reading, mathematic literacy and science literacy (OECD 2005, Danju, Miralay and Baskan 2013, Laundahl 2020). The PISA has a great impact on the educational reforms around the world. Laundahl (2020) explains the triennial cycle of the PISA test is marked as a special day for the participant countries and has a considerable media attention with repeated reports and media coverage even before and after the date. The OECD publishes thematic reviews of education for each member country and comparative data on school performance among the countries, to investigate which country performs the best educational practice (Launder et al 2006). The review significantly affects educational policies and reforms in the OECD member countries and partner countries (Danju, Miraly and Baskan 2009, Hartong 2012, Fernando 2013, Sellar and Ligard 2014, Liss 2013, Roger 2014, Laundahl 2020). When the result of a country shows radical decline in performance from the previous test, it is reported as a PISA shock, which triggers an urgent reform. However, before having a noticeable change or a practical effect on educational practice, another result comes next. In this way, school performances are accessed by PISA and educational systems are modified in similar manners at similar time transnationally to meet market needs (Shields, 2013).

Consequences of Neoliberal Educational Policies

Regarding the educational convergence and the influence of PISA, some scholars are concerned about the educational colonization by western countries (Roger 2014, Sellar & Lingard 2014). The rich countries such as the United States, the European Unions and some western influenced countries such as Japan impose universal educational platforms including educational values, policies and systems on other countries, which actually empowers the rich countries (Roger 2014, Spring 2015).

Others point out the educational universalism which denies diversity and differences (Hartong 2012, Roger 2014, Liss 2013). Global educational standards and accountability measures such as PISA are financially supported by global funding agencies. Thus, "[i]f global funding agencies

offer monies for specific policies, many countries find it difficult to refuse the funding; the catch, however, is that the countries must follow the policies dictated by the global funding agencies, and in this case, these are policies in support of standards-based education reform measures" (Liss 2013:562). These educational standardized platforms affect educational policies of each country including the West and then weaken the state control over the educational policies by oppressing national distinctiveness, cultural uniqueness, diversity and tradition, which brings social inequality and injustice (Roger 2014).

Neoliberal globalisation promotes a new commodification of education and changes the educational aims from transmission of common culture, citizenship formation and support of children's individual needs to fulfilment of economic requirements under the condition of global competition (Green 2006, Arnove 2013, Soerensen & Gumloese 2018). Spring (2015:3) puts it as the "corporatization of global education" by explaining:

> [The corporatization of global education] refers to corporate influence over national school policies, enlisting economists to judge the work of school systems, teaching cognitive skills and knowledge needed in the workplace, and shaping behaviour in schools and by government to meet the needs of corporations to sustain free market economics.

The corporatization of global education is also backed up by multilateral agencies like the World Bank, World Trade Organization, and the Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation as discussed above (Launder et al. 2006, Shields 2013). As with the intervention of such agencies and the erosion of national-boundaries in globalisation, national services including education are privatized in the competitive market, and collective and community identities, beliefs and goals such as social cohesion and social solidarity and citizenship formation are diminished (Arnove 2013, Green 2006).

Those ideas of corporatization of education pervade even primary and secondary school systems to educate children to be human capital in the global economy (Stepen 1995, Liss 2013). This tendency can be supported not only at schools but at home. Those educational trends are also seen in parents' and caregivers' investment in education for their children. Lauder et al. (2006:1) describes how education is seen by parents and caregivers:

1. "[A]s a way for their children to improve on their own lives by building an understanding of their place in the world.
2. "[T]he principle means by which young people, by passing exams and gaining credentials, can gain an advantage in the labour market."

In the age of globalisation, the competition for recruitment in the international markets excels and

educational credentials get more important. As a result, Lauder et al. (2006:6) indicate children in wealthier families have more advantage in the credential competition which nation-states are no longer able to control, so socio economic status is a key to be success in neoliberal global society (Lauder et al. 2006, Arnove 2013). Referring to comparative data, Arnove (2013) states that students from higher income and status families have better academic achievement and attainment and do better on the PISA tests than ones from low income and status families. In higher education level, elites have more opportunities and choices to get into prestigious universities nationally and globally. The competition between higher educational institutes are getting fierce globally. Domestic and international students choose the universities referring to league tables relating to research and teaching. The higher education section now opens to global forces and are greatly influenced by the change and the needs of global labour markets (Lauder et al. 2006).

Since education is believed to be a key for the economic success as seen above, education is used for political campaigns as well, which is "relatively risk-free election promises which few will oppose" (Green 2006:195). Because it is difficult for governments to improve the deficiency of national economies such as the growing structural unemployment by composing fiscal, monetary and trade regulations and employment policies, they focus on education and training policies though it is uncertain the link between skills and productivity (Green 2006). Although universal standardized educational policies are created above the nation level, education is still seen as a key to nation building and national progress in the global knowledge economy. Accordingly, policy makers have "little doubt the economic role of education has assumed primacy" (Lauder et al. 2006:3).

In neoliberal globalisation, educational aims have changed into producing human capitals to compete in global economy. Each country has been undertaking repeated educational reforms to adopt what is assumed to be the best educational policy and practice. While doing so, educational policies and practices are uniformed and standardized. Do all the countries agree with such policies and practices? How do educational practitioners cope with such policies and practices? The following sub-sections will examine how people resist and modify the educational systems.

Resistance to Global Education

People are not passive receptors for global changes. Also, even if it is not a direct resistance, some of the ideologies and practices might be altered and localized after adoption from the West. As Spring (2015:12) agues borrowing the idea of Kathryn Anderson-Levitt, "[i]n reality, local school officials and teachers do not simply dance to the tune of global flows and networks", but

they interpret, adapt, resit and transform them and so do parents and children." Arnove (2013) mentions that global economy brings increasing interconnectedness of societies and poses the closely intertwined economic and educational agendas around the globe in globalisation. As seen in the previous section, international aid agencies such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, USAID (United States Agency for International Aids) and JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) financially support the educational systems in developing worlds. Thus, those agencies have a great influence on educational reforms in the aiding nations. However, local people do not accept the international trends unquestioningly, but reshape them to local ends. (Arnove 2013).

Stephens (1995:3) also states, "[s]tates and national elites, minority populations, and new social movements represent themselves as acting to protect traditional cultures or to develop new forms of cultural identity." She raises an example of Sri Lanka in the late 19th century that nationalists tried to protect and to strengthen their Eastern cultural and spiritual heritage while introducing Western technologies and political strategies that had allowed the western colonization. Stephens (1995:22) describes:

> Western cultural discourses have come to occupy an increasing global space […] [S]ubject peoples [in non-Western nations] must frame their resistance in national cultural terms. To be a nation means to have a distinctive cultural identity and to have the capacity to produce culture in the aesthetic and intellectual sense"

In reality, non-governmental organizations, citizen associations and trade unions resist the trend and try to change the educational systems of developing countries to create a global civic society, opposing to the education emphasizing global market economy. (Lauder et al 2006.)

Even in advanced countries, educational practitioners such as teachers and parents are challenging the neoliberal educational policies and practices. Lingard (2017) raises some examples of teachers' resistance to privatization and commercialization of education. In the United States, some teachers and middle-class activist parents are against commercial, standardized and high stakes tests for profit ed-tech businesses, by opting their children out of the tests. Also, in New Zealand, the teacher's union has been opposing to the National Standards introduced in 2008 without any consultation with teachers or the teacher's unions. The teachers criticize that the standards lead to curtailment of curriculum, commercialization of public schooling and change of their work. In this way, even though the educational reforms have taken place in each nation at the governmental and institutional levels, individual educational practitioners also struggle to resist and reconstruct the policy and the practice.

The standardized and uniformalised curricula do not meet children's individual needs. Governments are concerned about the results of PISA scores and push teachers to raise children's score. The teacher's voice, quoted by Hedegaard-Soerensen & Gumloese (2018:604) in their interview gets to the point,

> In some ways, it is obvious that some children are overlooked. It is difficult for us to meet their needs; actually, it is awful to think about. Years ago, we had more time and were more concerned with them.

Examining the resistance of those educational practitioners, the standardized and uniformalised curriculum seems to have three negative effects. First, the global standards of education are set by multilateral agencies such as the OECD, the World Bank and others, which has encouraged policy borrowing to develop the best educational practice to meet the demands of global economy. Their financial support loses the autonomy of the funded developing countries in terms of educational policy making (Launder et al 2006). Second, the standardized and uniformalised curriculum does not see individual difference of learning abilities. Like a scientific approach to study of children and education, the curriculum is set based on a set of unitary characteristics of children and childhood without taking account of differences in social reality due to culture, class, gender and other factors. Third, children are treated as social-becomings rather than social beings. As seen above, children are educated to be human capital and future workers. Educational end is not merely as Emile Durkheim (1956:80) states, "to form the social being" and "to elicit the hidden potentialities [of children]" while "developing the individual organism in the direction indicated by its nature" anymore, but to produce the workforce who is active in the global economy (Roger 2014, Liss 2013). As discussed before, it is a tendency of education today globally to focus on children's learning achievement, narrowly defined by their test scores rather than to meet children's individual needs and cultivate their individual skills. Liss (2013) points out that the educational trend in global era tends to seek a universal standardized educational system for maximum efficiency, but may ignore heterogeneity and diversity to meet the needs of diverse students and to promote high levels of creativity and innovation. The tendency causes the dilemmas among the educational practitioners between the ideal of teaching and the reality.

4. Conclusion

The world gets smaller in globalisation. Globalisation is characterized by cultural flows of people, goods, capitals, ideas due to advanced information, communication and transportation technologies and other factors, which cause interconnectedness and interdependence among people and countries. People around the globe have "a common social experience provided by a ubiquitous consumer and media culture" unlike former societies divided by class, religion, language and

geography, (Green 2006:196-197) which lead greater uniformity. Education is not exceptional. As globalisation progresses, educational systems around the world become convergent.

Although neoliberal globalisation promotes privatization and commercialization of educational systems, education is still regarded as a key to development of the country. The neoliberal global knowledge economy changes the labour markets in both advanced and developing countries (Inda and Rosaldo 2008, Lauder et al. 2006, Shield 2013). At the same time, educational aims are also altered to produce global human capital to compete in the global markets (Spring 2015, Stephens 1995). Each country searches for the best educational policy and practice, and then adopts whatever policies and practices are thought to be the most effective. As a result, the educational policies around the world come to resemble each other (Shields 2013). Also, the international academic assessment like PISA accelerate educational reforms around the world. Consequently, educational systems are standardized and uniformalised globally (Danju, Miraly and Baskan 2009, Hartong 2012, Fernando 2013, Sellar and Ligard 2014, Liss 2013, Roger 2014, Laundarl 2020). This uniformity deprives countries from control over education, traditional values and practice and freedom and diversity in education. Especially developing countries who have financial aids from the multilateral agencies such as the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund and others are hard to resist the western educational ideologies, policies and practices (Launder et al. 2006, Shields 2013). However, local educational practitioners are not passive receptors to adopt such educational ideologies, policies and practices. They interpret and modified the policies and practices to fit them in their own cultural backgrounds (Arnove 2013).

Inda and Rosaldo (2008:7) states, major globalisation studies focus on macro-phenomenon, but sociology examines the realities of particular societies paying attention to how people mediate the process of globalisation in their everyday lives. This thesis will closely examine subjects' everyday lives and how they perceive globalisation and reconcile the realities. Although in the discourses of neoliberal globalisation each country searches for the best educational policy and practice, as Arnove (2013) states, there is no such a policy and practice that policy makers can simply adopt the one of other country. All the educational systems have strengths and weaknesses, and some aspects of systems work for a country but not for others. The next chapter analyses how globalisation has been affecting Japanese educational policies and reforms and how they resist the global force and adapt and alter the universal policies and practices to fit in their own social and cultural backgrounds.

CHAPTER 3: JAPANESE EDUCATION IN GLOBALISATION

1. Introduction

Since the 1970s, the educators and the researchers in the United States have started to investigate the educational systems of Asian countries, like Japan (Lewis 1995, White 1998, Tobin et al 1991, Stevenson, H.W. and Stigler, J. W.1992) firstly, and, according to Takayama (2013), more recently Singapore, Taiwan, Korea and other countries, which rank high in international assessments of educational achievements. On the other hand, Asian educators started to pay attention to the child-centred progressive educational systems of the US and other Western countries, and then have introduced child-centred, problem-solving and interdisciplinary learning from the mid-1990s (Arnove 2013, Takayama 2013).

In Japanese case, Japan ranked high in Math and Science in international assessment tests, but the students' lack of motivation and dislike of the subjects became a topic of conversation, as shown in the result of TIMSS-R, the Third International Mathematics and Science Study – Repeat in 1999 (National Institute for Educational Policy Research 2001). Takayama (2013) states that those tendencies were also seen in the case of Taiwan and Korea which ranked top 5 in the test. Children's lack of motivation to learn and dislike of the subjects and some other problems caused by the fierce competition among children brought about more child-centred education to those Asian countries.

In Japan, after the high economic growth from the late 1950s to the early 1970s, the national curriculum guidelines have been revised five times, almost every 10 years: in 1977（enforcement in 1980), 1989 (1992), 1998 (2002), 2008 (2011) and 2017 (2020) (NIER 2012, MEXT 2020). It is rare to have a complete revision like the one seen in 2017, but the guidelines are somewhat modified every time (MEXT 2014). After issuing a proposal of revision, it takes about three to four years to be enforced. It takes so long to enact the new proposal, that the social reality some-times moves in a different direction from the one the policy makers imagined when they proposed the revision. Accordingly, the curriculum guidelines occasionally fall into the situation whereby they do not fit to the reality, which urges another revision. Also, the repetitive revisions lead to some confusion for teachers. I remembered when I worked as an assistant language teacher at a primary school about twenty years ago, the subject called "*sōgō gakushū*" (Integrated Studies) was introduced. However, teachers were not trained to teach such a subject, so the entire teaching

team was thrown into state of confusion. Although the concept of the subject was brilliant, teachers were not well informed about how to teach and did not know how to make use of the subject.

This chapter will review the literature on Japanese education in globalisation, especially focusing on primary school education, by addressing the following issues:

1. How has the Japanese educational system fit into neoliberal globalisation?
2. What is the peculiarity of Japanese education?

During the high economic growth, education was a key for people to climb up the social ladder, so education became extremely competitive, which was considered to cause several juvenile problems and to deprive children of their curiosity and motivation to learn (Cave 2007, Okano & Tsuchiya 1999, Fujita 2010, MEXT 2014). Consequently, *yutori* (pressure free/relaxed) education was introduced. The following sections examine how Japanese educational system has been shifted after the emergence of modern globalisation in 1980[5], dividing the history into two phases: *yutori* education and post-*yutori* education. In the period of *yutori* education, quite a few Western researchers came to Japan and observed the primary school classroom, so this chapter also includes the section on how they interpreted the Japanese educational system in the period.

The following section starts with an investigation of the social and the historical backgrounds of Japanese education after World War II.

2. Backgrounds of Japanese Education after World War II

In Japan, the modern system of schooling started in 1868 and has been revised several times since then. After World War II, the Allied Occupation tried to transform the Japanese educational system from a nationalistic and imperialistic one to a more democratic one (Okano& Tsuchiya 1999, Cave 2007). Especially during Japan's post-war rehabilitation, education played an active role in supporting rapid economic growth (Okano & Tsuchiya 1999:39), which many western, especially American researchers focused on mainly as a key for its economic success (White 1987, Tobin et al 1989, Peak 1991, Schoppa 1991, Stevenson and Stigler 1992, Lewis 1995, Benjamin 1997, Rohlen and LeTendre 1998.)

The swift economic growth changed the lifestyles of the people. Along with the high economic growth, the population of farmers decreased drastically. Young people left their hometowns and

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[5] As discussed in Chapter 2, there are various definitions on globalisation, some of which are trace back to prehistoric periods. This thesis focuses on the modern globalisation starting from the 1980s with the advent of advanced information and communication technology.

engaged in secondary or tertiary industries, which brought about urbanization and nuclearization of family (Kadowaki: 2001, Kotani: 2004, Nogami 2008,). According to Honda (2008), as a part of postwar reforms instituted by the GHQ, the privileged such as the landed gentry, the nobility and the plutocracy were shorn of their privileges; as a result, the strong sense of equality among the masses prevailed in society. People could no longer rely on the assets from their ancestors, so believed that academic qualifications would make social mobility possible, which accelerated credentialism (Honda 2008). Then, the bubble economy brought economic stability and increased competitiveness among not only adults but also children to climb up the social ladder (Shiina 2004, Kadowaki 2001, Kotani 2004, Yamada 2002). As a result, it spurred the myth of academic meritocracy (Yakushiin 1995).

The academic meritocracy gave the people in Japan negative images of its educational system, which the western researchers referred to as a secret of Japan's economic growth as written above. It promoted the competition for entry to a prestigious college which was based on rote learning and strictly standardized education (Yakushiin 1995, Kariya 2002). In 1977, because of the escalation of educational competitiveness in the bubble economy and the bad reputation on the rigid model of standardized education which valued subject matters and acquisition of ready-made knowledge, as Kariya (2002) and Fujita (2005) mention, the educational reform was forged ahead without a sufficiently critical examination of its possible effects[6].

Kariya (2002:8-9) mentions that those dark images of the educational system triggered the educational reform in the 1980s with bright catchphrases such as 'education for cultivating children's spontaneous learning and the ability to think' and 'child-centred education." In short, the educational reforms from the 1980s shifted from a rigid model of standardized education which placed importance on subject matters and the acquisition of broad knowledge, to more pressure-free and child-centred education by reducing the duration of subject-centred classes, increasing hands-on and integrated learning, and changing the school week from six days to five days per week (MEXT 2014, Cave 2007, Okano & Tsuchiya 1999, Fujita 2010). Japanese education in the 1980s went in the opposite direction from the school reforms in the US and the UK.

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[6] At that time, the mass media gave a high profile to the problems in Japanese schools such as school violence especially toward teachers from the 1970s to the mid-1980s, bullying from the 1980s, the increase of school refusal from the 1980s and the escalation of educational competition called 'examination hell' from the 1960s, while fussing about juvenile crimes which were of a relatively low frequency in comparison with other countries (Okano & Tsuchiya 1999, Kariya 2002, Fujita 2010). Accordingly, politicians used the notion of 'educational reform' as an election campaign topic (Okano & Tsuchiya 1999). Those backgrounds seem to cause such a reform.

3. *Yutori* Education

Although there are several conceptual ways to divide the history of Japanese modern education in accordance with key phases, as explained in the introduction section, in this chapter it will be divided into two phases: the *yutori* education period from the 1980 to 2009 and the post-*yutori* education period from 2010 to the present. What is *yutori* education*?* How did this affect the educational system in Japan?

Yutori kyōiku (Yutori education) is translated differently such as "relaxed education" (Goodman 2003:24), "[education] designed to reduce pressure in the schools" (Bjork and Fukuzawa 2013:11), "pressure-free education" (The Japan Times 2013) and "education that will allow children "room to grow (Tsuneyoshi 2004:367)"" (Cave 2007:22). As these translations show, *Yutori* education was introduced to set children free from pressure and allow more time and room to grow in the relaxed curriculum. What social background urged such an education?

As described in the previous section, since World War II, the percentage of people going on to higher education has increased and academic qualifications were believed to be the key for people to climb up the social ladder, which caused the fierce academic competitions.[7] Moreover, as NIER (2012) states, the contents and the volume of learning were increased due to advancement and complication of economic and social activities after the high economic growth. Accordingly, children got more pressure the huge amount of schoolwork and the competition. Some children were left behind and several displayed problematic behaviours such as school violence. As described before, the repeated reports on those problems via mass media caused the drastic educational reform. Consequently, *yutori* (pressure-free, room to grow, and relaxed) education was introduced.

When talking about *yutori* education, many people may refer to the recent educational reform from 2000 to 2010[8]. However, this section deals with the time from the 1980s when the concept

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[7] According to Saitoh (2007), until 1960, only 10 percent of children went to higher education. However, by 1970, 138 universities and 199 junior colleges were newly founded for popularization of higher education. Also, the National Statistics Center (2019) shows that in 1975, more than 90 percent of the third year of junior high school children went on to high school, while nearly 40 percent of high school graduates entered either junior colleges or universities. Maita (2017) argues, in 1979, approximately 640,000 people took the entrance exams for universities, but only 410,000 people passed. That means 36 percent of the applicants failed the exams. In 1990, when the baby boomers took the university entrance exams, nearly half, 44.5 percent of applicants were rejected. Although the competition got gradually ease along with the decline of the birth rate after that, those statistics indicate the fierce academic competition in those days.
[8] This will be explained later.

was firstly introduced. The following sub-sections will examine the practice and application of *yutori* education along with its ideology and reality; how it was adopted and modified and why it was abolished in 2010s.

Introduction of *Yutori* Education – the 1980s

According to the MEXT, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Science, in 1980, *yutori no jikan* was introduced (MEXT 2001). As mentioned above, *yutori* stands for 'pressure-free,' 'room to grow,' and 'relaxed' education and *jikan* for 'time/hour.' Thus, reducing the subject teaching hours and refining the contents of each subject, those reducing hours were used for *yutori no jikan*. Furthermore, as a part of *yutori* education, each lesson hour got longer from 40 minutes/lesson to 45 minutes/lesson. How was *yutori no jikan* operated?

