

Democracy and Educational Reform in Japan: Toward John Dewey's Theory of Public Sphere

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School Reform and Democracy in the Global Era

After the 1980s, mainstream Japanese educational reform has failed to inspire hope and prospects of improvement for the school system by not pursuing equality and equity. In economically advanced nations, including Japan, England, and the United States, neoliberal principles of educational reform that advocate liberalization, marketing principles, and deregulation gained the power to control schools. Japanese schools have been declared to be in crisis, in that they face bullying, truancy, and decline in academic achievement; the fundamental cause has been said to lie in ideas of educational equality that lead to an unhealthy uniformity. The recognition of this crisis fueled the shift from the educational model of social services provided by the state to that of neoliberal marketization, which introduced free choice and competition. Distrust of schools and teachers has increased; nihilism and cynicism regarding learning have increased highly. It has been indicated that students' interest in and motivation toward learning has dropped. Also, in educational theory, schools and teachers have been criticized for being influenced by postmodern ideas. However, problem solving as a means for learning has been brought into the limelight since the year 2000. PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), developed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), has helped to bring about a shift in learning in Japan. Although educators have aimed toward preparing students to fully participate in our current knowledge-based society, the global economic crisis that began in 2008 has oriented our attention toward the problems of poverty and economic gaps. Today, it is necessary for schools to envision an alternative system of a democratic school system and public sphere, which will give students hope and strong prospects for the future.

The modern public-education system was created in the 19th century based on the integration of the nation-state and the development of capitalism, industrialization, urbanization, and a centralized mechanism of government. After World War II, the Japanese educational system was reconstructed based on the Constitutional system of the new government. Japan experienced strong economic growth, equalization of educational opportunities, and expansion in the number of students who enrolled in high schools and universities. However, various educational problems arose in the 1980s, when the number of students enrolled in schools reached its peak; at that time, modernist ideals of education seemed to be coming to fruition. Neoliberalism gained power in the form of open criticism of post-war education; conversion from the philosophy of educational equalization to that of liberalization was urged. Today, the public demands the reconstruction of the public sphere of the school based on democratic principles. Present-day changes, such as the rise of our knowledge-based culture,

information dissemination, multiculturalism, and environmentalism, have occurred worldwide. In schools, educational reform is proceeding not only toward acquisition of fundamental knowledge but also toward a citizenship model of education that pursues inquiry-based, creative, and critical thinking, social participation, communication, and so forth.

It is important to note that in a global era, school systems activate the localization of schools. Although globalization exceeds national boundaries, it simultaneously promotes localization efforts, such as decentralization, building local learning communities, and school home. Parents now demand that schools be involved not only in building cosmopolitan citizenship on a global level, urging border-crossing deliberation and dialogue, but also that they teach a curriculum comprised of lessons that suit the needs and characteristics of the local community. Cynicism about learning has spread based on the social changes surrounding children, hugely influenced by the expansion of economic gaps, increases in poverty, reduction of the labor market, and increases in divorce. The school is now being called on to function as a substitute home, a place of caring through learning. Schools are becoming reciprocal spaces that are connected with the other spaces in students' lives. The public sphere of schools is becoming linked to the intimate sphere, to which the local community and caring homes should also be enmeshed.

Thus, the situation of schools in the 21st century is influenced by a different political spectrum than before, namely, the spectrum between globalization and localization. In this paper, I will consider an innovative vision of the public sphere and democracy in schools to promote hope for learning that will transcend cynicism.

Neoliberalism and School Reform since the 1980s

The globalization that took place at the end of the 20th century evoked the necessity of recognizing the public sphere from a different viewpoint than the conventional idea of the domain based on the nation-state. The end of the Cold War in the late 1980s resulted in the overwhelming victory of liberal democracy based on free-market capitalism. In the 20th century, the United States accomplished economic development by focusing on the automobile, aviation, and electronics industries; the country acted as the driving force that led international society. However, this level of development has been eclipsed by other nations since the 1970s. In Western countries, social-service organizations retreated to the background due to expanding budget deficits; a shift to incorporating the principles of marketing, liberalization, and privatization took place in schools. Even in the United States, the decline of the manufacturing industry was remarkable, the trade balance changed the deficit, and economic growth slowed. Since the 1990s, finance, information, and electronic communication became the major influential industries, which led the drive toward global liberalism. Liberalization, privatization, and deregulation were expanded and neoliberal policies advocated.