Maruyama (1981) examines 49 schools in Kawasaki city, a bed town for people commute to Tokyo[9], to see how *yutori no jikan* was planned, and to identify the problems. He mentions that 39 schools provided children with 45-minute *yutori no jokan* hours per week, which was much less than the proposed hours written in the revised national curriculum guidelines executed in 1980: two hours/week for Year 4 and four hours/week for Year 5 and 6.   In the case of the city, *yutori no jikan* was used for all-year or all-school activities such as sports days, music activities, volunteer activities and others.   When given questionnaires on what they thought about *yutori* education, quite a few children displayed positive answers while many teachers gave negative answers. With the introduction of the lessons, the curriculum got tighter, but teachers needed extra time to prepare for such lessons which did not have any textbooks or guidelines. Also, some got stuck in a rut, although they were expected to provide children with creative lessons.   Consequently, as Iwama and Hoshi (2016) describes in their article, *yutori no jikan* disappeared in the next revision of national education guidelines in 1990s since many teachers claimed that they did not know how to deliver such lessons. Although this *yutori no jikan* did not seem to be used effectively enough as aimed, this concept has not completely vanished. The idea of *yutori* was one of the key themes for Japanese education till 2010.

In 1984, *Rinji Kyoiku Shingikai* or *Rinkyōshin* (Ad Hoc Council on Education, a high-profile advisory council) was formed and set up three fundamental educational principles; *kosei jūshi no gensoku* (principal of respecting for the individuality of each child), *shōgaigakushū taikei eno ikou* (the shift to life-long learning) and *kokusaika, jouhouka tou henka eno taiou* (policies to deal

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[9] It is the capital of Japan.

with the change of society such as internationalization and informatization) (MEXT 2001). Japanese educational policy started to shift its focus from collectivity and egalitarianism toward individuality and independence (Kariya 2010, Fujita 2010, Cave 2007). The council emphasized promoting life-long learning by transferring the role of school from transmitting the ready-made knowledge and essential life skills, to building up children's basic ability to learn independently.

Regarding the third key word, "internationalization," it seems to have been greatly influenced by the emergence of the modern globalisation starting from the 1980s, although the word, "internationalization" was used instead of "globalisation" at that time. MEXT (1981) states that the government made a plan to accept more than 100,000 international students at universities by the early 21st century aiming at mutual improvement of educational standards and reciprocal cultural understanding. As for the students from developing countries, MEXT (1981) mentions that it would be significant to help their countries to train human resource. By doing so, universities were expected to open globally and to raise internationally minded people. Also, in 1987, the government started to launch JET (the Japan Exchange Teaching Program) program to have foreign people as assistant language teachers at local schools, coordinators for the international relations at local governments and sports exchange advisors at local cities, for a year, renewable up to three years. In the first year, 848 people from the UK, the US, Australia and New Zealand came. The number has been gradually increasing, and in 2019, 5761 people came from 57 different countries (JET 2020). As seen above, Japanese education started to open to other countries and to be internationalized in the age of globalisation.

Implementation of *Yutori* Education – the 1990s and the 2000s
In 1989, the national curriculum was revised again and enforced at primary schools in 1992 and later years at junior high and high schools. Cave (2007:17) summarizes in the new national curriculum that "most prominent new feature was what was called the "new view of academic attainment" (*shingakuryokukan*), which emphasized pupils' interest and motivation *(kyoumi, kanshin, iyoku)* rather than just the knowledge and understanding (*chishiki, rikai*) that had previously been seen as constituting academic attainment (*gakuryoku)*." In the central council of education held in 1996, the MEXT reported "Education for the Twenty-First Century in Japan." This report (MEXT 1997) describes, under the basic principle of respect for individuality, the new curriculum emphasized meeting individual ability and aptitude and developing children's creativity and originality. Also, in a *yutori* environment, children were expected to have various different experiences, such as field work in nature, hands-on learning and volunteering, at school,

home and within the local community, which were considered to harness children's interests and encourage independent learning initiative. In terms of Year 1 and 2 (from the age of 6 to 8), Science and Social Studies were replaced with a new subject called *Seikatsu-ka* (Daily Lives) which emphasised cross-subjects, hands-on and autonomous learning.

Then, in 1998, the national curriculum was revised again. The content of the curriculum was 30 percent reduced and school days were shortened from 6 days to 5 days a week. School days were gradually shortened from the previous revision, but the contents and the amount of learning had not been decreased so that the curriculum got tighter and some children were left behind. In order to allow children to have more room to grow, in this reform the national curriculum guidelines minimized the contents and the amount of learning and attempted to promote children's *ikiru-chikara* (the MEXT translates it into "zest for life," but a more literal translation would be "power to live" (Cave 2007) or survival skills in fast-changing society by learning and thinking spontaneously.) Education was more decentralized; therefore, local governments and schools were given more discretion. Also, absolute assessment standards and integrated and cross-subjects learning lessons were introduced into the curriculum, which expected students to learn problem-solving skills through autonomous learning (Cave 2007, Saitoh 2007, National Institute for Educational Policy Research 2012). As Cave (2007) indicates, the emphasis of curriculum shifted from "students' equal progress and on the inculcation of knowledge" (15) to "individuality, independence and creativity, alongside more traditional concerns that children be socially well-adjusted" (1).

As the backgrounds of this reform, Cave (2007:14) explains "there was long-standing dissatisfaction about groups, including parents, business leaders, and commentators from across the political spectrum". The main claims were too inflexible, uniform, knowledge-based, goal-oriented (to pass the entrance exams of high schools and universities) education which deprived children of originality, creativity, initiatives and interests. Also, it was generally said that academic competitiveness among children and the decline of the educational roles of the family and local community caused children's anti-social and asocial behaviours. These problems alarmed the public, who then grew concerned with the system of education.

This educational reform seems to be related to the sluggish Japanese economy in those days. As Cave (2007:14) summarises the contents of National Commission on Educational Reform as follows;

Some on the Right wanted more stress on patriotism, 'Japanese tradition', and more education;

business leaders wanted more emphasis on creativity; teachers' unions wanted smaller class sizes and more resources; and some on the Left wanted the opportunity of high school education for all and the end of high school entrance exams.

The Japanese economy was stagnant from the 1990s and there was a prevailing discourse that no leader would be created by the conventional one-size-fits-all education at that time. A BBC news article (2001) quotes one of the Japanese journalists who was in the educational reform panel:

There's no elite in this country at all, only average people. You can have a thousand average people but that doesn't make one Bill Gates. [.....] The schools are failing to produce people with initiative and the sort of leaders this country needs.

In the beginning of global knowledge-based economy, people seemed to notice that education should be changed to cultivate the human capital for the future. Consequently, the government shifted national curriculum to more enjoyable, pressure-free and child-centered education by reducing the duration of subject-centred classes, increasing hands-on and integrated learning, and changing the school week from six to five days a week (Okano & Tsuchiya 1999, Cave 2007, Fujita 2010).

However, the revision did not progress as planned. There are several critiques on the educational reforms. The main target of the criticism was *yutori* education. Although the definition varies, children especially who had compulsory education from 2000 to 2010 were called *yutori sedai* (pressure-free generation). In the revision of the national curriculum guidelines in 1998 (enforced in the 2000s), as written above, the contents and school hours were drastically reduced and many lesson hours were used for *sōgō gakushū* (integrated, cross-subjects learning). *Yutori* education was aimed at giving children more time to have various different kinds of experience and to explore something with their own curiosity, but in reality, it did not function well. Also, when *sōgō gakushū* was introduced, teachers were not well trained to teach such cross-subjects and child-centred classes. Thus, it was not used effectively as planned (Kariya 2002, 2010 Fujita 2010). Even with decreasing in subject-centred class hours, the new curriculum did not reinforce either the children's learning initiative or ability to think but just brought the lower academic standard, children's less motivation to study and the increased discrepancy between low and high academic achievers which was vividly portrayed in the result of PISA (Kariya 2010, Fujita 2010., Cave 2007). Some researchers (Kariya 2010, Fujita 2010) denounce that the reform had stratifying effects and seemed to promote elitism.

In this *yutori*-education period, quite a few western researchers focused on the Japanese educational system, especially in the 1980s and the 1990s until China took over the economic position

in the 2000s. How did they interpret the Japanese educational system? Did they also recognise Japanese educational practices were as rigid and uniform as Japanese people think? The next section will examine the discourses on Japanese education from the outside points of view, including the opinions of a Japanese scholar, Tsuneyoshi (2001, 2008) who spent most of her childhood abroad.

Western images of Japanese education in *Yutori* Era

Japanese schools treat children as blank slates. Examining several works on Japanese childhood written by Japanese scholars, Tsuneyoshi (2001:7) states that "the traditional Japanese view of childhood was that children are pure and innocent until contaminated by the adult world (Kojima 1989:87; Shibano 1989: 227)". It is believed that if children are given a right environment, they are expected to grow well and bloom into bright flowers. According to her, school does not place importance on children's individual innate abilities, but rather focuses on children's equal academic achievement. Accordingly, at primary school, students have a whole-class instruction with the same textbook and at the same pace regardless of their individual differences in aptitude (Tsuneyoshi 2008). No tracking system can be seen at this level, because as White (1987:115) describes, "the pedagogies of a Japanese elementary school are based on the idea that all children are equal in potential, and that the excitement of learning can best be produced in a unity of equals."

The notion of "all students are equal" can be nurtured in the group-oriented learning as follows. From preschool, children learn how to survive in society in cooperative and harmonious ways. Thus, as many scholars describe, Japanese teachers are not authoritative, but rather permissive especially in preschool and primary school periods (Cumming 1980, Lewis 1998, White 1987, Stevenson and Stigler 1992, Tsuneyoshi 2008). Children are expected to solve some problems among their peer group, and to tackle them spontaneously. In this early education, daily activities are routinized so children can do all the basic matters from tidying up the outdoor shoes when they enter school to the daily closing meeting, without any direction from the teacher. Peak (1991:189) explains Japanese teachers try to manage children's behaviours "through affiliation and voluntary internalization of rules rather than through authoritarian enforcement of compliance". Before primary school, parents send children to preschool to learn how to live harmoniously with others by refraining egoism which is thought to be a taboo in Japanese social contexts. Tobin et al. (1989:204) state, "the child must be given a chance to move beyond the walls of the

home to more complex social interactions. In today's Japan, for most children, these more complex interactions are found first in preschools". After learning the basic skills to live in group life in preschool, children go into more structured primary school education.

After observing Japanese primary schools, unlike the stereotype image of cramming knowledge, some scholars note that the classroom atmosphere is quite vigorous, rather noisy (White 1987, Lewis 1995, Lewis 1998, Lee, Graham, and Stevenson 1998).) Children are expected to learn in a cooperative environment, so there are several group activities which often increase the noise level, where children are expected to acquire social skills (White 1987, Stevenson & Stigler 1992, Rohlen & Letender 1998, Lewis 1995, Lewis 1998). In all the activities not only lessons but also lunch time and cleaning time, students are normally divided into small groups and the leaders delegated by teachers on a rotational basis keep watch on other students' behaviours and bring the class together (Cummings 1980, White 1987, Lewis 1998, Stevenson & Stigler 1992). Each student is expected to take responsible roles in the group, and each class is often regarded as a big group. Thus, if something wrong happens in the group, even individual misbehaviours, teachers transform the problem into an issue for the whole class. They are not just expected to live in a group, but as Tsuneyoshi (2008:138) points out, they should accept and internalize group goals as well as expected deeds as a member of the group, and spontaneously conform to them.

Under these pedagogies such as cooperative learning, group activities and whole class instruction, children are seen as a homogenous group with the same potential abilities. (Tsuneyoshi 2008). The classroom instruction is focused on the average level. Thus, the high achievers are asked to wait for the whole class to catch up, while the low achievers are encouraged to try hard to reach the average (Tsuneyoshi 2001).

In the past few decades, however, individuality and diversification have become key words in the educational reform. Cave (2007) argues that the role of Japanese education is to produce desirable human beings, whose image has been transforming during the 20th century. Quoting Cave (2007:1)'s word:

> In the course of the twentieth century, schools have been expected to produce patriotic children (in the1930s), democratically-minded children (since the late 1940s), and skilled, disciplined and cooperative children (throughout the century). . . . in recent years, …. The image now includes new emphases on individuality, independence and creativity, alongside more traditional concerns that children be socially well-adjusted.

However, the key word, "individuality" has multiple meanings and does not have any single clear definition. According to Cave (2007), children learn independence, autonomy and self-direction

through both academic and non-academic activities at school. On the other hand, unlike the previous educational model which aimed at raising the academic achievement of children at the bottom of strata, the new educational policies re-describe the difference between high and low academic achievers by treating the difference as individuality "to refer to what it previously called ability (*noryoku*) or aptitude (*tekisei*)" (Cave 2007:29).

On the contrary, many scholars observing Japanese classrooms agree that cooperative and supportive classrooms are believed to create successful learning (Cave 2007, Tsuneyoshi 2001, Tobin et al 1989). Each child is expected to take a responsible role in a classroom community and to learn from others. Although teachers know there are individual differences in students' academic achievements, and that 'individuality' is a new key word for their educational objectives, in the whole class instruction with large class sizes[10], teachers still treat students in the same manner, giving equal opportunities and expecting all students to clear the standard in the corporal classroom community (Tobin et al. 1989, Tsuneyoshi 2008).

In the era of globalisation, neoliberal education policies around the world place importance more on learning achievement, standards and tests (Hedegaard-Soerensen & Gumloese 2018) and on fulfilling economic requirement under the condition of global competition (Green 2006, Arnove 2013, Soerensen & Gumloese 2018). In the case of Japan, the fierce academic competitions were eased in the curriculum of *yutori* education, and as examined before, the curriculum emphasised children's originality, creativity and learning initiatives and interests rather than conventional uniformed, cramming and goal-oriented education. Creativity was also stressed in the 21st century skills defined by six countries such as UK, Australia, USA, and others supported by major IT companies (Griffin, McGaw and Care 2012:18-19), and learning initiatives and interests were also stressed in the key competencies defined by the OECD which aims at promoting children's lifelong learning to motivate them to learn autonomously (OECD2005:3-5). Although Japanese education changed into more pressure free and child-centered approach which was opposite to the ones western countries took, the ideologies such as creativity and learning initiatives seemed to be disseminated and used in the educational policy making in Japan as well. How do these ideologies affect the education in post-*yutori* education? The next subsection will examine how the educational policies have been changing in post-*yutori* education period.

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[10] The average class size at primary school level is 28 students/class, but the maximum size is 40 students/class for Year 3-6 and 35 students/class for Year 1-2.

4. Post- *Yutori* Education

It has been more than ten years since the establishment of the complete revision of the national curriculum guidelines for primary and junior secondary schools and nine years since their implementation. Even since then, the national curriculum guidelines were partially revised in 2015 and the most recent revision has been just implemented.

The statistics of PISA shows that the ranking of mathematic literacy of Japanese students fell from being the first in 32 participating nations in 2000 to the ninth in 65 participating nations in 2009, and of scientific literacy from the second to the fifth. The reading comprehension ranking did not change; both were the eighth. (National Institute for Educational Policy Research 2015).

The test result caused more reforms in the 2010s, which actually went back to the direction taken prior to the 1980s reform, to a more classical, subject-centred approach. The lesson hours were increased 10 percent more in math, science, gymnastics and English (Fujita 2010)[11].

The revised national curriculum was implemented in the beginning of April 2013. The key ideology of this revision was *ikiru chikara* (power to live/zest for life), which was one of the main key words in the previous reform as well. However, the revision sought to clarify the ideology, emphasising the following three essential elements: acquiring basic knowledge and skills; cultivating the abilities to think, judge and express spontaneously by making use of the knowledge and the skills; and whetting pupils' appetite for learning, in order to develop the balanced competencies: *chi* ('intelligence')--solid academic ability; *toku* ('virtue')—richness in mind; and *tai* ('healthy body')—health and physical fitness. In terms of the curriculum in detail, the government emphasises the eight points to fulfil the contents of learning[12].

Those eight points can be categorised in the three essential elements of the balanced competencies described above. In terms of *chi* (intelligence), unlike cramming the knowledge, it is emphasised to cultivate the ability of thinking, judging and expressing. Also, math and science are enhanced due to children's losing motivation for these subjects. Regarding *toku* (virtue), moral education is introduced and stressed throughout school activities. In addition to that, increasing activity

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[11] In terms of gymnastics, Fujita (2010:26) mentions that a particularly influential political leader's concern for the decline of physical strength among children contributed to the increase of gymnastics hours. The concern for physical strength and its relation to academic achievement can be seen in the ideology of the revised national curriculum explained below.

[12] See the appendicies.

hours provide children with more variety of experience. In order to develop *tai* (healthy body), the curriculum also aims at developing sound body. Besides these six points, two more points are enhanced: enriching traditional cultural education and supporting corresponding social development such as environmental education, consumer education and others (MEXT 2008).

Besides, the curriculum stresses career education even from primary school. In addition, it tries to strengthen the educational cooperation and tie with home and local communities, informing home and communities of the aim of educational activities and the present situation of schools, and to act in concert with communities and home. Moreover, schools ask home to support and assist children to acquire the basic living habits and complete children's homework (MEXT 2008).

As is usual with the revision, this was also greatly influenced by the results of international assessment. As stated in the introduction section, the TIMSS-R in 1999 showed that children were not motivated to learn, this revision stresses children's spontaneous learning and "whetting pupils' appetite for learning". Also, "the abilities to think, judge and express" were the weak points indicated in the report of PISA 2009. This tells us how influential the results of those tests are.

What are new to the revisions are the emphasis on Japanese traditional cultural education and career education. In the era of globalisation, the MEXT may concern that the people tend to lose their cultural tradition and identity by the force of westernization through ideoscapes and mediascape, the transnational flows of ideas and terms, and of information disseminated by mass media, social media and social network services. Therefore, the MEXT tries to promote children's Japanese identity and a good grounding in Japanese culture. They expect children to understand the domestic culture, tradition, history and values, and to be proud of their country. Furthermore, in order to nurture children's economic sense, the MEXT has started to develop career education, consumer education and home economics. The advanced ICT created high-consumption society, where people even children can obtain goods easily without going to a shop. Thus, MEXT stresses the need of consumption education and home economics. Moreover, MEXT concerns about a decrease in the productive age populations and an increase in NEET,[13] so career education is placed importance on to secure the human resource for the future (MEXT 2008, 2013).

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[13] Not in Education, Employment or Training, NEET

In 2013, the Second Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education was decided by the Cabinet and some intellectuals in the Education Rebuilding Implementation Council. This council was made to reconstruct the educational system to fit in the 21st century, by creating a lifelong learning society to achieve the following three principals: creativity, independence and collaboration. In this plan, the government set four policy directions for the educational administrations:

1. Developing social competencies for survival
2. Developing human resources for brighter future
3. Building safety nets for learning
4. Building bonds and establishing vibrant communities (MEXT 2013).

In order to check if children learn in accordance with the directions, the government set the achievement targets for each direction[14]. The Education Rebuilding Implementation Council has been held 47 times since 2013 to the present (Prime Minister and His Cabinet 2020). It is rare for the cabinet to intervene in educational policies directly in the history of Japanese education. This implies how important it is to educate children to rebuild the country and to secure human resources for the future.

In 2018 the national curriculum guidelines were revised again and has just been implemented in 2020 in elementary schools. This revision was proposed to make a balance of children's acquisition, application and inquiry of knowledge and skills and to improve their abilities to think, judge and express. At primary school level, it has increased the hours of moral education and integrated/cross-subject/hands-on learning, introduced programming lessons and enforced the education on Japanese tradition and culture. Continuing to promote *ikiruchikara* (power to live/zest for life), children are expected to have spontaneous, dialogic and active learning. (MEXT 2020). This new revision does not seem to have dramatic change, except for the introduction of two subjects: compulsory programming and moral education which starts to be assessed from this revision. Other than these two subjects, it just reinforces the policies and practices established in last revision.

On the 3rd of December 2019, OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) released the report on the result of PISA conducted in 2018. As is usually the case, the

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[14] For example, the achievement targets of the first direction are the following five points: "solid cultivation of *ikiru chikara* (power to live/ zest for life), acquisition of the ability to explore and tackle issues, development of competencies for independence, collaboration and creativity over one's life time and development of abilities for social and vocational independence." As for the second one, its achievement target is "development of global human resources, as well as human resources to create new values." (MEXT 2013).

result of PISA got public attention. In Japan, the minister of MEXT[15] displayed his concern on the decline of reading comprehension ranking from the previous assessment in 2015 and increase in the number of low-scored group. He also pointed out inability of children to express their thoughts with clear evidence and reasoning and to have less chance of using digital appliances in learning activities compared to other OECD nations (National Institute for Educational Policy Research 2019). After that, the mass media reported the result of PISA and its related issues. Educational specialists also started to make comments on the results. It has not been so long after the report was released. Thus, it is difficult to examine its influence. However, *yutori*-education education was blamed to cause the discrepancy between high and low academic achievers, which caused the national curriculum guidelines to go back to emphasise the basics, subject-centered lessons from the last revision. In spite of the revision, even now the number of low achievers is increasing. Since the 1980s, education has become more privatized and the number of children who go to tutoring/supplementary schools is increasing, so that it is hard to determine the discrepancy is simply caused by school education. The results of international academic assessments could be good indicators to understand children's abilities, but at the same time those tests seem to cause moral panic to urge another revision.

Unlike the *yutori*-education era, the post-*yutori* education seems to be more future-oriented, by treating children as social-becomings who will compete in the global economy in the future. Tsuneyoshi (2008) mentions that in the era of high economic growth, the routinized repetitive learning was effective for mass production. However, when Japan became the second largest economy, globalisation was prevailing and the conventional style of learning did not come to work in a knowledge-based economy anymore. For example, unlike the conventional tests, the PISA does not assess children's simple knowledge and skills to seek for a single right answer for every question, but also, in the understanding of the MEXT (MEXT 2018), the ability to explain the process of how to solve the problem by connecting to their own knowledge and experience, and the skills to analyse and judge the contents of questions. Therefore, the recent educational reforms focus on cultivating children's abilities to think, judge and apply the skills and knowledge in real life. Also, since the results of reading skills have not been as good as the results of the other two subjects, mathematics and science, in PISA, at primary school level reading time has been set up every morning before regular classes start. In relation to that, recently, the MEXT often used the word, "active learning" on their website, whereby children identify a problem and solve it inde-

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[15] The Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology

pendently and actively in discussions and presentations. In learning, the MEXT aims at cultivating children's survival skills/power to live independently and actively, and working collaboratively in the fast-changing world. While actively tackling some issues, children are expected to broaden their potential and fulfil their lives as members of the Japanese nation. The MEXT believes that learning is not only for transferring knowledge but also connecting the knowledge with real life as written above. Also, they place importance on educating children to acquire the essential skills and abilities in the new era, referring to the key competencies established by OECD, the 21st century skills defined by ATC21S and the sustainable development education proposed by UNESCO and others. In this way, Japanese educational policies and practices are also convergent to the ones considered to be the best in the global world.

5. Conclusion

After the burst of the bubble economy, Japan faced a stagnant economy. Educational reforms were used for political campaigns as other countries do, although there is no clear causation between skills and productivity as discussed in the previous chapter. Education today, especially in post-*yutori* education intends to cultivate human resources who will be able to realise a big leap in the future. As with other countries such as member countries of OECD, the Japanese government seems to seek better educational policies and practices to raise children with the necessary competencies to survive in the 21st century. In this respect, the result of PISA issued every three years becomes the driving force for the reforms. One of the important themes of the revisions of the national curriculum guidelines from 2011, *ikiruchikara* (power to live) also seems to be reflected by the competencies promoted by OECD. *Ikiruchikara* implies the following skills: cognitive faculty, creativity, skills/abilities to express one's opinion and applied skills of academic knowledge in real life. On the other hand, even though privatization and decentralization of education have been promoted in neoliberal globalisation, the Japanese central government still has a strong control over education. Moreover, while placing importance on diversity and individuality, in post-*yutori* education, the MEXT propels the sense of solidarity and collaboration by creating a learning community connecting school, local community and home, and attempts to build up children's Japanese identity by teaching Japanese traditional culture and moral education, which they believe children are losing in the era of *yutori* education and globalisation.

The education system is always reconstructed in accordance with the change of social needs, but it should be noted that there are some tensions between ideology and practical application even if

the ideology of each educational reforms sounds splendid. It is hoped that this thesis will contribute to a better understanding of these tensions between the policies and the educational practices especially focusing on the voices of actual educational practitioners including teachers, parents and children. Especially, these educational practitioners cannot change their conventional ways of teaching/learning and values right away even if the new policies and practices are enforced. How do educational practitioners conceive, understand, and react to the consecutive educational reforms? In order to analyse their perspectives and everyday practices, participant observation and qualitative interviewing were conducted. The next chapter will discuss the methods and the methodology.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODS

1. Introduction

As described in Chapter 1, I went through the Japanese educational system from primary school to university in the 1980s and the 1990s. After that, I had some opportunities to see the educational systems abroad through my research and my children. Also, I am a mother of two children and had some experience teaching at a primary school and a high school in Japan as well. These experiences gave me an insider's point of view as well as some essence of an outsider's perspectives.

Since I am Japanese with Japanese educational backgrounds in the city being researched, I consider myself an insider, a member of the community. However, surprisingly quite a few of the participants regarded me as an outsider belonging to a university in the UK and sending my children to a private Japanese and an international baccalaureate school, which prevented me from getting into the field[16]. As an insider, I was able to communicate with the participants well in Japanese and could understand their narratives in a shared culture. On the other hand, my position as both a mother and a teacher sometimes made it difficult for me to keep a neutral position and I became somewhat judgmental towards certain answers unconsciously. With my experience outside the Japanese educational system, I could step back and examine some things which the participants took for granted or never questioned. In this way, my study was a process of trial and error.

This thesis seeks to explore and understand the perspectives of various groups of educational practitioners including teachers, parents and children. It does not start with any hypothesis to test, but is rather an ongoing process of a reflexive construction of themes gained by the analysis of the interviews with three groups of educational practitioners written above and the observation at a primary school. Accordingly, a qualitative and interpretivist approach was chosen to deal with people's perspective, behaviour, feeling and experience which cannot be well numerated in quantitative research methods.

In the policy making process, the voices of actual educational practitioners such as teachers, parents and children were often ignored. For example, Education Rebuilding Council organized by

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[16] The difficulties and obstacles of my study will be discussed later in this chapter.

the Prime Minister of Japan and his Cabinet have held conferences more than 45 times so far since 2013. However, the council consists of mostly bureaucrats, university professors and executives of some companies, some mayors and a few principals of secondary schools. No educational practitioners at primary school level were included in the council. Interviewing the groups of those practitioners provided me with their educational philosophy and daily practices, and discourse on how to adopt the changeable policies and to cope with, modify and reproduce the policies in their daily lives. Regarding interviewing with children, I found it quite useful to listen to their voices, which the previous literature on Japanese education have rarely included[17]. However, in Sociology of Childhood, children are believed to inculcate and internalize social order and rules through the process of socialization. Through this process, irrational, immature and incompetent children become fully competent members of society; that is adults (James & Prout 1997, James, Jenks & Prout 1998). Children are not passive receptors for knowledge but actual actors to engage in everyday educational practices. Therefore, their voices are precious to be listened. In other words, I may give a voice to them, and let them not only passively accept the situation but also be aware of, sometimes question and possibly take an action towards the policies. On the other hand, parents and teachers gave me valuable perspectives on the present education system based on their own experience in the past. As I did, both parents and teachers experienced the previous educational reforms, after the emergence of modern globalisation in the 1980s. Most of the parents spent their primary school days in the 1980s and the 1990s. Some teachers had already started teaching in the 1980s, and some experienced their childhood in the 1990s. Although their ages were different, they experienced the former educational reforms in some ways. Their views made it possible to examine how learning had been changed or unchanged in the process of globalisation.

This thesis will analyse how globalization was perceived by different groups of educational practitioners/actors and what kind of influence it had on their everyday practice. Examining commonalities and differences of the themes found in the interview data and observation, it will produce, what Mason (2012:1) calls, "well-founded *cross-contextual generalities*."

This chapter consists of seven main sections. The first section is this introduction, and the next section discusses the analysis of research methodology, outlining the reasons why a qualitative

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[17] Many literatures are based on their observation at school and/or interviews with adults or analysis of official documents (Peak 1991, Stevenson and Stigler1992, Tsuneyoshi 2001, Goodman and Phillips 2003, Cave 2007), a few includes some interview data with children, but mostly secondary or older children (White 1987, Okano and Tsuchiya 1999, Fujita, Kariya, Letendre (Eds.) 2010).

approach was most appropriate for my study. Then, the third section deals with some methodological issues and concerns related to the research with children and the actual procedure used in this study. The following two sections argue actual research methods used for this study. Linking the research questions with the strength and the weakness of the methods, the section discusses how the methods were applied and how they actually worked. The sixth section explains some ethics issues, discussing general ethics on qualitative research approaches: informed consents, anonymity, and confidentiality, and mentions some practical challenges and limitations of thesis. Then, the final section leads to the conclusion and the summery of this chapter. Firstly, it moves on to the section of methodology.

2. Methodology

This thesis is inspired by interpretivism theory, which considers that social reality is not singular, objective or external but "a construction of shared meanings and interpretations" (McNeill 1990:121). The social actors interpret the society they are in, make sense of it and actively create social reality through social interaction. The aim of this thesis is not gaining one objective, value-free reality to establish the best educational policy for all children, but rather analysing how actual educational practitioners such as teachers, children and parents interpret and behave in their social world, and reconstruct the situation in their everyday lives.

Based on an interpretive approach, as described above, qualitative interviewing was chosen as a main method and observation as a subsidiary method for the research. Also, McNeil (1990:17, 19-21) mentions, mixed methods "compensate for the weakness of another" and also "get a better view of things by looking at them from more than one direction." To understand participants' experience of their everyday lives, semi-structure interviews were conducted. Unlike structured interviews, the interviews were not 'one-size-fits-all' structured approach, but as Maison (2012:64) state, "tailor-making to each one on the spot." Only with interviewing, it might have been difficult for me to understand the contextual accounts, but the observation gave me some important insights on teachers' and children's everyday school lives, which helped me to grasp the depth and the complexity. The observation gave me so many themes which I have never thought of. In fact, I have found some overarching themes such as teacher-student power dynamic on learning, active learning and moral values in learning. Also, only with observation, it would have been difficult to grasp the perspectives of each group of actors and the research would have been only my interpretation of their learning environment.

This research enables us to "achieve depth and roundedness of understanding in these areas, rather

than a broad understanding of surface patterns" (Mason 2012:65), by analysing the subjects' understanding and interpretation of the social world, and their behaviour and reaction to it in their everyday educational practice. Also, it examines their belief, motivation and social environment which affects their actions. My study focuses on small number of people but collects rich and nuanced data on individual cases. It did not apply a deductive approach starting with theories and hypothesis to be tested, but rather an ongoing inductive process with reflexive construction of themes gained by the analysis. Regarding the research on children's learning, the OECD and the Japanese government have been trying to identify the problems in children's learning and their environment by survey researches. A quantitative research deals with a large amount of data, but as McNeill (1990:122) states, it collects "data only about those things which are included in the questionnaire, and this may omit crucial points." Also, in a survey, participants may be getting tired of so many questions and give dishonest or trivial answers, so it would be hard to gain a rich data of their understandings on the issue to be investigated. Although the surveys analyse the overall patterns of the learning and their learning environment, they hardly examine individual cases. Accordingly, this research is meaningful to gain the detailed data of individual experiences and perspectives with qualitative research methods.

The problem of qualitative research methods is objectivity. Miller and Glassner (1997:99) states, "[i]nterviewing is obviously and exclusively an interaction between the interviewer and interview subject in which both participants create and construct narrative versions of the social world." Thus, the interview data is context-specific, so cannot be treated as representative of some truth in the world. Regarding participant observation it is nothing but a researcher's interpretation of symbolic meaning and of social reality on the everyday lives of people being researched. Although the interpretation reflects participants' voice and their culture, but it is not always the same as what they conceive. In qualitative research methods, it is impossible for researchers to eliminate all the bias against people being researched. Thus, it is crucial to have a reflexive statement to clarify the researcher's social backgrounds, the aim of the study and other details in order to show the reliability of the data.

3. Methodological Concerns on Research with Children

Punch (2002:323) addresses the ethical issue in research particularly with children, stating "[w]hile it is vital to recognize that children are potentially more vulnerable to unequal power relationships between adult researcher and child participant, ethics and dominate debates about methodological concern." Because of the power imbalance between adults and children, some children may not expect

to be treated equally to adults by an adult. Thus, according to her if children display just model answers, researchers should realize that they have not been able to build a rapport and just shown their authoritative attitude toward children. Also, researchers should consider children's competencies especially at their developmental stage in terms of their vocabulary, attention spans and experience. Moreover, on the bases of potential difference of children, Punch (2002:324-330) argues the following seven methodological issues:

1. Not imposing the researcher's own perception of childhood which they have from their Experience
2. Keeping in mind the power relationships between adults and children
3. Clarifying language and being more conscious of choosing the word
4. Trying to choose research setting which children have less control
5. Building a rapport with children
6. Interpreting the data with particular care by trying not to impose adult's view
7. Using familiar sources to children for research methods in accordance with their abilities.

Besides these methodological issues, Christensen and James (2008:9) indicates that we should have children as informants to understand their world from their points of view.

In terms of research methods, Punch (2002:300) introduces the following task-based methods: drawings, photographs, PRA techniques, diaries, and worksheets, which, she argues, "can enable children to feel more comfortable with an adult researcher" and possibly to give a researcher more detailed data. However, at the same time she warns that researchers should be reflexive and critical to recognize the disadvantage and limits of the approach. Also, both Punch (2002) and Christensen and James (2008) point out that those child-friendly methods are not universal for all children. Each child is different in terms of skills and abilities, and also cultural and social environment affect their competencies. Thus, we should carefully choose the methods which should be "participant friendly, rather than child friendly" (Christensen & James 2008:8-9).

In terms of the interviews, eight participants were children, so I was careful about the power relationship between those children and myself. The interviews with children were conducted in pairs to avoid the power imbalance between an adult and a child. Also, at least one of children in each pair had known me before the interviews, so they might have felt more secure than talking to a stranger. Interviews were conducted at their familiar place such as one of the participant's houses or a gate keeper's house or my house. The familiarity may cause children to worry about the confidentiality, so I closed the door of the room and had the conversation together only with the participants. The interviews with children were also conducted in a relaxing conversational style as I did with adults. However, the conversation did not go as smoothly as the interviews with adults. Thus, I just let them flow and tried to find some serendipity from the conversations.

Moreover, in order to avoid misunderstanding and miscommunication with children, I used simple words to talk to them and clarified the meanings that I did not understand. Sometimes, I asked them to draw some pictures when they were not able to describe certain things well verbally. When they did not understand my question, I explained the meaning with simpler words or raised some examples. A diary might have been a good resource as suggested above, but children were already too busy with some lessons and after school tutoring to keep that for me. Also, most of the children had already graduated from primary school, it was not worth it for me to ask them to do so.

The pair interview in such a conversational style enabled me to gain their honest opinions. For example, when I interviewed two boys, one boy tried to answer all my questions politely and gave me typical RIGHT answers, but another boy just teased him for displaying model answers. Then, the former boy also started to mention his own opinion honestly. In another situation, when I asked a child the meaning of some words which I did not know. She answered and the other one gave me additional explanation. Moreover, sometimes, one child mentioned something that the other one did not think of. Then, the other one came across some ideas after listening to the opinion of the former child and told me his/her own experience or own view on the issue as well.

Hardman (2001:513) points out that "children may have an autonomous world, independent to some extent of the worlds of adults," and that "children's thoughts and social behaviour may not be totally incomprehensible to adults, so long as we do not try to interpret them in adult terms". Thus, it was good for me to have the pair of children in the interviews, since they could be informants to tell me the meanings and the values of their everyday lives from their perspectives. In this way, the pair interviews gave me more detailed data and helped me to understand their world better.

I treated children's voices as equally importance as adults' ones. I carefully paid attention to children's perspectives and the meaning systems. While doing the interviews, I tried to be friendly as possible and build up a rapport with the children, by playing the "least-adult" role, showing my interests on their opinions without imposing adult's view. The interviews made me realize that good communication was a key of a good research.

4. Interviewing

My main research method was the interviews conducted from 2015 to 2017, with eight parents, eight children and seven teachers in a city, one of twelve designated cities by ordinance in Japan. I did not focus on a specific school in the city, but selected the participants studying, teaching or sending their children to municipal schools, which are affected by the educational policies and practices established by the municipal and the central governments more than private schools.

Also, the majority, 98 percent of primary school children go to municipal schools.[18] Therefore, it is considered to be rational to focus on municipal schools rather than private schools. The interviews were semi-structural, in-depth ones, spent from one to two hours per person. The semi-structured in-depth interviews enabled me to gain rich data on their ideas and experience, such as what meant to them in their everyday lives, and how they understood and reconstructed their social world.

Inviting participants

To invite participants, I employed my own personal networks and a partial snowball sampling. First of all, four parents, four children and two teachers were recruited for the pilot interviews[19]. Since I was teaching some primary school students privately, I asked three of them and their parents to participate in my interviews. Another child was invited through one of the three children. Since the mother of the invited child was one of my acquaintances so that she also joined as a participant. Regarding teachers, I recruited a friend from my college days who had become a primary school teacher, and the classroom teacher of the primary school which I had worked at as a volunteer.

There is no magic number of how many interviews are enough, but I aimed at having semi-structured qualitative interviews with 10 teachers, 10 parents and 10 children from different municipal schools in the same city. Although I had proposed to have 30 participants in total, the process of recruiting participants was not straightforward at all. The number of actual participants became 23 in the end: seven teachers, eight parents and eight children including those pilot interviews starting from April 2015. The last interview was conducted in August 2017.

Since I was a mother of two kids who were a pre-schooler and a primary school student when starting to search for the participants, I thought there was no problem to recruit participants. However, it was a much more complicated process than I had expected. One of the reasons was that I was sending my children to private schools, not municipal schools, so I knew only a few parents who sent their children to municipal schools. Secondly, I wanted to have many samples from different school districts around the city, but this made the sampling process much harder. I expected pilot interviewees to introduce me some people to participate in my study, but they hardly

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[18] Only 1 percent of children go to private schools and less than 1 percent attend national schools. (MEXT 2020).

[19] The number of the participants in the pilot interviews is included in the total number of the participants written above.

had any chances to communicate with other parents in different school districts. Moreover, I faced another obstacle, Japanese cultural characteristics. Probably, in general Japanese people feel uncomfortable to talk to a stranger. Parents who did not know me were not willing to join my project by stating they were too busy to take part. Because the interview was conducted in a face-to-face and semi-structured in-depth way, they may have felt uneasy to join the project. In fact, some of the participants were willing to ask their friends to take part in, but nobody wanted to join my research. I also used my Facebook page to advertise that I was looking for somebody to help with my research. However, it was also not effective in gathering participants.

Regarding parent participants, I planned to interview some fathers, but they were too busy with work or were not familiar with school matters. In Japan, fathers are still strong breadwinners and long working hours deprive them of their time with wives and children (Allison 1996: 136, Long 1996: 165-167). Accordingly, the parents' participants were only mothers. Since I used my personal connections as well as snowball sampling, I was not able to collect the data from the families in financially marginal positions. Except for two mothers, six mothers and their husbands were university graduates, and one of the former two mothers had university graduate husbands.[20]

In terms of children, I tried to recruit either some in Year 6 (the highest year at primary school in Japan) or some newly graduates, from as many different municipal schools in the city as possible. Pupils in Year 6 and new primary school graduates are supposed to have more experience at primary school and more words and knowledge to express their own ideas than other years. On the other hand, it might be hard for the researcher to have a rapport with those adolescents, a sort of difficult age. In my case, I had known most of the children and their parents before conducting the interviews and had some teaching experience at a primary school, I did not have much complexity to have a rapport with them. On the contrary, children may have felt uneasy to talk to me honestly, because I knew most of their parents. I explained children about the confidentiality issues, but actually, in about the first quarter of the interview hour, children seemed to be quieter and more polite than usual. However, they seemed to feel relax gradually while having a chat with me.

I asked the parents I interviewed to introduce me to their child/children to have an interview with them, but only four children from four parents were willing to join and others refused. According to the parents whose children were reluctant to participate, their children were too shy or busy to

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[20] See Appendices for further details.

do so. I ended up interviewing six new primary school graduates at the age of twelve and two fourth-year children, at the age of nine or ten. I did not recruit any children from the sixth-year class that I had observed because I was not comfortable to ask the classroom teacher to engage with my project[21]. Two participants were friends of the children whose mothers I had interviewed with. This city does not have something like Ofsted to refer to the socio-economic difference between school districts. Thus, it is hard to understand the details of all the school districts that the participant children attended. However, what can be said is that the children were from five different school districts around the city, two were quite wealthy school districts, two included some low-income communities and one was located in the average housing area.

Regarding teacher participants, it was more difficult to recruit than the other two groups of participants. Some of them were my acquaintances and others were recruited through some gate keepers. First, I tried to search for teachers from my acquaintances as I did for my pilot interviews. Although my daughter went to a private school, she used to go to a municipal school for a year. Thus, I wrote a letter to her former classroom teacher to see if she could participate in my project. She was willing to help me out, and fortunately when I interviewed her at a café, we happened to meet another teacher who had recently retired from the school. Then, I asked the retired teacher to let me have an interview with him as well. In Japan teachers are hired by a board of education of each city or each prefecture depending on how big the city is, and then assigned to a certain school and transferred to another school in two to five years or so. In terms of the choice of school, municipal/prefectural school teachers do not have discretion. It was fortunate to have an interview with such a veteran teacher with varied experiences working at different schools within the city.

After interviewing, I asked the participants if they could introduce me to some other teachers, but they were not keen to do so. The busy schedule of teacher was the main reason. They hardly have time off even on weekend for club activities and other school related events[22]. The second obstacle was confidentiality issues. A teacher seemed to be afraid of the leakage of our conversations to other parents, so he did not agree to participate in my research despite my detailed explanation on protection of privacy such as confidentiality and anonymity. In addition to those two obstacles, hierarchical and bureaucratic systems at school prevented me from recruiting

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[21] I will explain the reason in the fifth section of ethics issues.
[22] In fact, many teachers complained that they had long working hours till 8 pm or sometimes 10 pm every day.

teachers. For example, one of the teachers I interviewed introduced me to his colleague, but the head teacher at the school they were working intervened and did not allow the colleague to join my project. In fact, the head teacher scolded the teacher I had already interviewed that the teacher should not have participated in my project nor introduced me to the colleague without the permission from the head teacher. Moreover, when I asked the other head teacher to join my project, he was suspicious about my research as if I had come to the school to criticize the Japanese educational system as written before. Although the deputy head teacher was willing to support my project, he was not able to do so because of the head teacher's denial of my study. With those difficulties, the total number of participants became seven including the participants of pilot interviews in two years of recruiting.

Regarding the recruitment, snowball sampling might be effective in some situations but is not always practical. In this project, snowball sampling did not work well. Also, snowball sampling could be biased in terms of the sample selection. In the case of my research, it was difficult to recruit participants from different socio-economic backgrounds. Although municipal schools include some people who are socially and economically marginal, the participants being recruited for this research were comparatively well off or economically around average. Also, I tried to recruit parents and children from different school districts around the city, four parents and three children were from the same school districts.