Neoliberalism, which constituted the driving force behind educational reform in the West, responded to the conversion of industrial structures after the 1980s. Educational liberalization and deregulation were advanced; reform of market mechanisms, in which selection and competition are central, was pursued. In Japan, the Provisional Council on Educational Reform, which took place from 1984 through 1987, considered that public education is in "a serious crisis," and urged liberalization of, diversification of, and individualization within formal education. During this time, school violence, control-oriented education, juvenile delinquency, bullying, school truancy, and the entrance-exam race became social problems in Japan. Schools and teachers were blamed for truancy, violence, uniformity, and rigidity, as well as being accused of depending unduly on standardized testing and

cramming-based education. Bashing of schools and teachers became rampant; the central target of criticism became public education.

It is striking that these educational problems occurred during the time that the ratio of students attending high school reached its peak, exceeding 95%. Whereas the modernistic ideal of the school system seemed to have been realized, objection against and criticism of schools and teachers had arisen, and distrust of and dissatisfaction with schools had grown. The reforms of neoliberalism harnessed this reimagining of public education; neoliberalism expanded in influence as if compensating for the distrust of and dissatisfaction with schools and teachers. The post-World War II type of educational system was criticized for allegedly fostering formal and uniform egalitarianism. Neoliberal school reform, based on the principles of marketing and deregulation, became a dominant force.

It is necessary to note that the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s were timely, corresponding to the prosperity enjoyed during the postmodern period. Neo-Marxism, post-structuralism, psychoanalysis, semiology, deconstructionism, and feminism were also in fashion at that time. Educational theory included wide discussion of topics such as reproduction theory, deschooling theory, social-history research, psychoanalysis, critical pedagogy, the hidden curriculum, and so forth. The ideas of Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Philippe Ariès, Pierre Bourdieu, Louis Althusser, Ivan Illich, Alice Miller, and others were often quoted. Charges of and criticisms against problems said to be hidden in the modernistic school system and educational relationships became mainstream in academics. For example, the theory of “deschooling society,” developed by Illich, criticized “educational institutionalization” and the assumed fact that education was monopolized by the school; it stirred up discussion of generating a “learning web” that connected people with the resources they need. This theory explains how to bring about a school system that functions as “the sector of lively learning,” which spreads root to life outside the sphere of formal education.¹

The idea of a dichotomy between the school system and the rest of life is elaborated on by German philosopher Jürgen Habermas. According to him, private “lifeworlds” have been colonized by “systems” that pervaded modern life. Habermas thinks of “civil society” as being composed of the “lifeworlds” in the state and the market that act autonomously; they include churches, cultural circles, academic associations, the media, sports organizations, and civic movements.² The argument that assumes that lifeworlds carry over to exterior institutions such as schools follows the idea that civil society takes autonomy away from the conventional national and economic sectors. The shift to a globalized world, which has come to fruition since the end of the Cold War, fostered the trend that glorifies a free civil society and new social movements that exceed the national realm. Global civil society has paid great attention to issues involving citizenship, the environment, information dissemination, international understanding, ethnicity, and gender. The dominant educational reforms after the 1980s criticized the centralized public-education system and reorganized it based on the framework of bringing neoliberal marketization principles to the national realm. It is important to notice that neoliberal reform was not antagonistic to the theories of Illich and Habermas, which criticized the modernistic school system and insisted on the necessity of building a civil society outside the organized system. The movement toward building free and alternative schools was no exception. Being faced with ongoing criticisms of schools regarding bullying, truancy, the entrance-exam race, and cramming-based education, securing a sector for learning and living outside the conventional school system was highly desired. Also, mental health care was desperately needed; systems for educational consultation and in-school counseling were introduced in the 1990s.