Basic Information on Participants

To give a simple explanation on the basic information on the participants, the following sections summarize and arrange the data into tables. The names used here are all pseudonyms.

Information on Teachers

I have interviewed teachers in different age groups and years of experiences. Each teacher had teaching experiences in several different schools in the city. Regarding Mr Ohta, his years of teaching experience looks short, but had engaged in different sectors in education for 36 years such as a teacher, a curriculum coordinator, a deputy head teacher and a head teacher at municipal schools and a researcher at the municipal board of education. As for Mr Ishiguro, he used to work at a primary school, but he had been working as a junior high school teacher for longer years.

	Mr Suzuki	**Ms Ueno**	**Mr Ashida**	**Mr Ishiguro**	**Ms Yoshino**	**Mr Ohta**	**Mr Fujita**
Age	Late 20s	Early 30s	Late 30s	Early 40s	Late 50	Almost 60	Early 60s
Status	Classroom Teacher	Class-room Teacher	Curriculum Coordinator	Secondary School Teacher	Classroom Teacher	Head Teacher	Retired Teacher
Years of Teaching Experience at Primary Schools	5 years	9 years	15 years	9 years	37 years	27 years	33 years

Information on Parents

As discussed above, parent participants were all mothers. They were in their 30s and 40s who respectively came from different cities. Mei, Karen, Yuka and Moto were sending their children to the same school but the other four parents to different schools respectively.

	Naomi	**Mei**	**Karen**	**Yuka**	**Sayuri**	**Takako**	**Momo**	**Emi**
Age	Around 40	Early 40s	Early 40s	Around 40	Around 40	Late 30s	Early 40s	Around 50s
Child/ Children	1 son (Y8) 1 daughter (Y6)	2 sons (Y3&Y5)	1 son (Y7)	2 sons (Y9, Age 2) 3 daughters (Y7, Y1, Age 4)	1 son (Y4)	1 son (Y5) 1 daughter (Y2)	2 sons (Y7 &Y2)	1 daughter (Y4)
Economic Status	High	Lower Average	Lower Average	Average	High	High	Average	Lower Average
Relationship with other participants	Mother of Rosa	N/A	Mather of Satoshi	Mother of Aya	N/A	N/A	Mother of Kai	Mother of Suzu

Regarding their economic status described in the table, Japan today has no apparent class systems so that it is difficult to say who belongs to which class. Normally, their occupations stand for their socio-economic status so that their strata are inferred from their occupations and styles of living. I did not ask their annual incomes or their economic class directly so they are all my suppositions. What is clear about is that no families were on benefits.

Information on Children

Kai, Satoshi and Aya graduated from the same primary school although Aya was a year older than those two boys[23]. Rosa and Mana had just graduated from the same school. Schools of others differed from one person to the next. Here is the basic information on the participants.

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[23] Since the years of interviewing them were different, they looked the same age in the table.

Name	Kai	Satoshi	Aya	Hisayo	Rosa	Mana	Suzu	Yuna
Gender	Boy	Boy	Girl	Girl	Girl	Girl	Girl	Girl
Year	Y7	Y7	Y7	Y7	Y6	Y6	Y4	Y4
Age	12	12	12	12	12	12	9	9
Relationship with other participants	Son of Momo	Son of Karen	Daughter of Yuka	N/A	Daughter of Naomi	N/A	Daughter of Emi	N/A

Procedure of Interview and Analysis

As mentioned above, semi-structural, in-depth interviews were conducted in Japanese, spending from one to two hours per person. Open-ended questions were used to give the participants room to talk about their own experience and perspectives freely in a relaxing conversational style. Regarding parents and teachers, most interviews were conducted at a cafe, except for one parent at her house, two teachers at their school and one at a college. On the other hand, as for children, their familiar places such as one of their houses were chosen for the place for interviewing. In order to build the rapport with participants, I became a sensitive listener and showed interest in them personally. Especially for the research with children, I tried to create a welcoming atmosphere with a smile and provide them with comfortable surroundings. I used as simple words as possible to communicate with them. Moreover, even if their answers were a bit deviated from the questions, I let them flow a while and tried to gain as much information on their everyday experience and opinions as possible by having a chat with them.

Regarding the process of analysis, I read all the interviews of each group carefully and repeatedly to find cross-sectional themes and sub-themes. Then, they were categorized by NVivo. Even with NVivo cross-sectional coding did not go smoothly, but it was highly messy work. After categorizing by NVivo, I read the slices of data again and noticed another categorization would have been better to answer my research questions. Therefore, all the data was sorted out by new themes manually. After that, I compiled and analysed the data according to the themes. I did the same procedure for all data of the three groups. Finally, the codes of all three groups were compared and examined regarding how they interrelated and how different they were.

The process of coding made me realise that my positionality, a mother of two children and my own experience of teaching somewhat affected the contents of the interviews and the responses from the participants. While interviewing, I refrained from mentioning my own opinion. However, in the semi-informal and conversational style, the participants also asked me my opinion. I

tried to mention my opinion as briefly as possible, but my perspective and positionality may have biased their answers. When transcribing the interviews, I found that some of the questions sounded a bit leading. I sometimes unconsciously stated my ideas since those educational matters were closely related to the education for my own children and my teaching.

Although it can be better with training, qualitative research methods are time-consuming, can have a biased sampling and have some limitations in terms of objectivity. Accordingly, it is necessary to show readers the reflexivity of the research to increase the credibility of the data and of the analysis and to give them better understanding of the work.

5. Observation

Getting into the Field

After the pilot interviews, I did participant observation at a municipal primary school. As a language assistant for two siblings from Indonesia in Year 2 and Year 6[24], I spent time together with other children once a week from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. from November 2014 to March 2015. My field notes tell me that I joined more than 30 hours of regular classes per each year and some extracurricular activities such as a graduation ceremony, the sum of which were about 70 hours in total. I was assigned to one of the classes whenever I arrived at the school in the morning. I did not focus particularly on the contents of academic subjects, but rather how learning was conducted in the classroom as well as in the extracurricular activities.

Before working as a volunteer at the school, I had requested a few more schools to let me observe their schools, but they refused to have me for several reasons. One of the schools was the one my daughter used to go to. The head teacher was anxious about the disclosure of school details to other parents although I explained to him about the confidentiality. In another school, the head teacher was suspicious of my research and treated me a critic of Japanese educational system. When I was at a loss and thinking of what to do, I got a chance to work at the primary school. As mentioned above, my main job was interpreting the contents of classes to two Indonesian siblings in Year 2 and Year 6. The deputy head teacher allowed me to observe the classes in which I worked. He imposed one condition on me that no picture of pupils should be taken. I agreed with that and did not bring a camera to the school. Thus, I drew some pictures of what the classrooms looked like on my research diary.

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[24] Year 2 students are at the age of 7 and 8, and Year 6 students at 11 and 12.

The Process of Observation

Because I was interpreting the contents of the lessons to the Indonesian children, I sat next to them and listened to the lessons in the same way as other children did. Moreover, I spent as much time as possible with children by playing with them in recess and having lunch with them. During the class, while interpreting the contents of the classes, I listened to the classes and attended the activities as other children do. Thus, as for Year 2 children, I could be a friend of the children and played the least-adult role. However, it was difficult for me to do so with Year 6 children. They treated me as an adult outsider and an assistant exclusively to the particular student. Although I enjoyed a chat with them in lunch time, the time was so limited. Even in recess, unlike Year 2 children, I did not have a chance to share the time together. It was harder for me to have a rapport with Year 6 children, because of their difficult age, adolescence, less time to join their classes and the unwelcoming attitude of the classroom teacher[25].

While doing the participant observation, I had planned to conduct informal interviews with as many children as possible using recess, lunch time and after school to know the children's worlds from the children's points of view. However, during recess, children just concentrated on playing so that I had no time to have an interview, but just played with them, instead. During lunch time, I was able to have a chat, but topics were too changeable and lunch time was too short and too rushed to have an interview with them.

I kept a research journal of whatever I saw and heard at the school, even a small chat with and among children. As Gallagher (2009:61) states, "in participant observation any kind of interaction (verbal, physical, eye contact, gestures and so on) is potentially rich data." Children create their own world. According to him, children may create their own rules and have some symbols of meanings, which are totally different from or unimaginative for adults. Without knowing them, researchers may not have effective observations. In regards of my study, even in children's play, some sort of learning can be seen. In order to grasp their own social world, I tried to spend as much time with children as possible and we learned and played together. The problem was that I was not able to concentrate on my observations since my main work was interpreting the contents of the lessons to the Indonesian children. Thus, I just jotted down whatever I found interesting on my fieldnote during lessons, and then kept the research diary after coming back home.

6. Ethics

At first, before the interviews and the participant observation, I obtained the consents from all the

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[25] I will write about the suspicious gaze of the teacher toward me later in this chapter.

participants for the interviews and from the deputy head teacher for the observation. I produced an information sheet outlined the project, its aims, objectives, usage of data to all participants. Regarding observation, the deputy head teacher handed the information sheets to the classroom teachers and explained it to the children. In terms of the interviews, I explained to each participant the contents of the information sheet including anonymity and confidentiality before each interview. This was accompanied by a consent form which all participants including children and the parents of the children signed. With specific regard to the children, I made the information sheet and the consent forms written in an age-appropriate language.

I used pseudonyms for the names of the participants and of the school locations to avoid revealing their identities. Also, I am keeping the records in a locked cabinet and password protected computer to keep their confidentiality. The records will be destroyed a certain period after the research is completed.

Some of the children I interviewed were the children of my friends or acquaintances. Thus, I assumed children would regard me as a mother of one of their friends, rather than as a researcher. To avoid their anxiety of disclosure of their talk to their mothers, I had explained to children about the confidentiality of the data before having an interview with them. Moreover, just in case, I explained to the children during the consent process about the possibility of having to break confidentiality for some accounts related to child welfare such as bullying and to report to their classroom teacher in order to take some appropriate actions. By thinking about "the best interests of children in given situations" and the children's wellbeing and protection, it is sometimes necessary to pass on information about a child to an agency (Gallagher 2009: 21-22). After the explanation, the interviews went smoothly and all of them were cooperative, and fortunately I did not obtain any information ethically wrong during the interviews.

I faced some practical challenges and limitations in conducting this research. First, I faced a dilemma between keeping confidentiality and building a rapport. When I was keeping the fieldnotes, some children of Year 2 came to me and asked me what I was writing. I could show them some trivial contents, but some were confidential. Thus, I just tried to hide it from the participants, which was a bit uncomfortable for me as if I had been a spy there.

Secondly, even stating the section on recruiting, hierarchy and bureaucracy at school made my research more difficult and complicated. Regarding the observation at the school, the deputy

principal hired me and allowed me to observe the classes. Thus, the homeroom teacher in Year 6 appeared to feel reluctant to have me in his class but did not seem to be able to refuse me because of the decision of the deputy principal, although the teacher in Year 2 were willing to help me with my research. Thus, I always felt uneasy to be in Year 6 classes due to his suspicious gaze. Accordingly, I was not able to ask him to take part in my research as an interviewee or to let me interview some children in his classroom.

As for an interview, when the gate keeper requested a principal to participate in my research, he asked me to explain the aim of my research and to give him a copy of the list of interview questions. I was wondering if I should show all the interview questions before the interviews. Because of the characteristic of semi-structured qualitative interview, I did not want the participant to prepare for the RIGHT answers. However, it was inevitable for me to do so. Also, the hierarchy at school prevented me from having a relaxing interview with a teacher. I was invited to the head teacher's room to have an interview with the teacher, so the teacher appeared to be and sounded so nervous to talk to me under the supervision of his boss. The head teacher seemed to have a strong responsibility of what other teachers at the school did and spoke.

Those were the challenges I faced in this research. I had heard of the issue of hierarchy and bureaucracy in Japanese schools but did not imagine that it would be such an obstacle to let me into the field or do research freely. It should have been necessary to investigate how other researchers got the permission to observe the schools or interview with teachers in Japan.

7. Conclusion

This research was based on an interpretivist approach; reality is socially constructed. The actors in the society interpret the reality and construct the shared meaning through social interaction. Since this research focuses on the perspectives of three groups of actors, teachers, parents and children on the education in the age of globalisation, qualitative research methods such as interviews and an observation were conducted. Quantitative research methods could be used, but the methods have limitations to grasp the deep understanding of subjects' perspectives and meanings in their everyday lives especially by examining individual cases. Unlike quantitative research methods which test the hypothesis by analysing the mass of data, this research applied an inductive approach with reflexive construction of themes gained by the analysis of the data.

On the other hand, qualitative research methods also have limitations and obstacles to be objective. The process of interviews and observation do not go as planned especially with children. Sampling can be somewhat biased and snowball samplings are not effective sometimes. Regarding the interviews with teachers and the observation of schools in Japan, hierarchy and bureaucracy at school can prevent a researcher from getting into the field or doing his/her research freely. As for researching with children, it is necessary to consider the power imbalance between a researcher and children and specific research methods for children should be used by taking into consideration of the individual's cognitive abilities. During the interview, the narrative is created by interaction of the researcher and the participants. In addition, the analysis is the researcher's interpretation of the data and the positionality of researcher may affect the research as a whole. Accordingly, reflexivity is the key for its credibility.

The following two chapters deal with the discussion of findings with an analysis of interview and observation data. How do the groups of actors understand contemporary education? How do they act accordingly or resist and modify that? Several themes were founded by the thematic analysis of the interviews. The next chapter begins with their perspectives on some policies related to globalisation.

CHAPTER 5: ACTIVE LEARNING

1. Introduction

When I asked teachers and parents what they thought of education in the global era, both started by mentioning the introduction of English language education at primary school. However, the impression I got from the parents was that teachers were not well trained to teach such a subject. It was partially because at the time I interviewed them there was a transitional period in the Japanese educational system, and it was challenging to introduce such a new curriculum[26]. A head teacher and a curriculum coordinator being interviewed were working at a research school to establish an effective English curriculum for primary schools. According to them, they were making teaching materials using ICT including tablet computers, while other schools had not seemed to be well prepared to teach such a new subject yet and were waiting for the teaching materials and the methods to be established by the research school. The enforcement of the policies is rather top-down, so teachers seem not to be trained yet on how to teach new subjects and do it by trial and errors in the transitional period, which was also seen in the introduction of *sōgō gakushū* (integrated learning) discussed in Chapter 3. In this way, even after the new policies are set up by the government, teachers are sometimes not well informed nor trained, and engage in teaching with a feeling of some dilemma or gaps between the ideal and the reality. Parents may judge the education today compared to their own school experience. Children are also not just passive receptors of the present education system, but actively participate in everyday educational practice. This chapter will examine their voices on everyday educational practices.

2. Various Experience on Child-Cantered Learning

As seen in Chapter 3, in the 1990s and the 2000s, in a *yutori* environment, children had more opportunities to have various hands-on learning experiences, such as fieldworks and volunteer activities to motivate them to learn, with the minimisation of the contents and the amount of learning and the promotion of children's *ikiruchikara* (zest for life/power to live). Although the contents and the amount of learning have been increased again since the 2010s, *ikiru chikara* is still emphasised in the curriculum. Moreover, education has placed importance on '*shutaiteki de taiwateki na fukai manabi'* (proactive, interactive/dialogic and deep learning). This phrase was actually changed from the English, "active learning[27]" into Japanese words by interpreting the

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[26] As mentioned before, there are a few years of a transitional period after revising the national curriculum guidelines.

[27] This word is not normally translated into Japanese, but used as it is.

meaning, because it had been often misinterpreted since English words were used first. Mr Ohta (head teacher) mentioned the following interesting comments on the word:

> O: Active Learning was changed into the word such as '*shutaiteki de taiwateki na fukai manabi'* (proactive, nteractive/dialogic and deep learning), wasn't it? In short, as is often the case with actual educational sites, teachers paid attention to the word, "active" so much that they took it that they should do more activities than lectures. However, I think that they should have given more attention toward "learning" rather than "active." In order to be proactive, you may have to think deeply in a quiet manner
>
> N: Yes. Sometime, we have to read something quietly...
>
> O: The reason why people pay attention to the word "active," they are concerned about the state, um, the state of being active. They might think that they don't do 'active learning' if they just let children listen to their lectures.

Ms Ueno (teacher) also remarked on 'active learning': "I think it is the state which the brain is active, not like the passive attitudes toward learning." During the interview, she also commented;

> Well. actually, I was wondering what to do with 'active learning.' However, I feel keenly that output is important, anyway. Thus, children should not only listen to lectures but also have many output opportunities such as writing, pair work and group discussion. At any rate, I let children output their learning.

As Mr Ohta delivered, the word 'active' seemed to have strong impact on the way of teaching so that it was totally replaced by the Japanese word, *shutaitekide taiwatekina fukai manabi* (proactive, interactive/dialogic and deep learning). This phenomenon can be explained by the ideoscape discussed in Chapter 2 that the ideas such as active learning brought by global flows are interpreted and can be misinterpreted within and between different cultures and countries due to different semantic and pragmatic nature. Active learning should have meant children's spontaneous learning, where children actively engaged in learning. However, many teachers seemed to misinterpret the words, whereas some teachers like Mr Ohta and Ms Ueno understood as it should have been. Although the word has appeared again in the recent educational reform, we had hardly heard the word 'active learning' for a while.

Since the English words, 'active learning' is so catchy, people may have felt as if it had been a totally new policy. However, for some teachers it does not mean that there is anything new to learn. Ms Ueno reflected on the lessons in her primary school days:

> I do not think the primary school education I took was not something like cramming knowledge. The lessons I teach now are actually influenced by the way of teaching I received in my primary school days.

As seen in Chapter 3, many Western scholars who observed Japanese classrooms in the 1980s and 1990s also described that children were vigorously joining the lessons unlike the stereotype image of cramming (White 1987, Lewis 1995, Lewis 1998, Lee, Graham, and Stevenson 1998). In addition, Mr Ohta mentioned that he had emphasized active listening when he conducted his

lessons a few decades ago, which might be considered as a sort of active learning. He described:

O: Well… When I was a classroom teacher, I just wanted to stop doing one-way lecture style lessons like just talking to children. So, what I trained children uncompromisingly was 'listening' including the style of listening. Thus, I always called on children not only who raised their hands but also who did not, by asking "What do you think?"

N: Even the one who did not raise his/her hand?

O: Yes. Even those ones. Under a sort of tension. Then, when they couldn't answer, I said to them "you may have more time [to think]." After a while, I was sure to go back to the same child to ask the same question again. We should do so. As for a subject like moral education, it is really important for children to express their opinions. Moral education requires children to show their mindset. So, I ask them "What do you think?"

O: First of all, I make sure everybody listens to me. Then, I call on a child. The child confirms that all the classmates pay attention to him/her. If not, the child says, " <Call the child's name>, can I start to talk?" After that, the child starts to express his/her opinion. About three months of the practice, children get used to this way of listening. It does not matter if there is summer break in-between. First, you should listen, and then talk. When you talk, you should be aware of the listeners and confirm they are listening. Then, the listeners understand the opinion of the speaker and examine if the opinion is the same as or different from theirs. If different, how and if the same, which points. After that, the listeners also express their ideas. In this way, they always have a discussion. I do not know how this is related to the curriculum guidelines. However, I always recommend this method to new teachers as well.

As seen above, the definition of 'active learning' seems to be ambiguous. For some teachers and people in general, it sounded something new and innovative, while others saw it as nothing new or something familiar to their everyday practice. The policy was instituted to aim at cultivating children's *ikiruchikara* (power to live/ zest for life) to take an active role in the 21st century, as discussed in Chapter 3. How are teachers actually teaching children under the policy? Next is one of the typical ways of teaching today.

To Be an Active Learner

Education today places importance on problem-solving and autonomous learning skills as discussed in Chapter 3. Thus, children are trained to set the objective to achieve at the beginning of the lesson, find problems, solve them by themselves and have reflection at the end, for most of the subjects every day. Mr Suzuki (teacher) explained to me how he was leading children to do so.

N: Objectives and Reflections. For all subjects?

S: Basically, Yes.

N: Even for Math?

S: Math and Japanese. Well, Japanese, Math, Social Studies and Science. Recently, even in Moral Education, it is often said that we need to have objectives.

N: In 45 minutes, do you ask them to set objectives every time for all [subjects] ?

S: Yes. All, all. Basically, it is set in introduction, so it takes only about 5 minutes.

N: They set objectives in 5 minutes? I cannot imagine. Examples?

S: For example, in the case of a lesson recently, the topic was 'length.' We had measured stuff with a small ruler attached to the textbook before. I asked children, "How many rulers did

you need to measure this? We did it, didn't we yesterday?", and continued "How do you describe it to other people? Do you say this is how many times as long as the ruler? What do you think?" Then, I asked them, "What objective are you going to set up today?" having prepared a certain model answer such as "To think how to tell the length to others" in my mind. Children raised hands to share their opinions, so I tried to pull as many opinions as possible and put them together, and set the objective similar to the prepared one, by saying "That means this, right?"

N: Uh-ha. You write different opinions on the blackboard...

S: Then, put all the opinions together, and squeeze them into one objective.

This is for the classes of Y1 (aged 6 and 7). As children grow older, they have more knowledge and skills to have more sophisticated objectives. By clarifying what they are studying for, children can study more proactively rather than just listening to the teacher's lecture without having clear visions. Then, regarding reflections, according to Mr Suzuki (teacher), in the case of Y1 and 2 (aged 6 to 8) it can be like; "It was easier to solve the problem by doing this and that," "I found it easy to solve the problem with the math figure blocks." or something similar. Reflections are basically what they have learned/found and possibly what they want to know further. In terms of the process of the reflection, children normally have a whole class reflection, and then write their own reflections on their notebook/paper. As for Y1 and Y2, the teacher helps them to navigate to a certain model answer, but as children get older, a chairman among the children picks the opinions up from the class, sorts them out and puts them together. Then, they reflect on what they have learned individually. Mr Ishiguro (teacher) told me an example of the lesson in older years;

When I taught Science to children in Year 5 and 6 (aged 10 to 12), I let children think the problems/topics today and what experiments to use to solve the problems. After they had discussed the problems and the experiments to do, I sorted ideas out and asked them what to prepare for the experiments, and what to expect. I let them think about the process, hypothesis and prediction of the result, and then had them discuss in a group and make presentations. After that, we conducted the experiments by group. While doing so, children noted down the results, and then shared the results in a whole class discussion. At the end of the class, I asked them to write about what they had learned from the experiments individually. Then, we continued to solve another question...

Most of the parents also expressed that their children had less time for note-taking, but had a lot of time to think and express their ideas. For example, Mei (parent) explained to me how lessons were managed;

...there is almost no such a class that the teacher conducts lessons monotonously writing the contents on the board as we received. The lesson today is something like; first of all, children set up the objective, work on a task, and then reflect on what they have achieved at the end of the class…

In the parents' eyes, the teaching style was something unique to education today.

Moreover, the idea of having objectives seems to take firm hold in the children's mind. When asked "Why do you think you go to school?", Yuna (girl aged 9) gave me the following opinion:

[I am studying now] to be active when going out into a society. Also, I can build up a friendship [at school].... Well... If I was at home all the time, as mentioned before, I cannot draw a clear line [between play and study]....Er.... I cannot establish or achieve the objectives, so I should go to school.

According to Yuna, because they became upper primary year students,[28] teachers started to tell them to have their own objectives. She told me that there was an inaugural speech from a new teacher on the day, where she got the message, "You should have an objective such as something to achieve today. If you make it, you will try another one. If not, try it again tomorrow." Suzu (girl, aged 9) also said to me that she heard the words, "have your own objective" at the all-school assembly on the first day of academic year. These children's words indicate that today's education emphasizes having an objective and achieving it, which is instilled in children's minds. By doing so, children are expected to study proactively rather than passively.

On the other hand, as Mr Ota (head teacher) and Ms Ueno (teacher) mentioned in introduction, teachers have been trying to give lessons to children that children actively participated in from decades ago, using various techniques such as active listening. Benjamin (1997:4) also states, from the observation in 1989 and 1990, "Teachers appear to have several techniques to make classes feel more participatory." This also proves that the teaching in the past was not all one-way lectures, but teachers tried to let children participate in lessons actively. However, as for parents who went through such an education, the teaching style was something new to them. Why did such a contradiction occur?

The next section will examine the difference between teaching and learning today and in the past and how the role of teacher has changed or not changed to conduct active learning. What techniques do they use to promote children's autonomous learning? How do parents perceive the aim and the practice? How do children understand, feel and practice the lessons influenced by the policy? The following sections focus on their everyday practices and perspectives on the policy.

3. Teachers as Navigators

All the parents and several teachers agreed that the teacher's role has been changed into 'navigator'. Teachers should not tell children what to do, but draw out children's curiosity and interests and elicit questions from children. Mr Ishiguro (teacher) mentioned what he had been told by the

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[28] In Japan, school years are divided in two ways: lower years from Y1 to Y3 (aged 6 to 9) and upper years from Y4-6 (aged10 to 12) or lower years for Y1 (aged 6 and 7) and Y2 (aged 7 and 8), middle years for Y3 (aged 8 and 9) and Y4 (aged 9 and 10) and upper years for Y5 (aged 10 and 11) and Y6 (aged 11 and 12). Here, she used the former definition. Since they had become Y4 students, teachers started to treat them as upper year students.

administrators;

> ......What I am still told is that I talk too much in the class. I was once told the same thing by teacher's consultants from the city board of education at a demonstration lesson. Although I do not have such a case anymore, but the head teacher also used to drop by my class and often commented that I should have not talked that much but rather encouraged children to express their opinions. He told me that it is not a teacher's role to give children knowledge, but to get the deviated ideas they express back on track. I no longer see such a teaching style that a teacher stands in the front of the black board to write the contents while children copy them on their notebooks. Children [today] have discussion proactively and then write their opinions on the board...

Mr Ishiguro stated that teachers today should talk less in most of the subjects. In the case of Math class, when some children finished problems faster, he asked them to teach other children who had not finished. In this way, they could learn the topic profoundly by teaching others. Also, to the whole class, he asked if some children knew how to solve the problems and called them out to explain. All he had to do was to guide children to the right answer. Ms. Ueno (teacher) explained to me about the role of the teacher in such a class;

> [The teacher stands] somewhere in the back [of the classroom], or wherever. Even next to children or in the front [of the classroom.] Well... If the teacher finds the discussion deviating the topic, he/she might put them back on the right track. It seems to me that the teacher also creates the lesson as one of the learners.

The teacher is supposed to be a navigator as well as one of the learners in the lesson. Ms. Ueno also trained children to use some techniques in order to have discussion go smoothly.

> U: Yes. I would like to give children as much discretion as possible, since it is said that teachers should talk as little as possible.
> N: Uh-huh. It is often said recently. Actually, most of the teachers said so.
> U: Teachers should not talk too much, but wait.
> N: When you teach children using the textbook, how do you teach that way?
> U: Well... In the case of Math, the textbook shows the problem today, so first of all, I let children think how to solve the problem by themselves, and then have them share the ideas in group. After that, share in the whole class.... In this way, there is no time for a teacher to talk.
> N: So, they think how to solve the problem by themselves...
> U: Children ask other children like "But, how come you solve the problem that way?" They ask questions one after another. "But, you know..." "What is going on here?" They interact each other and discuss... That is what I want them to do and guide them to do so. Thus, I use hand signs.
> N: What is it?
> U: Use 'paper' to say their own opinions, 'scissor' to add some ideas to what others said and 'stone' to mention something different. As children raise their hands by thinking if their opinions are the same/different, they are trained to listen to others.
> N: Is that right? Before raising their hand…
> U: Before raising their hands, they choose which one to use, wondering if they should use 'scissor' to say different opinions or 'stone' to add some ideas.
> N: Did you create the hand signs by yourself?
> U: Well... Some other teachers also use such signs.
> N: Is there any books on hand signs?
> U: Hand signs.. I think quite a few teachers use them.

Although the teacher tries not to talk much in the classroom, he/she needs to give children some instructions on how to discuss by themselves. Also, in order to avoid the sole show of specific eloquent children, Mr Fujita (teacher) mentioned that it is necessary for teachers to elaborately construct the lessons.

Here is an example of Mr Fujita's lesson. He tried to make the lessons more enjoyable and to make sure everybody had a chance to talk.

> For example... Well... After solving a problem, before checking the answer together, children have a group discussion (4 children/group), and then write the process on a piece of paper and paste it on the white board. After that, one child from each group presents the process. In order to choose the presenter, we use a dice. Each child in the group has been assigned a number in advance, so when the dice shows number one the child with the number will make a presentation. Therefore, all children in the group should have a chance to explain. I give them a simple question and all of four children in each group try hard to explain how to solve the problem. Even memorization of the answer is fine. Well. I try to let them have as many opportunities as possible to speak out for all subjects.

Also, he made the group presentation more fun by giving each group some scores after the presentation. In this way, he let each group compete each other like a game.

The data of observation also shows that even from the early years, children are well-trained to express their opinions, following a rule. In the Year 2 (aged 9 and 10) class that I observed, children who wanted to express their opinions all stood up and gave an answer by turns spontaneously, calling upon a child after presenting his/her opinion, while the teacher wrote down their answers on the blackboard to share the opinions in the classroom. When the noise level went up, the teacher said to children, "*ohanashioshimasu*" ("I am going to talk"). Then, all children got quiet and replied to the teacher together by saying "*hai dōzo*" ("Yes, please"). These phrases were often hard when the classroom got noisy (Fieldnote: 2nd December 2014). Although teaching techniques differ, teachers place importance on motivating children, giving children time to think by themselves and cultivating children's presentation skills.

Since there is a series of patterned procedure for children to conduct discussion/lessons by themselves, it might be questionable if children really have proactive learning. There is a pitfall that children might automatically conduct the discussions by using the same words in patterned practices. Regarding the patterned practice, Yuka (parent) raised the example of reflection time of their school play practice. She described a part of the activity by saying:

> ... [children are trained to say what to say in the discussion] a child asked other children, "Are there any points to be improved or any good points to lead to the next step?" Then, others expressed opinions, saying such as "he/she should have been more expressive." or "his/her

movement should have been more well-defined." After that, the teacher told the children who were pointed out something to be improved, "You should say, "I will keep it in mind." Then, the children repeated the words and said, "I will try my best." Accordingly, children have practices on what to say in which situation.

In this case, children made comments by just choosing the words from the fixed expressions, not with their own words. Therefore, as Mr Ishiguro (teacher) mentioned, teachers prepared a lot of things behind the scene and asked children to decide what to do. If teachers can navigate children well, children may feel as if they did everything by themselves.

Positive and Negative Sides of the Child-Centered Lessons
As far as Yuka (parent) was concerned, educational practice is sometimes more likely to be a patterned activity rather than children's spontaneous learning. In fact, parents had both positive and negative impression on the child-centered lessons. When I asked parents how teachers conducted their lessons and if they noticed something different from the ways of teaching received in their childhood, almost all the parents stated that children seemed to have more opportunities to express their opinions and to lead lessons by themselves. One of parents, Mei (parent of 9 and 11-year-old boys) stated, "I feel that one third of lessons are used for children to express their opinions." Naomi (parent of a 12-year-old girl) also described, "On Parents' Day, I saw children conducting lessons by themselves standing in the front of the classroom. Well, children worked by group and made a presentation in front of the class. Something like that. The teacher appeared to be an assistant." She found such lessons to be promoting children's learning initiatives.

Mei continued, "In the past, a teacher was in charge of the class, for everything. Today, even young children, Year 1 and 2 (aged 6 to 8) are asked to manage the lesson as a chairperson." According to her, lessons appeared to be led by children. By exchanging their opinions, children evaluated their opinions of each other in order to improve the shortcomings by themselves. In such a class, she continued, children were the leaders. A child who expressed an opinion called on another child as the next presenter.

Besides, Karen (parent of a 11-year-old boy) said;
> Well.. I think the big difference between the lesson in the past and today appeared to be, although the contents of class have also been changed, increase in chances for children to express their opinions. When I was a child, [we had] little chance [to do so] ... a teacher spoke and we copied [what the teacher wrote on the board on the notebook]. . . Something like that.

She commented that she had no image of just rote-memorizing something in the class anymore. According to her, "Making presentation may cultivate children's thinking skills, by discussing the topic by group before the presentation." She saw a good teacher listening to children well

and leading children to give the answers which is what he wanted to obtain. Because teachers normally gave children so much time to present their opinions in the lesson, she noticed almost no time for children to note teacher's blackboard demonstration or teacher's talks. Instead of notetaking, other parent such as Mei explained to me that children had a well-designed handout to fill in the blanks. Then, at the end of the class, children wrote the summary of the contents and what they had learned and thought on the handout.

Takako (parent of an 8-year-old girl and an11-year-old boy) also gave an account of such a child-centered class, when we talked about *Ikiruchikara* [zest for living/ power to live] which was one of the key words in the educational reform those days. She said

> Let me see... *Ikiruchikara*, there... One of the most important skills is, what I said before, initiative/autonomy. Children express their own opinions in front of other people. Making a concession if necessary… Um.. When a child become a chair person [in a discussion], he/she tries to put together the various different ideas raised by other children. It depends on how much we expect from school education. However, well, I think school is doing good. Thus, regarding this matter, I am satisfied with it.

In Momo's (mother) son's class (Year 6/ aged 11 and 12), she saw a teacher leading the lesson, but he also tried to pull as many ideas as possible from children. Thus, she got an impression that children had many chances to give their opinions freely. She also said, "Teachers today accept [different kinds of opinions.] They appeared to encourage children with a lot of compliments. Teachers do respect all opinions."

In the case of Emi (parent)'s daughter (aged 9), when her daughter was in a younger year, teachers took charge of the class and elicited children's ideas and lead them to a certain goal. Even so, she said:

> Even in Year 1 [aged 6 and 7], children had a fairly lot of times to express their opinions autonomously. When my daughter became Year 3 [aged 8 and 9], the teacher called on a child to answer the question, first. But after that, the child called on another child, and then the child called on other child. When children raised their hands, they used hand signs to tell how many times they have already been called on. Thus, when a child picks other child, he/she checked the hand signs and called on somebody who have had less chances to express their opinions. I thought that was a good idea and interesting.

As negative sides of those child-centered lessons, some people were concerned about the discrepancy between active and quiet children, and also children tended to have patterned practices of what to say in which situation rather than to give their opinions freely. Mei (parent) said, "...a child calls on another child. Instead of a teacher, children are chairpersons. Thus, children who are active and/or eloquent speak more in the lesson, while quiet children do not get any spotlights on them." Accordingly, even in some activities such as a school play, she saw some children

taking non-speaking part and others having many lines.

Although some parents found the child-centered lessons innovative and promoting children's autonomous learning skills, others had an impression that the lessons may cause some discrepancy in quality and opportunities of learning among children if it is not conducted by teacher's good navigation, assistance or guidance.

Diversified Experience on the Same Lesson

How do children perceive these active lessons? Mana (girl aged 12) and Rosa (girl aged 12)'s class in Year 6 had one of the most innovative classes where two chairpersons on duty led the lesson having discussions and giving the class some assignments for almost all the subjects except for science, music and PE. According to them, the teacher just intervened when discussions got out of control or deviated from the topic. Although they had such innovate lessons, only seven students actively joined the discussion, while others were just listening. Rosa said, "When the teacher gets angry at the situation, I raise my hand." Rosa said to me that she did not like these lessons.

> N: Well, I am wondering which subject you like.
> R: Nothing.
> N: Nothing? Don't you like any subject at school?
> R: None.
> N: You don't like this kind of lesson [pointing at the paper they drew to explain to me about the lesson plan.]
> R: No.
> N: So, you don't like these lessons.
> R: I hate Japanese, especially.
> N: You hate it?
> R: The lesson gets me so tired.
> N: You get tired?
> R: Tired.
> N: But, don't you think it is good to think about various kind of things?
> R: I just keep sitting, rather than thinking.
> M: Ha ha ha...
> R: Then, when somebody raises his/her hand [and expresses his/her opinion], I am just nodding like a head knocker.

Also, both Mana and Rosa mentioned that they disliked the Japanese class, which needed two hours of making lesson plans and five to six more hours to complete one unit.

> R & M: It is time-consuming!
> R: Also, it is so long to keep sitting. If I did not seat neatly or chatted with others, the teacher would scold me. Thus, I should sit straight.

For Rosa, the teacher was an authoritarian figure and preacher. She told me she saw some children chatting with others during the lesson and were told off at by the teacher. Also, when she was not

sitting straight and slouched back on her chair during the lesson, she was scolded severely. She even said, "the teacher has high expectations of us regarding our learning attitude." Even though they experienced such innovative learning, it was so coercive that they seemed to dislike such a learning style. In this class like others discussed above, the teacher seemed to give children instructions how to manage the classroom discussions using several typical phrases. Children were expected to join the discussions actively, but only a few children always spoke out. As one of the parents, Mei was concerned that quiet children do not seem to have an opportunity to say a word in the class. Some unmotivated children got bored and were day-dreaming during the discussions. Since children were scared of the teacher, they pretended to listen and were well-behaved. Thus, when other teachers and parents see the class in a demonstration lesson, they might regard it as very successful class. However, some children did not seem to learn from the class nor were they motivated by such a learning style.

Besides such student-leading lessons, the following activities are practiced daily. In addition to presentation and discussion skills, thinking skills are also necessary skills described in the official documents by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. The following practice can be aimed at cultivating children's thinking skills.

First of all, when children reach upper years such as Year 5 and 6 (aged 10 to 12), they have debates. Satoshi (boy aged 12) and Kai (boy aged 12) in Year 6 told me that in Moral Education class, all students in the same year were gathered an assembly room and shown a video. After that, they were asked to choose which decision they would have made if they had been in that situation.

> S: I often choose the negative side.
> K: You would abandon the person. For example, in the snowy mountain, one person fell in somewhere like a hole, but it grew dark. In this case, should the captain of the party save him or not?
> S: I am on the side which the captain should not save him.
> K: We do something like that. We show our position, pro or con with reasons.

Children also had such debating opportunities in Japanese class in Year 6. Hisayo (girl aged 12) and Aya (girl aged 12) described how the debate was like.

> H: For example, we debate which one is good for breakfast, bread or rice.
> A: Was it a class debate?
> N: Did you have a class debate?
> H: Yes, we did.
> A: It was dealt in one unit.
> H: There was a chair person. Then, the class was divided into two groups, bread eaters and rice eaters. Both sides made their opinions and the chair person was in charge of them. As for the teacher, he was just looking and gave some advice

occasionally.

In Hisayo's class, the classroom teacher was just a bystander, so children decided the topics and their positions, while in Aya's class, the teacher decided the topics and the position of each child. Hisayo found it much fun, while Aya was really bored with the debates.

As their voices show, even in the same activity, children's experiences are different depending on their personality, interest on the subject and the teacher's guidance. In the normal classes, children seem to use a limited discretion since they should follow certain rules or patterns to express their opinions. However, as for some activities, children seemed to have almost full discretion to make decisions. The following section examines how parents and children see such activities.

4. Children's Autonomy

One of the parents, Emi mentioned that children today had much more discretion. According to her, children started to take part in one of the *kakari*, the teams which were responsible for/ in charge of one particular activity from Year 1. In her interpretation, the activity let children learn how to be useful in the class. Children discussed in order to decide what teams/duties were necessary. They made several different kinds of teams such as 'birthdays team' to celebrate each classmate's birthday and 'cartoon team' to draw cartoons to entertain others. Besides the team activities, it was fascinating for her to hear from her daughter that there were several auditions in the school. For example, when students decided the casting of a school play, they had auditions. Moreover, when deciding the members of the pupil's committee, candidates gave a speech to other children. She said, "The school seems to place importance on children's autonomy. It is interesting that there are many occasions for children to express their own opinions, to be approved and to enjoy their discretion."

In the case of parents, they always seem to judge the education today compared to the one in their childhood. Some memory of their childhood could be ambiguous. *Kakari* was not a new activity, but they also had similar experience in their childhood. Since the educational system in higher education is normally much more rigid than the one in the primary school, they may have had the impression of higher education. Thus, after listening to the comment on such activities, I interviewed what children actually thought about them.

In Suzu (girl aged 9)'s class, there were about six teams in charge of particular activity, such as Entertainment Team. Dancing Team, Comedian Team, Birthday Team, Quiz Team and Ecology Team. Suzu had been joining Entertainment Team since Year 1. Her team planed some parties

and games on particular days such as Children's Day and *Setubun*[29].

I asked Suzu and Yuna (both were 9-years-old girls, but go to different schools) if they had full discretion on these activities.

> S: Yes. We can decide everything, although the classroom teacher chooses the date.
> Y: When we, Party Team want to do something, make a plan first and ask the teacher, "When can we do this?" Then, the teacher decides the date. After that, although I forgot to say, in the morning meeting the student on duty asks every day, "Is there anything to tell from Teams?" So, if a team has decided something to do, the leader of the team raises his/her hand [and say], well.... "On XXX, we are going to have XX. Hope you have fun." Something like that.

Regarding these activities, both Suzu and Yuna said to me that they enjoyed taking charge of particular activities with the team and were always looking forward to next events that other teams would organize. In Suzu's class, she engaged in the team activity once a month, while Yuna participated five times a month.

Regarding Rosa's (girl aged 12) and Mana's (girl aged 12) class, they said to me that there were about 10 teams such as Music Team, Newspaper Team, Birthday Team, Pet Sitter Team, Entertainment Team and History Research Team. They also took part in one of the teams. As for upper year students, beside *kakari* activities organized in each class, there were several Y5 and Y6 mixed committee activities. Moreover, a few classroom representatives from Year 3 joined the Student Council. Rosa was in the Newspaper Committee, where she made some school newspaper by scrapping real newspaper articles such as who won in 2016 Rio Summer Olympics, and then posted them on the school building. Mana was a member of the Health & Ecology Committee who filled up the liquid soap and changed the solid soap at sinks. Also, each committee made a presentation and gave some quizzes at the whole-school assembly. When I asked them how they found the activities, both Rosa and Mana said to me, "Bothersome!" I do not know if this is typical for children in adolescence, but when I asked them their impressions or their opinions on some activities, newly graduated children and children in Year 6 often expressed, "Bothersome," although younger children seemed to enjoy such activities. On the other hand, Aya (girl aged 12), a newly graduated child was involved in the Art Committees to decorate the stairways with mosaic art. She stated that she enjoyed the activities a lot with a full discretion, compared to the Year 6 lessons under the coercive classroom teacher.

Although there was no chance to observe such activities of teams and committees, the following

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[29] The last day of winter in the lunar calendar.

activity also gave a full-discretion to children in Year 6.