At the beginning stages of the implementation of its ideas, neoliberalism tended to remove

impediments to a market-based or civil society and tended to activate individual, free, living spaces. Hence, the market and civil society seemed loosely coupled. In other words, the arguments against what was seen as an unpatriotic and noneconomic civil society were united with the principles behind neoliberal reforms to reduce state responsibility and to liberalize the national school system. The post–World War II school system was simultaneously disassembled and created, aimed at extension and innovation in a burgeoning market-based civil society. In educational reform, these trends supported ideas of school selection and competition and resulted in justification of the liberalization, marketization, and deregulation of academic culture. Whereas neoliberalism expressed distrust of and dissatisfaction with modernistic school system by proxy, it demonstrated power in that it provoked expectations for a free civil society.

Transformation of Learning and School

Neoliberalism and the “zest for life”: Expansion of cynicism regarding learning

The characteristics of neoliberalism strongly impacted curriculum reform in Japan in the modern era. The 1989 revision of the Guidelines for the Course of Study emphasized the “New View of Academic Achievement,” which highlighted student’s concerns and areas of curiosity; it championed the “zest for life” in “Yutori Education” (i.e., relaxed, pressure-free education) in 1998. The phrase “zest for life” was used to mean “the nature of choosing and the capability to explore a subject independently, to learn in a self-directed manner, to think independently, to judge actively, and to solve problems more efficiently.” As part of this reform, school was in session five days a week, a 30% reduction in content from the curriculum was enacted, and the curriculum of the Period for Integrated Study were newly introduced.

It is important to indicate that the five-day-a-week school schedule and the policy of reducing the content of the curriculum by 30% dovetail with the logic of neoliberalism, which narrows the function of schools and minimizes state responsibility for academic content and practices. Although these reforms have often been thought to exemplify “Yutori Education,” they were actually derived from neoliberalism, which aimed for privatization and marketization of schools. The viewpoint that advocates the recovery of life and learning in civil society overlaps with the idea of the “zest for life” and its manifestations. In the 2000s, when educational policy was being revised to emphasize the “zest for life” and “Yutori Education,” neoliberal reform was being advanced; school choice and academic achievement tests were also introduced. These reforms urged educational decentralization, privatization, and deregulation. By their nature, these reforms have expanded the economic and educational inequality by making the school environment more competitive.

However, a drop in students’ zeal for learning and their loss of concern about and meaning derived from studying were seen as problems. It was shown by the 2003 and 2006 PISA reports that Japanese students as a whole had some of the lowest scores in the research concerning student’s interests in learning mathematics, enjoying reading books about mathematics, and being conscious that studying science is important because the discipline is useful in post-school life.³ It is completely ironic that, after the 1989 publication of “New View on Academic Ability,” although educational reform has emphasized students’ interests and concerns and teachers have tried to encourage “the zest for life” and zeal for learning, expanding numbers of students have shown a drop in volition and felt a loss of meaning regarding learning. Hopeful attitudes about learning and living have lessened, and cynicism regarding education has been amplified. Whereas the “Yutori Education” reform was accused of causing a decline in academic achievement and a decline in zeal for learning, arguments that blame

neoliberalism, the philosophy that led the dominant reforms after the 1990s, have been continuously avoided.

Learning and school in a knowledge-based society: The paradox of the “zest for life”

Starting in the late 2000s, curriculum reform reached a turning point. The Guidelines for the Course of Study, revised in 2008, stressed teaching the “zest for life” in a “knowledge-based society.” In 2008, although the idea of the “zest for life” had been inherited from previous generations of educational theorists, the emphasis on “Yutori Education” had completely declined and had morphed into emphasis on creating a “knowledge-based society.” Regarding educational content, the reform was directed toward highlighting and implementing language-based activities, scientific and mathematical education, moral education, activities that encouraged students to discuss their experiences, and foreign languages. Regarding academic achievement, (1) acquisition of fundamental knowledge and skill; (2) acquisition of the abilities of thinking, judgment, and expression needed to solve issues by using knowledge and skill; and (3) encouraging zeal for learning were emphasized. In schools, merit-based-system views, such as problem-solving, communication skills, and human capital, have spread. It has also been pointed out that the views of PISA and the OECD, particularly the Key Competencies listed in its Definition and Selection of Competencies (DeSeCo), have influenced the recent reforms.