> The fifth and sixth periods were used for the preparation of the school performance to be held in about 10 days. Each class had a different performance. The class I observed were preparing for a school play. Before children had a rehearsal, the teacher said to the children to keep in mind the following three rules while watching and making a comment on the play:
>> 1: You have to look at the play silently.
>> 2: Praise other people's play (Don't speak ill of others)
>> 3: If you have any questions, raise your hands.
>
> After that, the director within the children group gave directions to the actors and scene shifters regarding what to do. Seeing the play, the teacher made some comments on their acting and asked children what the good points and the points to be modified were. Children started to mention their opinions. Some of them praised other's acting. Others made a comment that it would be better to add some more lines and sound effects. Then, they started to discuss where to add some lines and sound effects to look and sound better.
>
> After the practice, they had a little break. Then, they started to make the scenery and the stage settings. Girls were making the scenery. Four to five girls were actively engaging in making by putting some big paper together with tape. A few were drawing a rough sketch on the paper. A group of girls were just watching and started to play by arranging each other's hair. Boys were dividing into some groups to make the stage settings in the hallway. The teacher just advised the children, "There is a limitation for the materials and the tools to use, so you have to think how much you should use. If you order some materials, it'll take so long to get it." The teacher only said the words and did not warn the girls who played nor give comments on the scenery and stage settings they were making (Field Note: 18th November 2014).

The fieldnote indicates that the teacher just played the least leadership in the activity and respected the children's autonomy. Children's discretion is increasing as they get older. Seeing the practice of a school play of Year 2 in a gym, all children played on the stage in the rehearsal, although in Year 6, only a few children played on the stage. In Year 2, four female teachers instructed children together. The most senior teacher took charge and another two teachers also instructed standing downstage, while one teacher was at the back of the stage to supervise children. In Year 2 the performance was rigidly organized and children were asked to sit side by side silently behind the children who were acting, to wait for their turns. Although there were several times to do choral singing all together during the play, children were asked to stand up together exactly after an actor had said a certain word of his/her lines. The teachers seemed to require a high standard for the performance. Children were directed where to stand on the stage while acting and the voice tones, pitches and volume were checked strictly by the teachers. The chorus was very expressive with the right tune (Field Note: 11th November 2014). Compared to the rigidity of Year 2, Year 6's practice was more relaxing and creative. Active learning increases with less teacher involvement as the children get older. Also, children make use of their strengths to be involved in such activities. For example, some children are good at art, so they deal with set pieces rather than acting. On the other hand, Year 2 children were treated as the same. Individuality may be more respected as they get older, while younger years may be trained to develop their potential equally.

5. Conclusion

According to the Courses of Study (the National Curriculum Guidelines), the goal of education is "to foster the ability to think, to make decisions, to express themselves and other abilities that are necessary to solve problems by using acquired knowledge and skills." Thus, teachers seemed to train children to acquire such skills and abilities. Learning should be children's spontaneous activities, so teachers let children speak as much as possible. Accordingly, the teacher's role has changed from teaching children the existing knowledge to navigating them to think and express their opinions. On the other hand, to let the lesson go smoothly, teachers prepare and plan a lot behind the scene, which is in contradiction to the child-centered approach.

Teachers experienced the education in a *yutori* era as a teacher or a child, so they think that the educational practice has not changed that much, although they noticed today's education places importance on setting up objectives to achieve, finding the problems to solve and having reflections, which was a new practice to them as well. On the other hand, parents who went through the conventional, rigid educational system or had a memory of such an education in their higher education, found the primary school education today more innovative and child-centered. On the contrary, the practice tended to be convergent and patterned, so some parents were concerned that children just expressed their opinions from fixed phrases or displayed model answers without using their own words. It may be doubtful that children have full discretion to conduct lessons or have creative discussions of their own free will. Although the government has been trying to promote individuality, the education today still seems to be conducted under the notion that all children are the same or have the same potential as discussed in Chapter 3.

Children do not know about the education of the past. Even if some of the educational practices seem to be innovative through adults' eyes, without good guidance children cannot learn anything and just get bored. Sometimes, they feel they are forced to do such a practice by the teacher who is an authoritative figure. In that case, they resist the authority quietly by pretending to listen to or to join the activity by just nodding their heads. This chapter examined the various experience of everyday teaching practice by different actors especially focusing on the teaching methods today. The next chapter will examine how actors think education has been changing in the age of globalization.

Chapter 6: MORE STANDARDISED FUTURE-ORIENTED EDUCATION

1. Introduction

As mentioned in Chapter 3 in the age of globalisation, the conventional style of learning such as rote memorization, which was once efficient in producing a high standard workforce in the era of high economic growth, does not fit to a knowledge-based economy. The PISA does not only give simple questions on existing knowledge, but also tests children's application skills of that knowledge to real life (MEXT 2018). Thus, the Japanese government has been trying to promote children's abilities to think, judge and analyse in daily practices such as child-lead-lessons and *sōgō gakushū* (integrated cross-subject learning). On the other hand, as seen in the third section of Chapter 3, educational policies and practices have been standardized globally, which also applies to the domestic educational system to some degree. Also, as mediascapes and ideoscapes discussed in the second section of Chapter 2, the dissemination of such policies and practices are uneven between cosmopolitan cities and rural areas. This chapter will examine what parents, teachers and children think of educational policies and practices today and how they interpret the meaning of primary school education. The chapter consists of four main parts: Introduction, Uniformization and Standardisation, Children as Social Becomings and the Conclusion. The second section discusses how education becomes uniformed and standardised in the city and how it affects teachers' and children's everyday experiences at school. The third section will analyse how children are educated to be future workforce. The next section starts with examining teachers' and parents' opinions on unified teaching.

2. Uniformization and Standardization

The Guidelines for Unified Teaching

In Japan, each city/prefecture chooses the same textbook for all the municipal/prefectural schools within the city/prefecture. Besides that, in the case of the city being researched, they have their own systematic teaching guidelines and the original digital teaching tools made by the city. According to Mr Suzuki (teacher), in order to make sure children in any districts in the city learn the same volume of knowledge and the same contents of study at the same pace, this city has the original teaching guidelines. Mr Ashida (teacher) said the guidelines showed how to organize the class, when to use the teaching materials such as digital textbooks, photos, slides and their original internet network. Some teachers saw this as convenient, while others seemed to regard it as a restriction. Mr Fujita (teacher) did not sound happy with the guidelines, saying, "To tell my truth, the biggest problem is the thick teaching guidelines written by the city. After provided with the

guidelines, I think teaching gets harder."

He also claimed,

> Especially, we are expected to follow the guidelines and conduct lessons. That should be basically just for a reference. However, everyone mostly obeys the guidelines, so all schools [in the city], all classes of the same year have generally the same teaching progress. I believe that it [the progress] should depend on region. Well, academic level differs from catchment to catchment. It sounds odd to me to teach in the same way and at the same pace.

He told me that the teaching guidelines were issued by the city as the teaching plans of how and what to teach every hour and how many hours to teach each subject in a week. Nowadays, the city provides teachers with the online database on the guidelines. Thus, teachers were expected to conduct lessons referring to the guidelines. According to him, the guidelines instruct teacher to have discussions even in Physical Education so that children have physical exercise for only 15 minutes or less in a lesson. Thus, he said that he refused to obey the guidelines:

> We use fairly a lot of time for discussions. I ignored the guidelines, so young teachers often said to me, "You are doing something different from what the teaching guidelines indicate." Although it might be different from the guidelines, I follow the National Teaching Guidelines (The Course of Study). So, er.. for example, in regards of basketball, we cannot enjoy playing that without moving, I think. I place importance on athletic skills pretty much. Thus, in order for children to acquire the skills, it is important for them to run around the playground on regular basis. In recess, they may run around... In this way... Playing dodge ball is also another one. Er... What shall I say... Manual.. Everything is manualized, and teachers tend to just go through it. Indeed, it does not match the reality of children.

The guidelines may make it possible for children to receive the same quality of lessons regardless of the teacher's ability or experience of teaching, because even a new teacher does not need special teaching skills but just has to follow the guidelines and use the materials provided by the city. However, this is contradictory to the key themes of the government's educational policies: 'the emphasis of individuality and diversification' from a few decades ago. From my observation, I only had a few opportunities to observe Physical Education lessons so it was hard to evaluate what they did. In the lessons, I did not see any discussion time. It may be because those lessons were the continuation of the previous lessons and they may have had some opportunity for discussion before or after the lesson or that the teachers with long teaching experience like Mr Fujita had their own teaching styles. The discussion can be related to setting up the objectives to motivate children to learn as written in the previous chapter.

More Freedom in Rural and National Schools

Since teachers are hired by the board of education in the city or the prefecture, many teachers normally stay in the same city unless they resign. Thus, they do not have a chance to see any school in different city/prefectures. However, some of the teachers had some teaching experience

in different cities. Mr Ishiguro told me that children competed with each other freely on Sports Day in the countryside primary school in which he used to work. Moreover, Ms Ueno had some teaching experience in different cities/prefectures, one of the national primary schools[30] and a school in a different prefecture. The followings are some examples of other schools.

Ms. Ueno (teacher) used to work at a national primary school and several municipal schools in the research arena, and then moved to another prefecture to work at a local primary school there. First, she worked at the national school, which placed importance on *sōgō gakushū*. National primary schools are normally research-based, which provide children with advanced education. One day, Ms Ueno saw Year 4 children making a huge mountain in a sand play area. They kept building the mountain and digging a hole to make something similar to a dam. They were learning about a dam in social studies, so this sand mountain generated further interest in dams. After a period of time, they got a chance to visit some local dams to listen to the workers' experience and to learn about the structure of the dams and its merits and demerits. After the fieldwork, some children insisted on seeing the biggest dam in Japan. Thus, Ms. Ueno suggested to them, "If you really want to go, give me a persuasive presentation and show me your passion." Then, they made presentations to her and made plans for a further school trip, investigating the cost of the trip, where to stay and so on. Finally, they could make the school trip a realization and learned about the dam by talking to the staff working there. After returning to school, Ms Ueno asked the children to make a future dam. Some children made a dam with a paper clay dough, while others drafted a design of the dam, by thinking about the merits and the demerits. In this way, national primary schools are allowed to spend more hours conducting deep inquiry; that is, learning comes from the children's own interest. Ms Ueno said that this kind of flexible education would be impossible in the research site because teachers should follow the municipal teaching guidelines. She explained that parents in national primary schools were sending their children with an agreement on the flexible teaching style, so teachers were able to organize the lessons in accordance with children's interests and abilities. She recalled the teachers were making lessons together by learning with children.

Moreover, after moving to a local school in a rural area, Ms Ueno was surprised at the unconstrained hands-on learning approach which was much unlike the rigid educational system in the city being researched. Teachers and children created the lessons together out of curiosity. On

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[30] More than 98 percent of all primary schools are municipal/prefectural schools, a little bit over 1 percent are private schools and about 0.3 percent are national schools.

the other hand, she was bewildered about how to conduct lessons without any elaborated teaching materials as the city had.

Although rural schools may not have a unified education system throughout the prefecture, they have more freedom to teach. The schools in the city have centrally-controlled, unified, so-called advanced education with several digital teaching materials while others in especially rural regions seem to be less systematic but make it possible for teachers to enjoy their discretion to have more free and creative lessons. Actually, some teachers told me that they did not have enough time to do something creative or different from the city-made teaching guidelines. The following section will examine how tight and busy the curriculum is, from the voices of the participants.

Tighter Schedule & Less Freedom

Overall, parents indicated that children today were busier with a tighter schedule than before. Mei (parent) mentioned that schools still saved the time for some activities such as a school play and its practices, although new subjects such as English and Moral Education were introduced and the contents of primary subjects were increased in 2010. Besides, children had more time to express their opinions in group discussions and presentations. Accordingly, she felt that teachers had to accelerate the speed of each unit of study to finish the contents described in the curriculum. She said, "I do not know about the decline of academic abilities, but in reality, I think children are busy genuinely." Even summer holidays got shorter. According to her, children practically had only 20 days off for summer since they had about two-weeks of schooling during the holidays. Also, some parents were surprised to see children having a lot of homework, not only for summer, but also spring holidays, after the end of the academic year when children did not even know who was going to teach them the following year.

Teachers also expressed that it was impossible to teach all the contents thoroughly in such a child-centred manner and in such a limited time, especially after the introduction of new subjects and an increase in the contents of study. Thus, as parents worried, teachers rushed through some of the contents and gave children less chance to have repetitious practices than before. Mr Ishiguro (teacher) claimed,

> In the past, children had more repetitive practices at school so there was less disparity among children [to acquire knowledge]. Moreover, mothers in those days mostly stayed at home and they checked if their children were doing homework while cooking dinner. On the other hand, nowadays the number of dual income families is increasing. Thus, if worse comes to worst, parents come home after children go to bed. Accordingly, parents do not know what children do [after school]. Especially, single-mother families can be more likely to face such a situation...

Mr Yoshino (teacher) also mentioned that some of school catchments were located in a low-income area. In such a region, parents' time was taken up with their paid work rather than child-care. As a result, such school catchments had more low-academic achievers than other regions. Although Mr Ohta (head teacher) mentioned that he used to visit the houses of those low-academic achievers in the evening to help them out with home study a few decades ago, teachers today are occupied with more school affairs besides teaching. Also, teacher's overwork now gets public attention, so teachers cannot visit children's homes to support their homework anymore. On the other hand, as all the parents being interviewed did, wealthy or education-centred parents let their children take extra lessons in tutoring schools after school. This situation creates further disparities among children in wealthy or/and education-centred families and low-income families.

Since there is not enough time for teachers to make sure all children acquire the basic academic proficiency steadily in the lessons, children have more homework to make up the lessons as seen above. Also, because of the increase in the contents of each lesson and the introduction of the new subjects, the total hours of lessons has become longer after 2010. Sayuri (parent) was concerned that from Year 1, children had a long day until the 6th period almost every day. Most of the parents were critical of the situation, stating that especially young children may not be able to concentrate and may become absent-minded in the lessons.

How has the system been changed over the years? Many teachers expressed that they had more freedom in terms of how to organize lessons at the time when *sōgō gakushū* (integrated/interdisciplinary learning) was introduced in 2000, while education today became rigid and inflexible. The hour of *sōgō gakushū* has even reduced to 70 hours after the demise of *yutori* education in 2010 (MEXT 2009), although more than 100 hours were allotted before that (MEXT 2003). Ms Yoshino (teacher) explained to me how the hour was actually used;

> In the case of Year 5, they visit the facility [where children learn how people live by engaging in different kinds of job, earn money, pay tax and buy goods in a virtual city], don't they? Before going there, they have some preparation. Including the excursion day, we spend more than 10 hours of *sōgō gakushū* for the event.

Some teachers told me that they cannot use the full 70 hours for *sōgō gakushū* anymore. As Ms Yoshino said above, in order to conduct some other activities, some of the hours were used. Accordingly, she said, "I think no school tried hard to conduct *sōgō gakushū* as we did before."

When introduced, *sōgō gakushū* got public attention and many researches were unable to devise an effective method for delivering the lessons. According to Cave (2003:96), within a year and

half after the introduction of *sōgō gakushū*, he found more than 160 different books on the subject in a bookstore in Tokyo, the capital of Japan. However, according to the teachers, it was not emphasized anymore. The contents and hours of teaching are fixed in the teaching guidelines, also teachers are overwhelmed by so much paper work which teachers had not had before. Teachers today especially working for the city being studied may tend to have less creative teaching time. Mr. Ohta (head teacher) lamented;

> Even in my previous school, I said to teachers, "[As a head teacher], I will take a responsibility, so you can do whatever you want." However, it is no good after all. Teachers are too busy. I am not sure if they do not have any creativity or any time to do so....

Mr Ishiguro (teacher) described primary school teachers' work as teaching, student guidance and clerical work. The ratio of each task was almost the same. He explained to me there were quite a few reports required to be submitted to the city board of education. Moreover, Mr. Fujita (teacher) expressed the gap between the ideal and the reality. He expressed that the amount of desk work had increased from around 2000. For example, the city board of education required teachers to submit the report on teaching objectives each term. Besides the objectives, there are several surveys and reports to write in order for the city to have educational subsidies from the Ministry of Education. He saw this as annoying. Thus, he said,

> ….. So, I always just copy what I wrote last. I screen the works in my mind. Then, if I think it is not something vital, I just finish it off with a copy, or anyhow I just write "yes" or "no." Well, some teachers take so much time to think what to write. I think it is just a waste of time.

During my observation, I heard the classroom teacher in Year 2 complaining about a weekly lesson plan that was supposed to be submitted to the deputy head teacher by the end of Thursday. According to her. the deputy head teacher checked the contents and submitted the plan to the city board of education.

As seen above, teachers have become so busy with the increase in the contents of teaching, the introduction of the new subjects and the extra paper work to submit. They do not have enough time to finish all the contents written on the teaching guidelines, so they use the hours for *sōgō gakushū*. Also, there is insufficient time to prepare creative lessons for *sōgō gakushū,* so the situation has become difficult, especially in the city where teaching is manualized and where the educational system is somewhat uniformalised.

Although the government had been trying to promote proactive learning and reduced the contents of study in order to give children enough time to have more experience and more inquiry,

the decline of academic achievement shown in PISA triggered a backlash against the previous policy. Moreover, the city itself seems to be quite education-centred. According to teachers being interviewed, the total lesson hours in the city were longer than the ones determined by the government and holidays were shorter than other cities/prefectures. In addition to this, the city had been providing children with an annual academic achievement test in order to check children's understanding and to improve teaching, since long before this the nation-wide academic achievement was launched in 2007.

What do children think about the rigid educational system? They seemed discontent with the tight schedule and the academic-centred curriculum. Talking about school excursion, Kai (boy aged 12) and Satoshi (boy aged 12) stated that they were having off-campus learning activities instead of the excursions they used to have. The curriculum had changed so that children did not seem to have a relaxed excursion anymore, but to have the off-campus learning activity instead. Satoshi described the place to visit for the off-campus learning activity as "somewhere dull."

Aya (girl aged 12) also complained about her school over-night field trip in Year 6

> ... We just compared our local pottery and the one made there. Something like that.
> In the previous school[31], children went to Nagoya to see the TV tower and the Port of Nagoya Public Aquarium, where children enjoyed their free time. In our case, we only had one short time of freedom on a walkway. That was the only free time.

She looked back on the fun over-night school camp where she made an indigo dye T-shirt in the previous year before the school was combined.

Both Hisayo and Aya claimed that the off-campus learning activity was boring. As for the field trip to a science museum, they commented that it was fun because they tried some experiments. However, Aya again said, "The experiment was fun, but other than that, I was very bored under the teacher's severe surveillance."

As a tendency of curriculum reform in 2010 onward, schools may try to promote more learning than playing time. One of the main reasons for such a change was the decline of academic achievement, especially shown on the results of PISA in 2003 and 2006, which brought education back to the forefront, emphasizing knowledge and skills as well as children's learning initiatives.

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[31] Her school was combined with other neighbourhood primary schools and a junior high school two years before the interview was conducted. See the appendix for the detail.

Then, the new national curriculum guidelines (the Course of Study) were established in 2008 and implemented in 2011 and 2012. Ms Uchida (teacher) confessed that the practice was quite challenging:

> Well, it is quite difficult. Er... What is said today is, like, that it is not enough for children to acquire academic abilities, knowledge and skills. In order to apply them they need to have cognitive abilities and the skills to judge and express. In the end, from the top [of the educational authority], [we are pressured to raise children's] academic abilities, academic abilities and academic abilities. Er…which one [do they place importance on]? Now, is it all right to cram knowledge into children? In this way, I am being confused.

Accordingly, although parents mentioned the innovative proactive learning in the interviews as described in the previous chapter, parents and teachers were concerned about the issues of more pressure on academic matters, more conservative policies and inflexible and bureaucratic education, while children expressed their discontent that adults imposed on them what they thought was good to learn but was actually boring to them.

One-Size-Fits-All Education and Uniformity

The issues of one-size-fits-all education and uniformity were often heard in several different questions in the interviews. Mei (parent) gave me an example:

> In Year 6, there is a long-distance road relay in the city, competing between schools. Some of children were selected to join the race, but teachers got all children to practice together with those selected children, standing in the middle and at the four corners of the playground and cheering children by saying "Hang in there!" Everybody runs with the motivated representative runners, without any space to overtake. I think it is all right to encourage everybody to run, but teacher do not know how to deal with some of children unable to keep up pace with others or to give up….

She explained how Japanese education places importance on old virtue such as "never-give-up spirit" and "all-round", saying "If children cannot achieve something, teachers tend to see it as the result of a lack of effort. Every child is expected to reach a certain level of achievement in all subjects, that is all-round skills rather than specialization." Actually, she pointed out laughingly that the school educational objective of the academic year was 'Try out everything and extend your vectors toward different directions." Momo (parent) also said, "I do not know what the school values [are]. I would say it must be all-round skills. It is hard to say specifically what they emphasize. I think they try to have uniformity, rather than putting effort in a specific matter."

Uniformity can also be seen on Sports Day and other special school events. Momo (parent) raised another example, "Regarding a school play, ... Um... Education today does not let anybody [stand out]. Treating everybody the same. Everybody has almost the same length of lines. I feel keenly that way." She mentioned that education today did not rank children in any occasion,

saying "I think education does not make anybody stick out. I assume that education tries to make individual difference invisible." Yuka (parent) described a scene of slanted equality on Sports Day. She said:

> ... In our childhood, we, both fast runners and slow runners competed each other. However, children today were sorted out by their running speed in advance and competed with others with almost the same running speed. In this way, no children really stand out. Unlike the parents' childhood, some parents expressed that there was no place for children to show off their skills under the name of equality.

The issue of equality was also mentioned by teachers. Mr Fujita (teacher) also complained that a weird sense of equality prevailed in P.E. According to the teaching guidelines written by the municipal board of education, teachers should divide children into groups carefully in order not to show any outstanding difference among groups in terms of skills and abilities. Even like basketball, each team should have almost the same degree of strength. Mr Fujita insisted that it should be natural for each group to have different level of skills. It must be a teacher's role to guide a weak team to win. Moreover, on Sports Day, teachers should have children with almost the same running speed compete with each other in order not to make a child feel inferior. Mr Fujita expressed that the guidelines directed teachers to make children's individual difference invisible. He claimed that education today confused such equality with human rights.