However, as globalization and the knowledge-based society progress, students are experiencing social conditions that will potentially have serious repercussions on their ability to learn. The first factor is the relationship between education and the labor market. The conversion from an industrial to a knowledge-based economy increased demand for skilled and intellectual labor and decreased demand for manual labor. The number of laborers engaged in the manufacturing industry decreased after the 1970s; the 1990s witnessed an increase in engineering workers and intellectually skilled white-collar workers (such as lawyers, accountants, management consultants, designers, information technology experts, health care professionals, and social workers). The highest number of workers was found in the service industries. However, the percentage of part-time, temporary, and contract employees is increasing, influenced by labor-market changes and the sluggish economy.

The second factor influencing student learning is the expansion of social inequality and the growing economic gap. In 2006, the rate of relative poverty of Japan was 15.3%, and the rate of poverty among children was 14.2%. This factor is greatly affecting children’s learning environments. In the era of high economic growth, social-class mobility was expected through popularization of higher education. During this economic downturn, however, it has become difficult to dream of success based class ascension earned through formal education. In the current situation, in which poverty and the economic gap have spread and low birthrate, longevity, and population decreases are observed, we face the limitations and the end of the economic-growth model. In this instable and fluid society, students’ future prospects are uncertain. This is why we have observed declining feelings of incentive toward earning high marks in extremely competitive school entrance examinations and loss of interest in advancing the curriculum. As social inequality has expanded and the market mechanism of competition has permeated all aspects of society, semantic loss of learning has been aggravated.

The third factor influencing student learning is the crisis surrounding the family. Although the home should be a place that values intimacy and provides relief, love, and fundamental relationships of attachment, it is becoming difficult for modern families to fulfill such functions of stability. The number of divorces and single-parent families is increasing. In many homes, family members experience psychiatric disorders, domestic violence, maladjustment, and panic disorders. In the classroom,

children experience the effects of divorce, an unmarried parent, a parent's second marriage, abuse, a parent undergoing social-protective care, a parent who is troubled with depression, and a parent who has attempted suicide. The home, long considered by many to be the primary space of intimacy and comfort, is in crisis. The social and institutional conditions that surround learning and living have been corroded, and cynicism regarding learning is advancing among children as difficult living situations become widespread.

During the advancement of academic reform to better prepare students as citizens of our knowledge-based society, neoliberal ideas were put into practice. In the process of reducing the social safety net and during the erosion of stability in the lives of the younger generation, an inappropriate level of responsibility was loaded onto individuals. Arguments about "privatization of risk,"⁴ "liquid modernity,"⁵ and "the power of life"⁶ deserve mention; the latter, in particular, reminds us of the reality in which the individual must live in a great deal of risks. Even the risks and unstable elements inherent in the larger society are likely to be seen as being in the domain of personal responsibility. Neoliberalism, which sets ranking and competition as the source of economic revitalization, has been functionally connected with educational reform.

In 2009 in Japan, the change of ruling party to the Democratic Party of Japan has resulted in new government policies, such as the Child Allowance and the free high school tuition for public high school. While the discussion about economic inequality was in motion and poverty was spreading, neoliberalism was not being widely criticized; the loose coupling of neoliberal ideas and civil society was maintained. Practices such as Saturday schooling, after-school classes, volunteering in the schools, and community schools became widespread. In 2012, the Liberal Democratic Party won the election and became the ruling party again. One of the main priorities of that party is to restructure the educational system. Thus, there was a move toward the state, the market, and civil society acting in affinity with one another, rather than acting autonomously as independent sectors.

Neoliberalism has led reforms that emphasize the "zest for life" and specify that it should be brought about according to the volition and capabilities of students. However, it has proven ineffective in designing institutional arrangements that adequately address social and economic conditions. The spread of cynicism regarding learning has also been thought of as a failure of the individual, a lack of individual responsibility; focus on the social dimensions and changes in homes, schools, and the labor market is weak. By these measures, the idea of education based on "the zest for life" is paradoxical. Advocating "the zest for life" not only complements and compensates for the erosion of the learning environment brought about by implementation of neoliberal principles but also helps to bring about further reforms based on these principles by containing elements that back up notions of educational marketing and liberalization.

Designing Democracy and School Reform

Democracy as a way of life

In this section, I will explore ideas of academic reform and democracy, which will spur hope among students and enhance the prospects for learning and living in the modern, global era that transcend cynicism. Although neoliberalism has been the dominant ideology in modern educational reform, we must reconstruct the relationship between society and the educational system, readjusting the relationships among the state, the market, and democracy.