Moreover, some parents noticed that teachers tended not to admit different approaches to solving a problem from the one shown on the textbook, or not to teach anything higher than the level of the textbooks. One day, when Yuka (parent) saw her daughter's test, one of the answers was marked wrong though it was correct. Then, she told her daughter to ask her teacher why it was marked as an incorrect answer. The teacher told her daughter that she did not use the unit 'ml (millilitre).' Instead of 'ml,' she used 'l (litre).' Despite no direction to use "ml" on the test, the teacher did not accept the answer. Also, when her daughter, or the friend of hers, solved the problem with a different approach from the one shown on the textbook, the teacher told them, "We have not learned this way yet, so we do not use it for now." Yuka (parent) said, "I thought the teacher wanted to teach children only the ways shown on the textbook or believed it is inadequate to teach something different from them." Karen (parent) also pointed out that despite the emphasis on active learning throughout the lessons, teachers did not allow children to answer deviating from the model answer or to have different approaches to solving the problem. Similar situations were noticed by other parents as well.

On the other hand, Momo (parent) was more optimistic by stating that children participated in the lessons actively while the classroom teacher basically respected any kinds of children's opinions

by praising and encouraging them. Actually, her child, Kai (boy aged 12) also gave quite positive answers in the interview. However, even so, Momo found the lessons at school uninteresting and encouraged no children to stand out. Although uniformization and one-size-fits-all education are the conventional themes in Japanese educational systems, quite a few parents lamented that children in the past could have more chances to be a hero in some scenes. Is that the influence of globalization? The following section will examine the participants' opinions on the impact of globalization on education and the necessary skills required to survive in such a society and also their expectations on schools in order for children to acquire such skills.

3. Children as Social Becomings

Child birth rates are decreasing year by year in Japan, but the number of elderly people is increasing. Children tend to be considered as precious human resources. This section analyses the participants' voices in each group separately to examine how each group of participants interpreted the educational policies influenced by globalization.

Vocational Education – Parents' Views

All the parents interviewed mentioned that the primary schools today were providing children with opportunities to think about their occupations in the future. When asked about their ideas on how the government tried to put one of the core concepts of the educational reform, "*ikiru-chikara*" (zest for living) into practice, many of them mentioned the following two kinds of children's job experiences.

First, in Year 2, children had a chance to visit some shops and/or facilities in the school catchment area to interview people working there, by group. Then, after that, they made a presentation on what they had learned through the interviews. Moreover, according to Karen (parent), children also had a chance to learn how their parents earn and save money, and also to learn and think about what happens if they do not save money. After that, they also studied the roles of the bank and the flow of money.

There were more chances for children to receive vocational education in between, but many parents mentioned in Year 5 children had one-day job experience at a facility (a virtual city). According to Karen (parent) and Mei (parent), the facility had several shops, companies, banks and public institutions such as the police station. The real local and nation-wide big companies, local shops, banks and post offices cooperated with the city government and provided some goods and personnel to teach children how to work there. Before going there, children wrote their CVs to

apply to a job they wanted to get and then had a job interview at school. Children had a chance to learn about different kinds of jobs and employment positions, and to think about their aptitude. After working, children had to pay the tax and could buy some real goods at some stores there, although the variety of goods were limited. In order to make this activity successful, children had to "prepare and reflect" (Momo) or to "choose, research, negotiate, experience and reflect" (Karen) the job. According to Mei (parent), children spent more than 20 hours to prepare, investigate, participate and reflect in the activity. She said,

> So, children learn why they study now [through the experience]. It does not mean merely a vocational training, but is learning for *Ikiruchikara* (zest for living) by thinking what they are studying for. In our childhood, it was all right for us to just study. However, children today are, I think, expected to make a connection to the future.

Momo (parent) also mentioned that education today was giving children a strong work ethic, experience and vision while learning how to deal with money.

How did parent see such activities? Sayuri (parent) said, "… through these kinds of activities, children learn about the social system and have moral education at the same time." Mei (parent) also said, "These activities get children aware that they have to work in the future, look and plan ahead in order to increase their choices of work. If children did not know certain types of work, the types of work would be excluded from their occupational choices in the future."

On the other hand, some parents saw the negative sides of this vocational education as well. Momo appeared to feel uneasy with the situation and said,

> Don't you think the tendency gets stronger than our childhood that children today must have some objectives for their future from the early childhood? It is a trend to place importance on vocational education anyway. I think children are losing their childhood or they cannot enjoy their childlike experience."

Mei also expressed a similar opinion, "School today urges children to look and plan ahead so much. In other words, the government seems to want all children to be a work force in the aging society." Thus, "children today tend to be stability-oriented." Momo also mentioned, "(Education today) emphasizes too much on (thinking about) future." She described that education and even society emphasized nurturing children to be financially independent in the future so that children today were too serious. She lamented that even if a child had a chance to go abroad, he or she would most likely refuse to go and instead save the money. Almost all parents expressed that education was more or less related to economy. Yuka (parent) said, "…Rather than cultivating the skills of individuals to live an enriched life, I think the government tries to create better

human resources, … such as strong human being to fight against other companies or the rival in the political world.

Although parents had both positive and negative views on such vocational activities, they regarded such activities as one of the key events for children to think about their futures. How did the actual practitioners, the children, interpret such activities?

Blurred Vision -Children's Voices

Regarding vocational education, children explained that there were more activities than parents noticed: some opportunities to think about their futures every year.

According to Suzu (girl aged 9) and Yuna (girl aged 9), although they went to different schools, from Year 1, there was an opportunity to present what their dreams were. In Year 2, all the children mentioned that they had a chance to visit stores, offices, public facilities in their school district by group and interview people working there, as parents mentioned above. According to Aya (girl aged 12),

> We discussed where to visit, the contents of interviews and which group to join in the whole class. First, we chose the leader [of the groups]. Then, the leaders had a meeting to decide which group visits which stores/facilities. After that, the leaders told the whole class about their plan. Everybody choses which group to join.

All the children told me that they went to visit some stores in order to interview people working there.

In Year 3, children had an opportunity to express their dreams. According to Yuna (girl aged 9),

> Well... When I became Year 3, I drew my portrait on the center of paper and made a presentation about my future [as a part of self-introduction], in order to have others [new classmates] get to know me. I wrote that [my dream] on [by the portrait], and then presented. Er... Even if my dream changes later, nobody will not say anything.

Even in Suzu's (girl aged 9) school, she did a similar thing.

In Year 4, children had another chance to present their dream in front of the parents. Rosa (girl aged 12) and Mana (girl aged 12) told me what they did:

> R: Er.. First, I wrote something like "I will be a pâtissier" on paper. Also, I presented my dream car and place to live by putting some photos on. Lastly, I added "I want to bake cake like this."
> N: Did you put it up on the wall like a poster?
> R: Yeah.
> M: We will make a presentation showing the paper.
> N: Is that so? Then, do you think your mindset has changed after the presentation?
> M: No, nothing different.

N: Nothing different. So, you both have the same kind of ....
M: I did not have any dream, so I made it up for that moment.
R: I had nothing, so I did it anyhow.

Those Year 3 and 4 activities portray that children appeared to make up their future dreams instantly for the activities, rather than having a true desire to be like that. Although those activities gave them a chance to think about their futures, it may be doubtful that children contemplate the issue sincerely.

In Year 5, in this research site, as mentioned in the interviews with parents, children have a chance to work at a miniature city. Although some parents gave me an impression that the activity was one of big events in children's school life, children's impressions were different. Hisayo (girl aged 12) and Aya (girl aged 12) explained to me what was like;

N: Some of parents mentioned that primary school today emphasizes vocational education. What do you think?
A: XYZ City ? Was it?
H: Oh, yes. We did.
N: From your points of view, wasn't that a big event?
A: Just temporal.
¦ [snip]
N: How did you find it? Did you learn a lot of things?
A & H: Much fun!
A: It was fun. That's it.
H: What was the most bothersome was to explain the reason why I wanted to engage in the occupation.
A: There was a survey, wasn't it?
N: You had a job interview, right?
A: No, I didn't.
N: No interview?
H: Yes, I did.
A: When a few people want to take the same job, there was an interview, though.
H: I filled up the application form and submitted to the teacher. Then, the teacher decided who took which job.

From a few weeks before going to XYZ City, they started to prepare for that. According to Aya, besides the decision of the occupation, they learned something related to the activity such as how money is circulated. In the case of the school being observed, a tax accountant came to the school to give a whole Year 6 children a lecture on the taxation system. Not only working at the virtual city, children seemed to lean how society is functioning.

In Satoshi (boy aged 12) and Kai (boy aged 12)'s case, Kai appeared to be really excited to tell me what he did in XYZ City, while Satoshi showed rather little interest in the experience.

K: Last year, in Year 5, we went to XYZ City, which was fascinating.
N: What did you find it interesting particularly?

> K: It was like a job experience, so we could use several real machines.

Kai was working at a bank in the city and dealing with participants' money including their salaries, while Satoshi worked at a security company. Kai wanted to learn how banks work, while Satoshi did not have any desire to take a particular occupation. Thus, in the job interview, Satoshi asked the teacher what job was left and just took the leftover. Although he worked at a security company, he said, "It was not really interesting. Well, like other stores, I got the impression that the security company were just selling their goods." He just had a negative impression on the experience, while Kai wished to go there again.

Throughout the primary program, children had several chances to think about their future and possible occupations. Some children found the opportunities quite useful and fun, while others just made shift to get the activity and its presentation done. As shown, what adults think of as good, does not necessarily inspire children.

Economization of Education in Global Era -Teachers' Perspectives

In order to raise children who can survive in global society, education is closely related to economy. Although primary school education itself does not directly connect to the economy, some teachers regarded that education took an important role in maintaining the sustainable economic power of Japan. Mr Ishiguro (teacher) mentioned that it was necessary to keep up children's academic level to maintain international competitiveness. Also, in regards of the aim of education, Ms Ueno (teacher) stated, "I want children to be somebody necessary to their working place." She also mentioned communication skills would be necessary as the 21st century skills:

> When a company hires people, they do not always want high academic achievers but rather someone who can actively communicate with others and collaborate with colleagues. […] And someone with good presentation skills.

As seen in Chapter 2, economization of education is one of key concepts on the globalisation of education. Education aims at producing human capital by providing children with teaching and guidance to acquire the necessary skills in a global economy. The concept pervades even primary and secondary school systems (Stepen 1995, Liss 2013). Moreover, in around 2004, the word, NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) got public attention and still remained in people's mind. These backgrounds seemed to push the government to emphasise career education and employability skills. While cultivating children's English language abilities and communication skills, the government tries to promote children's sense of pursuing their careers by making them aware of how they can take part in a society and letting them have some job experience as seen above.

Ms Yoshino used to teach at a school which focused on career education. She explained to me what the career education was:

Y: So, career education let children have self-esteem by acknowledging what they are doing is helpful to others. That is career education. It is not exactly equal with career education, but it is a start. I heard that career education was introduced at the time NEET (Not in employment, education or training) got public attention. Career education has started since then.

N: Is that so?

Y: The career education aims at trying not to create such NEETs who are indecisive and do not have any jobs. Also, it brings children's self-esteem by acknowledging who they are and finding themselves valued in the society. That is career education, I believe, after having provided children some career education in *sōgō gakushū* (cross-subjects/integrated learning) and leant what career education should be [in the teacher's seminars].

Her opinion is quite unique. One of her schools where she had worked before was assigned as a research school for career education. According to her, as seen above, the aims of career education, such as being useful and helpful in the society, are inserted in everyday educational practice such as assigned duties, although parents and children paid attention to particular vocational education as career education.

On the other hand, Mr Ishiguro (teacher) referred to the two specific working experiences as career education while talking about educational policies today;

... One of the key concepts of *ikiruchikara* (zest for living/ power to live) is referred to career education. Occupation, your own future job and so on. There are a lot more opportunities to learn various kinds of occupations. At Year 5, children go to XYZ City (where children have authentic work experience with support of local companies). At Year 2 at junior high school [Year 8], children actually work at a real company or a real shop for three days. They experience some occupations. I think there are more opportunity to have career education today than the past.

He saw education tended to aim at securing future work force.

Mr Suzuki (teacher) also displayed an interesting example of career education. When he taught Year 6 children, he was working as a chief of *sōgō gakushū* and did product development with children. Since the school was small, Year 5 and 6 children worked together to make souvenirs for the city:

First, we investigated what kind of souvenirs we have in this city. Then, children were divided into groups, discussed what souvenirs they want to make in the group and made a presentation. After that, they actually made the sample with clay or paper to show them to manufacturers, who would evaluate the samples. In fact, we called them dream stationery. Well, we made stationery. Er…Big companies.. Komada, Yayoi (pseudonyms) and... Which companies came? I forgot. The PR officers from a few companies came to the school..

They spent about half a year, (29 to 30 lesson hours) for this activity. The lesson was conducted

once or twice a week, and sometimes used two consecutive hours. They started before summer holidays and finished the presentation in December. Mr Suzuki's career education in *sōgō gaku-shū* was quite unique. Such a lesson was realized because the class size was much smaller than a regular class, and Mr Suzuki himself was young and really enthusiastic and passionate about new learning. However, as seen in the difference between Ms Yoshino's and Mr Ishiguro's views, the understanding of career education seemed to vary among the teachers depending on how much knowledge they had on such education.

Such a discrepancy can be seen in ICT education as well. As one of employability skills at the age of globalisation, ICT education is essential. Mr Ishiguro refereed ICT education as one of the 21ˢᵗ century skills besides problem-solving skills. Many of the teachers acknowledged that ICT skills were important, but not everybody seemed to take an active part in such education. In Mr Suzuki's case, he was a chief of ICT education at his new school when I interviewed. He said,

> In order to cultivate children's logical thinking, programming will be introduced. Nowadays, it is often said that about 30 percent of the present occupations will disappear and new occupations will come out.

Rapid globalization requires the urgent acquirement of new technology. According to the teachers, in this city, ICT teaching tools had already developed and they had a municipal ICT centre providing teachers and children with many teaching and learning materials such as video clips, pictures and photos. Textbook companies also had digital textbooks to show some photos related to the contents of some chapters. In terms of programming education, it was still developing since not many teachers were familiar with these skills, and needed to be improved before the introduction of the ICT education as a compulsory requirement in 2020. Since ICT education is actually strongly related to the global economy, according to Mr Suziki, the government was recruiting some leading companies to give children special lectures on ICT at school or to delegate specialists to teach children ICT skills. However, it was still an ongoing process and there were still many outstanding problems including training of teachers and ICT ethics.

The teachers' perspectives on vocational education show that the dissemination of the knowledge and skills seemed to be uneven, like the ideoscapes discussed in Chapter 2. Some teachers had enough knowledge and skills to provide children with good career education, while others had not yet had them. Although the city tried to provide children with equal quality and opportunity of education, in reality it seemed to be difficult. Also, there were some disparities among schools

in terms of accessibility of new educational information, although teaching methods were systematically unified in the city. Mr Ohta (head teacher) said, "some schools in inconvenient school catchments are less accessible to new contemporary educational information." Although the city had an education centre in a downtown area and it opened until 9 pm, it was still a burden for teachers with busy schedules to commute to the centre to collect data or to attend the educational seminars there. As globalization is progressing, we can access the information easily online. However, the physical accessibility of information and teacher's knowledge and skills seem to affect the quality of education.

4. Conclusion

As with the case of other countries in globalization, educational policies and practices in Japan are getting more standardised and uniformalised. Along with educational and economic competition with other countries in globalisation, the contents of learning have been increased and new subjects have been introduced. Besides, the learning styles, such as discussion and presentation, have not been changed so the curriculum has become tighter and children have longer school days.

Regarding the case of the city being studied, in order to disseminate the knowledge and the skills of teaching and to provide all children in the city with the same volume of learning at the same pace, the original teaching guidelines were created to systemise and manualise the teaching. While children are able to have the same quality of learning regardless of teacher's ability, the teaching styles ignore children's individual differences, which are contradictory to individuality and diversification having been promoted in a few decades by the central government. Moreover, because of the tight schedule of the curriculum, children do not have enough repetitive practice to acquire the knowledge and the skills as they had in the past, which relies on home education now. Thus, children today have more homework to review what they have learned and have to do more practice on their own, which causes disparity between high and low academic achievers especially in poor families.

Education today is goal/future-oriented, treating children as social becoming. Unlike education in the past, children today have more opportunities to learn about different kinds of jobs and to have some job experience. Through career education, children are supposed to learn how to contribute to society as a citizen, to study their own culture and business, to raise their employability and to have opportunities to think about their own career. However, what adults think of as good

is not always effective for children's learning. If teachers do not have the proficiency to guide children well, children are not motivated to learn anything. A Teacher's passion, knowledge and skills are the keys to improve the quality of teaching.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

1. Investigation of Everyday Educational Experience in the Global Era

Globalisation affects educational policies around the world. Japan is not exceptional. If the origin of globalisation is defined as the 1980s, the Japanese educational system has been modified several times since then. This thesis focused on the everyday experience of the actual educational practitioners: teachers, parents and children in Japan by examining the following three issues:

1. The skills and knowledge those educational practitioners emphasise in the learning process in the contemporary period
2. The reasons for them to focus on such skills and knowledge
3. Their perspectives on and reactions to the policies and the practices corresponding with globalisation.

School education cannot be carried out only by teachers and children, it must also be supported by parents. Especially Japanese education emphasises the linkage between school, community and family so that parents also play an active role in school education. Therefore, their parents' perspectives are supposed to have a significant impact on the policy making process as well. Accordingly, it is worthwhile examining the combined perspectives of those three groups of actors.

This chapter is composed of four main parts: this introduction, the summary of the key findings, cultural politics of education and the limitations of this research and the suggestions for further research. The first section will examine the research participants' perspectives on the skills and knowledge emphasised in contemporary education. Then, the discussion moves its focus on to the tighter curriculum affected by globalisation. Along with the competitive education, children are treated as social becoings rather than social beings. In order to examine how such images of children are established in the process of globalisation, the third section deals with the features of future-oriented education. After the discussion on future-oriented education, the cultural politics of education is examined, especially by focusing on children and childhood. The final section reflects on the research as a whole and gives the readers some suggestions for further research.

2. Summary of Key Findings

The Skills and Knowledge Emphasised in the Contemporary Education

Firstly, this section summarizes the main points that have been made in the previous chapters. Education has been emphasising a child-centred approach, such as autonomous and active learning in order to cultivate children's abilities to think, judge and express themselves, with the denial of rote memorisation and test-based and a strictly standardized model of education. Although

such education has been promoted since the emergence of globalisation in the 1980s, as the BBC article in 2000 referred to in Chapter 3 reports, business leaders, critics and parents were not satisfied with education, which was still considered to be incapable of promoting children's creativity or broadening their horizons, but accused of merely cramming knowledge into children. Accordingly, in the reform of 2000, the contents and the hours of lessons were decreased and more than 100 hours of *sōgo gakushū* (integrated/cross-subjects learning) were introduced to promote children's learning initiatives, creativity and autonomous learning skills. However, after the PISA shock in 2003, Japanese education has been going back to emphasise children's academic achievement. After that, the contents and the number of lesson hours have been increased again even from Year 1, while the educational policy continues to emphasise problem-solving skills and balancing the attainment of knowledge and the cultivation of the children's skills to think, judge and express themselves.

Some teachers with long teaching careers expressed that the aim and the methods of teaching had not changed before or after the reform, since they had been giving children several opportunities to think and express their opinions in their lessons even before the recent reform. Teachers have been making a lot of effort to let children participate in lessons actively and avoid giving children one-way lectures. Other teachers in their 40s, 30s and late 20s mentioned that they were trying not to speak too much in their lessons and were just taking the role of navigators to guide the child-led lessons in the right direction. Also, they stated that it was common to set up the objectives at the beginning of each lesson and reflect on what they had learned at the end of the lessons. In order for children to learn proactively, the teachers had children think about the reasons why they were learning the specific subject and reflect on what they had learned and should study further. Teachers were expected to have such a teaching style even for Physical Education. A teacher found it ridiculous to have only 15 minutes of physical activity due to discussions before and after the activity and to setting up the objectives, and carrying out reflection. He just ignored the teaching guidelines and taught children in the way he had been teaching. Even in my observation, I did not see any discussions in Physical Education lessons. Those teachers placed importance on building up children's physical skills rather than following the guidelines. Teachers, especially the ones with long teaching careers are not just the followers of the municipal teaching guidelines, but seemed to modify some of the practices by themselves.

Parents also noted that education today gave their children much more time to express themselves and to have child-led lessons, than the education in their childhoods. Some of the parents seemed

to be impressed by seeing even young children (aged 6 and 7) in charge of the lesson as a chairperson. Those parents praised such lessons for promoting children's learning initiatives and cultivating children's leadership, autonomous learning, thinking and presentation skills. On the contrary, some parents criticised that such learning styles would broaden the disparity between active and quiet children in terms of quality and opportunities of learning. Also, they saw children just following patterned practices and having no spontaneous learning through their own curiosity. Although parents saw the same kind of child-centred learning, they viewed it differently. Their perspectives may have been influenced by the voices of their own children to some degree. How did child participants perceive the learning style? The following is the summary of children's experience:

Some children expressed that they felt imposed upon to conduct child-led lessons and only a few children actively participated in the lesson. Because they were afraid of the teacher as the authority figure, they pretended to listen and/or participate in the lesson. According to them, children were assigned to be a chairperson to lead the lesson in turn and just repeat the paternalized practice. Children knew what they should have said and in which situation. Some unmotivated children got bored and were day-dreaming during the discussions. On the other hand, in some of the lessons where children were given more discretion to learn, such as debating and inquiry-based learning, most of the children regarded the lessons enjoyable. A girl (aged 12) stated that when the topic and the group were decided by the teacher, she did not have any interest in the study. Accordingly, children claimed that they wanted to have lessons driven by their own curiosities rather than ostensibly child-led learning.