Regarding this point, John Dewey's theory of public education is illuminating. He developed school reform based on the principles of democracy and publicness. According to him, democracy is

not a specific political form but is regarded as “a way of living together.” Although it is colloquially understood among scholars that Dewey’s public philosophy dovetails with the theories of Habermas, who insists on the predominant relationship of lifeworlds to social systems, the dichotomy of the social system and the lifeworlds is not shared in the writings of Dewey. Publicness is defined from the functional point of view as that which organizes social action and mediates between life, social systems, and active space on the basis of the public’s interactive and dialogical relations. It is important to see that Dewey’s idea of democracy is not a fixed entity but one that is continually in the process of reconstructing, rediscovering, reinvestigating, and recreating itself. In this sense, the relationship between democracy and education is reciprocal and interactive, and democracy becomes an educational principle and the basis for educational policy. Democratic practice, in which people act intellectually and develop a way of life, is closely connected with the construction of the political, social, and institutional system involving education.

Exploring democracy as a way of life induces concerns about creating a school system in which all children participate in high-quality learning and all are granted secure, equal educational opportunities. Dewey attempted to bridge the difference between freedom and equality; in his view, freedom and equality should not be considered in abstract and formal ways but should be understood in an active and concrete manner. In other words, freedom and equality live together functionally and interactively. For example, Dewey thought it indispensable that all children be guaranteed free, equal educational opportunities during the Great Depression (1929–1939). He appealed for measures to close the economic gap and to introduce systems of income redistribution, economic and social relief for children, and equalization of schools in terms of educational quality and allotted resources.⁷

When Barack Obama became president of the United States in 2008, he was faced with a similar global economic depression. Although American society was facing many difficulties between races, religions, classes, genders, and speakers of different languages, Obama’s calls for change and advocacy of “the audacity of hope” attracted a great deal of public attention toward the realization of a stronger society. These ideas gained broad support because they overlapped with the social situation in which many people were exhausted by the war against terrorism and the economic crisis. The Obama administration strengthened neoliberal ideas in the United States. The greatest educational reform investment in US history, the “Race to the Top,” was implemented. This program implements market mechanisms and encourages competition among states by introducing further standardized testing and championing charter schools, accountability, and teacher evaluation.

It is remarkably important that new concerns have arisen about realization of equality in the educational system. Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett advocate the idea of “equal societies” as the alternative to “economic growth.” By investigating social problems regarding physical health, mental health, drug abuse, education, imprisonment, obesity, social mobility, violence, teenage pregnancies, and child well-being, they reached the conclusion that larger income differences create greater problems; inequality for the poor reduces not only their quality of life but that of everyone. The authors illuminate “why more equal societies almost always do better.”⁸ Paul Krugman claims that it is false to contrast “equality of outcome” with “equality of opportunity.” According to him, the government should play a large role in creating “equal opportunities” by creating “equal outcomes.”⁹

In the meantime, research that aims to find ways to achieve equality in the school system has been conducted in Japan. Takehiko Kariya states that the characteristics of the Japanese education system had been highly dependent on that of the household economy in recent years because educational budgets are low compared with the gross domestic product (GDP) and because household expenses are quite high. Kariya emphasizes the need to reduce the economic gap in the

family environment to enable “fair competition.”¹⁰ Teruyuki Hirota also advocates for the necessity of “fair access to resources” (economic and social) for “equal educational opportunity.” He opines that policies should be implemented to improve conditions in schools with low academic-achievement levels, to support students with educational, economic, and personal difficulties, and so forth.¹¹

To improve the public education system in Japan and elsewhere, it is necessary to think of “equality of outcomes” and “equality of opportunity” as being complimentary; equality should not be defined by ideas of uniformity and homogeneity. This concept connotes an innovative vision of a democratic and equal society that contrasts with the idea of civil society put forth in the 1990s, namely, the idea of the freedom of lifeworlds that are independent of state and market sectors.

Lifeworlds were conceived of as being comprised of the live space outside institutional systems. This idea has functioned in harmony with that of neoliberalism, which, since the 1990s, has called for the liberalization and deregulation of the national school system. However, democracy and equal education give nourishment to ways of living together by constructing bridges between everyday life and social systems, promoting elimination of economic inequalities, and building equal practices within schools. Ideals of democracy and equal education secure student participation in high-quality learning and orient school reform toward supporting collaborative learning. Reviving hope for learning and living in the global era depends on designing an innovative vision of democratic schooling and learning.

A vision of democratic schooling and learning

How is it possible to implement and shape democratic schooling and learning? How do we prepare to offer schooling that gives students hope for learning and living? I will consider this point from five perspectives.

The first perspective pertains to strategies for connecting hope for learning to the publicness of schools. This perspective is concerned with “democracy as a way of life,” in which people live together in our fluid and uncertain society. Inspired by Dewey’s philosophy, Chris Higgins considers the distinction between “formalist and functionalist (or substantive) definitions of public schooling.” He stresses the “more active, verb-form of the term ‘public’” instead of the noun form, emphasizing the problem-solving abilities of citizens. According to him, active and functional understanding of the concept of the public is a key source of generating hope in this educational era.¹² Such an understanding is bolstered by the metaphor of “leaving safe harbors,” developed by Dennis Carlson. His metaphor of voyaging denies that a comfortable but fixed way of thinking will produce anything but exclusion and inequality. “Hope” is associated with the “belief that people need not accept the world the way it is but can reconstruct it according to a vision of a socially just world.”¹³ Hope for learning is connected with a way of life that realizes and reconstructs a stronger society in our fluid and uncertain world; thus, it is related to creating democracy.

The second perspective is of constructing learning as an interactive, dialogical, and collaborative practice and of securing students’ participation in high-quality learning. The project conducted by the Dewey Center at the University of Cologne, Germany, aims to practice “Interactive Constructivism,” which combines Dewey’s pragmatism with socio-constructivism. This new theory advocates building interaction between learners and the environment, including knowledge, ideas, other people, habits, and systems, and pursuing experimental, functional, and collaborative ways of inquiry.¹⁴ Learners will gain a broadened, diversified view of the world by becoming participants who build the world in a collaborative and interactive way.¹⁵ The importance of urging dialogical and interactive learning is growing widely nowadays. In the curriculum, a shift is occurring from repetition and reproduction of

deterministic knowledge to active, collaborative, and problem-solving types of learning. This new focus aims to open the door to learning-based quality, design, and communication rather than quantity, efficiency, and speed of knowledge. A curriculum is being reconstituted synthetically, relationally, and across boundaries of existing subject matters; it is encouraged that the classroom environment be widely opened to include the home, the laboratory, local communities, companies, and society in general.

The third perspective involves art as a key component in learning. Dewey captured the idea of art being a way of life based on democracy and publicness. He interprets art as not being isolated from daily experience and community life but being “a way of living together,” in which people meet with others and build a common life interactively and imaginatively. Learning art is connected to creating an active base of democratic social and cultural life; it is a process of learning that is created and recreated, improving esthetic quality and imagination. It launches familiar matters into lively motion, connecting learners with the deeper levels of those matters. Art gives meaning, concreteness, and clarity to the experience of learning and creates a view of a way of life that incorporates collaboration.¹⁶ Maxine Greene insists that art leads to social change in that imagination generates meaning and recovers the voice from silence.¹⁷

The fourth perspective is of rebuilding intimate relationships in schools by re-inserting caring into learning practice. Jane Roland Martin’s well-known concept of the “schoolhome” suggests that schools should enhance students’ experience of affinity and mutual reliance, as well as their sense of security, in the context of the society-wide collapse of stable family relationships.¹⁸ Michael Katz and colleagues developed the concepts of justice and democracy based on caring, with caring involving connection between the caregiver and the person receiving care, as well as a degree of reciprocity.¹⁹ For Nel Noddings, the practice of caring contributes to change in schools and in our society.²⁰ Dewey also insisted that democracy must start in the home.²¹ It is significant to point out that the idea of democracy, which supports public education, departs from the notion of the intimate nature of home. The publicness of schools is closely connected with its intimacy, in which students become caregivers and receivers of care.