Tighter and Busier Schedules

Parents and teachers mentioned in the interviews the curriculum has become tighter and busier. According to some teachers, some of the hours of *sōgo gakushū* (integrated/cross-subjects learning) tended to be used for some other activities due to the tight schedule and were not given high priority any more. Although the MEXT stresses application-based learning, teachers may not have enough time to conduct it as expected.

In the city being researched, in order for teachers to provide children with effective lessons, the city had provided the original teaching guidelines with lessons plans and digital teaching materials, which decided the hours and the contents of teaching. That may deprive teachers from having the freedom and discretion to teach, although giving children the same contents and quality of

lessons regardless of the teacher's ability and skills to teach. A few teachers with teaching experience in different cities/prefectures indicated that schools in provincial cities/prefectures had more freedom in terms of the ways of teaching and the choice of teaching materials.

Moreover, some teachers expressed concerns that education today enhanced the difference between high and low academic achievers, especially increases in low academic achievers among poor families, because there were less repetitive practices in the lessons due to the emphasis on active learning such as presentations and discussions in such a busy and tight curriculum. The repetitive practices were often assigned for homework, so they were not coped with well by children from poor families whose parents did not have time to see children's homework or did not place importance on education. Education may have become saturated with too many requirements and much expectation.

Future-Oriented Education

In school, children are taught to be future parents and economic competitors in order to establish a stable democratic order. Education tends to be future-oriented and treats children as social-becomings. As the interviews show, from early childhood, children are instilled with the notion of becoming members of the future workforce. Children seem to have less time to enjoy their childhood by simply playing and socialising with others. The curriculum has become tighter and stresses learning rather than playing. As seen in Chapter 6, children claimed that they no longer enjoyed school trips, since they did not have time to explore something freely with their own interest. The current education system seems to place too much emphasis on the meaning, so teachers always set up the objectives and guide children to meet the objectives. Everything seems to be structured and it actually constrains children and even the teachers themselves.

As seen in Chapter 1, the idea of the economization of education pervades even primary and secondary school systems globally to educate children to be human capital in the global economy. This tendency can be supported not only by school education but by home such as parents' and caregivers' investment in education for their children. In the case of the child participants and the children of the parent participants, they were busy with after school lessons/activities such as private tutoring schools and private lessons like English, Igo, music, swimming, Japanese chess and science experiment laboratories. Most of the tutoring schools and lessons were chosen and decided by parents, rather than children. Those investments in children create further gaps between wealthy and poor children in terms of academic achievements and opportunities to have advanced education and/or to acquire extra skills.

All parents expressed that academic abilities would be something measurable by tests and could be described by scores. Although schools provided children with long lesson hours every day, parents did not seem to feel that was enough. Momo (parent) stated that the high level of academic achievement, "connects to happiness" and, "If children have a certain level of academic achievement, they can gain a certain social and economic status." In other words, parents valued improving children's academic ability, knowledge and skills because as Yuka (parent) said, "High academic ability/knowledge increases the career options." and as Karen (parent) said, "It makes children's dreams come true."

All the parents seemed to believe, as Yuka (parent) stated, "Academic meritocracy still exists." In Karen's (parent) case, she loved science and took her son to science museums very often since he was small. Because of her influence, her son desired to be a scientist. She always said to her son,

> In order to be a scientist, you should go to a university where you can study science and enter the company to make use of the knowledge. If you are not accepted by such a university or a company, you cannot even stand at the start line. Thus, you should study. Even English language skills, you need. In order to be a true scientist, you have to write a paper in English and to read research papers written in English.

She wished her son to work at a so-called stable company in the future.

Momo (parent) said:

> Regarding school education, people believe a certain level of academic achievement brings a certain level of happiness so that parents send children to private tutoring schools after school.... In the future, parents believe, when children reach a certain high academic level, they gain a certain social status. Thus, parents encourage their children to study. That is what all we can do, although we are not sure what our children will be in the future. ... When children go on to a good school, they can have better personal connections… Thus, parents would like to send children to better school. I am not sure if it is success for the children at the end.

Mei, Mayumi, Sayuri and Takako described that success would mean making use of the processional skills and to live independently. Almost all the parents being interviewed said that they did not expect too much from municipal schools in terms of academic matters. They believed that school was the place for children to learn how to socialize with each other and to acquire basic knowledge and skills, including presentation and discussion skills. When they wanted children to acquire further specific skills, they just sent children to a specific school/lesson after school. In this way, children have less and less time to play even after school. Not only do schools promote children as social-becomings, but parents may also enforce that when thinking about their children's futures.

The rules and policies are social determinants that constrain children and shape their childhood,

but parents' desires when raising their children, and what they want their children to be in the future, also affect children's childhoods. Education has become more privatized in neoliberal globalisation. In the competitive global society, wealthy families can invest much more money in their children, especially due to the low birth rate, while poor families do not have time to look after their children at home. Accordingly, the gap between the wealthy and the poor seems to have a great influence on children's lives and their academic achievements.

3. Cultural Politics of Education

One of the key contributions of my thesis was giving a voice to children. Although this thesis regards children as active agents who are able to reproduce and modify the world, societies are still structured by adults and children have little power to change societies directly or independently. Although children are the important educational practitioners as well as teachers and parents, their voices are often ignored under the image of innocence, immatureness and ignorance. Children are protected and ensured to receive proper education at school. On the other hand, some scholars in childhood studies (James, Jenks and Prout 1998, Hendrick 1997, James and James 2004) point out that children are also constrained and controlled by legal policies and practices by adults. At school, educational policies restrict children's freedom by school rules and authoritative figures.

Educational policies are normally established based on a particular idea of children and childhood, mainly based on children's biological growth, disdaining other factors such as gender, ethnicity, class and other social and cultural backgrounds. In Japan, every educational practice seems to be conducted based on the idea: children as a blank slate. In the interviews, children seemed to be treated equally regardless of difference of individual abilities. Some parents claimed that Japanese education placed importance on "all-round skills" rather than cultivating individual skills. Actually, observing Japanese primary school classes, White (1987:115) mentions "the pedagogies of a Japanese elementary school are based on the idea that all children are equal in potential." Tsuneyoshi (2008) also states, instead of children's individual innate ability, school emphasises children's equal academic achievement. Thus, although individuality has been stressed, the education still provides "one-size-fits-all" policies and practices.

Policies are made by adults based on adults' perspectives on what is the best interest of children, which rarely reflect on children's voice. As seen above, child-led lessons were praised by adults, but children just followed the patterned procedure of how to conduct lessons, discussions and presentations. Some parents also regarded educational practices to be paternalized rather than

from children's spontaneous learning. Moreover, regarding some activities such as the presentation of children's dreams every year, on several occasions, adults found it brilliant for children to think about their future while some children just went along with things by making up temporal dreams for the presentation, as seen in Chapter 6. Children claimed some activities were boring, though adults saw them innovative, effective and useful.

Although education today places stress on motivating children to learn, as seen in the previous section, such learning does not seem to come from children's own interests. Satoshi and Kai (boys aged 12) said to me that they hardly had any discretion in learning. Also, Aya and Hisayo (girls aged 12) mentioned, they did not see any connections between different subjects, though they had cross-subjects/integrated learning lessons. Kai said, "I want to have more enquiry-based learning' such as cross-subjects/ integrated learning." Also, he found most of the lessons were conducted at the pace of low academic achievers, so he sounded bored by the lessons. Moreover, teachers seem to be monitored by the city board of education and do not have much discretion in what to teach, how many hours to be used for a subject, which materials to use and so on. It is hard for teachers to meet children's individual needs, but may be necessary for them to give children more time to inquire into something profoundly by themselves. In order to do so, the curriculum should be loosened to give teachers and children more discretion in what to learn, or have some streamed lessons in order to meet children's individual ability.

4. Limitation of the Research and Suggestion for Further Research

There were several limitations regarding the research. Regarding the sampling, it was difficult to have an even number of participants in each group. Although it was proposed to have 30 participants in total, there were several obstacles, such as bureaucracy among teachers and the busy schedules of all groups of actors. The total number of participants became 23 in the two years of recruitment. Thus, the sampling size was small. Secondly, the sampling became somewhat biased due to the snowball sampling and the personal networks used to invite participants. In the case of this research, most of the participants were economically stable, despite the fact that municipal schools consist of students from various socio-economic backgrounds. Besides, it was planned to recruit participants from different school districts around the city, four parents and three children were from the same school districts because of the snowball sampling and the personal networks.

Reflecting on the sampling process, it may have been easier and more beneficial for me to focus on one specific school, in order to recruit the participants and even to have an observation, because

the sample size was not so large and the process got even harder to recruit participants from different school districts. Having focused on one specific school, it could have been possible for me to invite many more participants and to have a clearer understanding of the educational system of the school. Moreover, I realised that it might have been smoother for me to get into the field and recruit teachers by being affiliated with an educational research institute or a graduate school in Japan to have some connections to schools. I found the Japanese school system bureaucratic, hierarchical and somewhat exclusive because schools did not welcome the researcher unknown to them. As seen in the Methodology chapter, head teachers/ teachers often gave me a suspicious gaze as an outsider or a critic of the Japanese educational system, which made it difficult to use snowball sampling in order to recruit teachers and to get a permission to observe their schools.

In terms of the observation, because of my role as a language assistant for two children from Indonesia in Year 2 and 6, time was limited for me to observe the lessons freely and to take field notes while interpreting the contents of each lesson to those children. Besides, it was difficult to find consistency in the field notes without any discretion to choose which lesson to observe. Therefore, it could not be one of my main research methods but remained as a subsidiary method, although the observation gave me deep insight and understanding of the interview data. In order to have an observation as a main method, the observation should have been the main work in the research arena, rather than catching glimpses by working as a language assistant.

The new curriculum has just been implemented from 2020 with the official introduction of new required subjects such as English, Moral Education and Computer Programming. The curriculum has become even tighter with the introduction of those subjects. On the other hand, the most recent educational policy (MEXT 2021) emphasises teaching children by meeting individual needs in order to raise individual potential, and giving children the opportunities to tackle the specific tasks and to perform learning activities in corresponding to their own curiosity, interest and initiative. Also, it requires teachers to provide children with collaborative study via inquiry-based and hands-on learning. In addition, it expects all children to acquire the necessary skills regardless of the socio-economic differences of family backgrounds. The contents of the policy sound superb but it may be challenging to realize this ideal. There are so many problems to overcome before making the ideal of policy realize in everyday practice. The size of the class should be smaller for teachers to track individual academic growth and to give them appropriate tasks and activities in accordance with their abilities and interests. As seen in the previous chapter, teachers have already been so busy with the tight schedule and the clerical work. There seems to be no room for them to give lessons to meet children's individual needs. It may be the time to

reduce teacher's burdens especially the paper work and to increase in their discretion in teaching methods and the choice of teaching materials. Also, although it is difficult in such a tight schedule, the curriculum should give children more time to learn autonomously while having them acquire the basic knowledge and skills, and also change the one-fits-all teaching styles by altering the idea of children as blank slates. Even though the policy is changed, people's attitude, perspectives and customs cannot be changed right away. 'Individuality' has been the focus from the 1980s, but does not seem to be reflected in everyday educational practices. Further research will be needed to investigate how the new policy is adopted in everyday practice from now on.

APPENDICIES

1. **Key Competencies defined by OECD**

   1: individuals need to be able to use a wide range of tools for interacting effectively with the environment: both physical ones such as information technology and socio-cultural ones such as the use of language
   2. [I]n an increasingly interdependent world, individuals need to be able to engage with others, and since they will encounter people from a range of back grounds, it is important that they are able to interact in heterogeneous group"
   3. individuals needs to be able to take responsibility for managing their own lives, situate their lives in the broader social context and act autonomously (OECD 2005:5).

2. **The Measurable Aspects of 10 Skills (The 21st Century Skills)**

   Ways of Thinking
   Creativity and innovation
   Critical thinking, problem solving, decision making
   Learning to learn, metacognition
   Ways of Working
   Communication
   Collaboration (teamwork)
   Tools for Working
   Information literacy (includes research on sources, evidence, biases, etc.)
   ICT literacy
   Living in the World
   Citizenship – local and global
   Life and career
   Personal & social responsibility – including cultural awareness and competence

3. **The Eight Points to Fulfil the Contents of Learning**

   1. Cultivating the ability of thinking, judging, expressing
   2. Enriching traditional cultural education
   3. Emphasizing moral education throughout the whole educational activities in school
   4. Developing sound body
   5. Enhancing math & science education
   6. Introducing foreign language activities into primary schools
   7. Enriching activities for experience
   8. Supporting education corresponding to social development, such as environmental education, consumer education, home economics and dietary education

4. **Additional Information on Participants**

Additional Information on Teachers

Mr Suzuki was in his late 20s, the youngest teacher I interviewed. He had been working as a classroom teacher at a municipal primary school for two years. Before that, he had worked at two different kinds of primary schools: at a primary school in a hospital for a year and at a primary school for some children with problematic behaviours such as truancy for two years. When I

interviewed him, he was still studying to obtain the teacher's license (he actually obtained it shortly after the interview), while working as a classroom teacher for Year 5 children.

Ms Ueno was formerly my daughter's Year 1 classroom teacher. Although she was in her early 30s, she had already had some unique experiences in different schools. She had been working at private, national and municipal schools in three different cities: a private primary school in the city being researched for three years, a municipal primary school in the city for two years, another municipal primary school in the city for two years and a national primary school in a neighbouring city for two years. After that, she went back to a post-graduate school to study for two years to obtain a master's degree in education, and following that, worked at a municipal school in the city being studied another year. When I interviewed her, she had moved to a city in the East of Japan and was working at a municipal school there.

Mr Ashida was a curriculum coordinator at a municipal school, where I also interviewed the head teacher, Mr Ohta. He was in his late thirties. He had been working for seven years at the school after working at the previous municipal school for eight years.

Mr Ishiguro was around forty years of age. It was his 11th year of working at a secondary school but he used to work at several different municipal and private, primary and secondary schools in the city as well as in another city/prefecture for 9 years. Then, at the time of my interview with him, he was working as a secondary teacher again.

Ms Yoshino worked at municipal primary schools for 37 years which included three separate years of maternity leave (one year each for three children). She had started to work at a private primary school a year before I interviewed her. She was in her late 50s, maybe almost 60. She had worked for several municipal primary schools as a classroom teacher, a music teacher, a science teacher and a curriculum coordinator in the research area. She was a Year 2 classroom teacher at the school being observed.

Mr Ohta was a head teacher at a school. When I interviewed him, it was the final year before his retirement, so he was nearly at the age of 60. He had worked at his first municipal primary school for 18 years: as an assistant classroom teacher (for 13 years) dealing with an entire year of students (for 3 years) and as a curriculum coordinator (for 2 years). Then, he worked at the board of education in the research area for five years. After that, he returned to the former school as a

deputy head teacher and worked there for three years. Then, again he worked at the board of education for four years and returned to the same school as a head teacher and worked there for three more years. In the end, he had been working at the school where I interviewed him for nearly three years.

Mr Fujita was a retired teacher in his early 60s who used to work at the same school as Ms Ueno. They had worked together at the same school for a few years. After his graduation from college, he had a different job for about a year, but he decided to become a primary school teacher and obtained the teacher's license. Then, he had worked at five different municipal primary schools in the research area. As a classroom teacher, he worked at each school for about six to seven years and worked at the last one for eight years.

Additional Information on Parents

Naomi was a mother at around the age of 40 working as a medical doctor, as had her late husband. She had two children, one son in Year 8 and one daughter in Year 6. Her son went to a private primary school and then moved on to another private junior high school. When I interviewed Naomi, her son was preparing to enter Year 9 the following month, while her daughter had just graduated from her municipal primary school and was enjoying the last spring break of her primary school days. She was going to be in Year 7 of a private junior high school the following month. The daughter, Rosa, had attended an international school for a year and a half, but then transferred to a municipal primary school when she was in Year 1. Because of some family matters and the small class size of the international school, Naomi decided to move her daughter to the municipal primary school which had about 450 students in total.

Mei was a mother in her early 40s working as an artisan. Her husband was in his late 30s who was working as an engineer at a company. She had graduated from a community college of art, while her husband obtained a bachelor's degree in engineering from a university. They had two sons in Year 5 and Year 3.

Karen was a mother and full-time clerical worker at a company in her early 40s, while her husband was a retired artisan in his early 50s. They had one son, Satoshi in Year 7, who went to the same school as Mei, Yuka and Momo's children.

Yuka was a mother at around the age of 40, working as a contract sales person at a company. Her

husband was working as a manager at a semi-governmental organization. They both were university graduates. She had 5 children from age 2 to Year 9 (aged 14-15), which is unusual in a society with a seriously declining birth rate. Her family were also living in the same school district as Mei, Karen and Momo's families and they all sent their children to the same school. One of her daughters is a child participant, Aya.

Sayuri was a mother of around 40 years of age, running a restaurant with her husband. Her husband was a university graduate, while she was a junior college graduate. Sayuri had a son in Year 4 (aged 9 or 10). She had first sent him to an international school for a year and half, and then transferred him to a municipal primary school from the beginning of Year 2 (at the beginning of the third term of Year 2 at an international school). The municipal primary school consisted of six original school catchments due to it being located in the centre of the city where the decline in the number of children was a serious issue. However, because of the school's good reputation and an increase in the number of high-rise apartments, the number of students was increasing. When I interviewed her, the school had about 700 students.

Takako was a housewife in her late 30s, while her husband was working as a doctor and researcher. Takako used to work at a company after graduating from a university, but quit her work when she got married. She had one son in Year 5 (aged 10 or 11) and one daughter in Year 2 (aged 7 or 8). Much like the school Sayuri's children had attended, due to the number of children, her children's school was also founded in the late 1990s by combining four schools. When combining the schools, the government built a brand-new school and started to use an innovative curriculum. Thus, it had become popular and the student numbers increased. When I interviewed Takako, the school had more than 1200 students from Year 1 to Year 5.

Momo was mainly a housewife in her early 40s, working at her friend's shop a few times a week during her children's school hours. Her husband was working as an engineer after graduating from a top university in Japan. The husband's family were all highly educated, graduating either from one of the most prestigious universities in Japan or from the United States. She had two sons in Year 7 and 2. Her family moved to a house in the same school catchment as Karen, Yuka and Mei's families when her older son reached Year 5. In her case, she had experienced three different schools through her older son. When he reached Year 4 at the previous school, it was combined with other neighboring schools due to the decline in the number of students and had changed into a four-year primary and five-year secondary combined school. First of all, her older son began

his school at a normal six-year primary school. Then, the son experienced a four-year primary and five-year secondary combined school for a year during Year 4, and at Year 5 moved to a new one, a five-year primary and four-year secondary combined school.

Emi was a mother in her 50's working part-time in two different occupations. She had graduated from a junior-college, while her husband worked as a plumber after graduating from high school. They had a daughter in Year 4 attending a standard 6-year primary school. Her daughter's school was a moderate size with about 400 students attending in total.

Additional Information on Children

Satoshi was a Year 6 student when I interviewed him. When he was Year 5, his previous school was combined with other three neighbouring primary schools and one secondary school due to a decline in student numbers. His previous school was a standard 6-year primary school, but the combined school had 5-year primary and 4-year secondary school programs. The previous school was really small with fewer than 150 students in total and in the lower years there were even fewer students. Since it had been combined with other two neighbouring schools and a junior high school, the new school became quite large with about 800 students attending in total.

Kai was in the same year as Satoshi and at the same school, although he used to go to a different school. His first school was a standard 6-year primary school, but was combined with other primary and secondary schools when he was in Year 3. His second school was also a primary and secondary combined school, but unlike Satoshi's combined school, according to Kai, it was divided into three stages: the first stage: from Y1 to Y4, the second stage: from Y5 to Y7 and the third stage: Y8 and Y9. After spending two years up until the end of the first stage at the school, he moved and started at the same school as Satoshi.

Aya had recently graduated from her primary school. She went to the same schools with Satoshi, but she was one year older than him. As described above, their previous school was combined when she was Year 6. She was just going to the same combined school as a Year 7 student when I conducted the interview.

Hisayo had recently graduated from her primary school and became a Year 7 student at a local secondary school. Hisayo's primary school was a normal 6-year primary school. Her school was quite small with fewer than 180 students from Year 1 to Year 6 in total.

Rosa had just graduated from her primary school at the time of interview. Firstly, she went to an international school for a year and half.   Then, in Year 1, she transferred to a standard 6-year primary school. Her school had about 450 students from Year 1 to Year 6 in total, which was located in a wealthy school district.

Mana had also just graduated from the same school as Rosa. She completed Year 1 through to Year 6 at the same school.

Suzu had just become a Year 4 student. She went to a normal 6-year primary school located in the north of the city, which included low-income residential areas. The school had more than 400 students attending.

Yuna was a friend of Suzu. Like Suzu, she had just become a Year 4 student.   Her school was different from Suzu's but located nearby. Children from those primary schools were supposed to go to the same secondary school after graduating from primary school. Yuna's school was also a standard 6-year primary school. Unlike Suzu's school, her school was a bit smaller with between 250 and 300 students from Year 1 to Year 6 in total.

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