The fifth perspective is of promoting learning and schooling based on the ideal of the “democratic community.”²¹ Dewey criticized the bureaucratic state and laissez-faire market liberalism during the Great Depression and played a large role in leading school reform centering on a “democratic community.” Democracy is not a fixed and deterministic idea but one that is continuously reconstructed, recreated, and rediscovered. In this sense, democracy and education are in a reciprocal, commutative relationship. The democratic ideal conceives of the definition of the public not as a noun but as a verb. The idea of the “democratic community” is furthered by Kenneth Strike, who believes that the educational crisis of today consists in the alienation of children from the community. He advocates for a “community paradigm” instead of the “standard paradigm” and “choice paradigm,” which form the dominant ideologies in modern educational reform. He supports small-school practices as part of the community paradigm, as made concrete in the “four Cs”—namely, coherence, cohesion, care, and connection.²² The democratic community is devised as an alternative to neoliberal ideas for educational reform.

School Reform and Generating Hope

The reorganization of public education to incorporate democratic principles is accelerating educational reform, moving from the 19th and 20th century concept of the public that concentrated on

its interaction with the state to a 21st-century concept based on globalization and localization. The world of the 2010s is facing new problems, such as the Euro crisis, the Arab revolution, the emergence of newly developing countries as economic players in the global marketplace, and the economic and social transformations of East Asian countries. Present issues occur in the transnational sphere, now that the boundaries of the nation-state have been exceeded. These issues include the economic and energy crises, global warming, problems with health care, food shortages, the proliferation of nuclear weapons, and environmental issues. Despite this, global society has recently urged localization, decentralization, and reform efforts aimed at localization of sovereignty. It has also activated localization of caretaking practices in homes and communities. The nation-state is too narrow to solve problems involving current politics, the environment, information technology, medical treatment, poverty, disputes, and disasters, which exceed its boundaries. It is also too broad and extensive to cope with regional issues regarding the home and community practices. Thus, alternative systems should be constructed, based on foundations of democracy.

Educational reforms after the 1990s were directed toward implementing the tenets of neoliberalism, which advocated educational liberalization and incorporated marketing principles. In Japanese schools, awakening students to “the zest for life” was set as a fundamental ideal; individual freedom and personal responsibility were emphasized. Civil society and the principles of neoliberalism came to be loosely coupled. With the trend of globalization and localization, the market-based orientation of neoliberalism came to constitute the dominant mode of educational reform. However, cynicism among students about learning has spread because the neoliberal reforms instituted by the institutional system have resulted in the corrosion of children’s living conditions.

It is extremely important to build a new vision of schools based on democracy and publicness. This vision will become the key to pursuing school reforms that secure the participation of students in learning and revive the meaning and value of schools. Because knowledge required for success in the modern world is highly advanced and complicated, crossing national borders, students need to learn inquiry-based and creative thinking, social participation, and communication skills in school rather than merely transferring and acquiring knowledge. Moreover, communicative and dialogical activities are required to cross borders of race, religion, language, customs, social class, and gender. The answer to academic reform and democracy in our global era can be found by reinterpreting the relationship between lifeworlds and social systems, freedom and equality, and the state and the market. Students must be taught the principles of democracy as a way of living together in harmony. Democracy, as a basis for educational reform, secures the participation of all children in high-quality learning and is connected with building a better world by eliminating economic inequalities and realizing a free, equal way of life. Regarding learning, creating hope that transcends cynicism will require the reconstruction of educational reform efforts based on the ideals of democracy and publicness.

Notes

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⁴ Beck, Ulrich, *Risikogesellschaft auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne*, Frankfurt am Main:

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⁵ Bauman, Zygmunt, *Liquid Modernity*, Cambridge, U.K.: Polity Press, 2000.

⁶ Agamben, Giorgio, *Homo sacer. Il potere sovrano e la nuda vita*, Torino: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1995.

⁷ Ueno, Masamichi, *The Publicness of Schools and Democracy: Toward John Dewey's Theory of Aesthetic Experience*, Tokyo: The University of Tokyo Press, 2010.

⁸ Wilkinson, Richard, Pickett, Kate, *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Do Better*, London: Allen Lane, 2009.

⁹ Krugman, Paul, *The Conscience of a Liberal: Reclaiming America From the Right*, London: Allen Lane, 2008.

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