

# Questioning the ‘politicization of education’

## Development education and citizenship education in the context of Japanese education policies

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### Abstract

Japan’s educational system has undergone a series of reforms over the past decade or so. Through these reforms, the ruling party has strengthened the involvement of the government and local authorities in education. At the same time, there has been a growing tendency for teachers to avoid taking up political issues in classrooms, in order to comply with the idea of political neutrality in education. This article attempts to extract the present-day meaning of development education and its implications for citizenship education by critically examining certain aspects of recent Japanese educational policy. Specifically, while pointing out that government-directed citizenship education has become increasingly ‘patriotic’, the article reaffirms that development education is a kind of political education. Finally, the article argues that development education should be expanded to democratic citizenship education to nurture active citizens with global perspectives.

**Keywords:** educational reform, political neutrality in education, citizenship education, development education, political education

### Introduction

There have always been demands for educational reform. Even in the past decade or so, proposals for new educational reform have been repeatedly set forth in the name of fostering ‘zest for living,’<sup>1</sup> introducing a period for integrated studies,<sup>2</sup> including moral education in subject classes, making volunteer activities compulsory, and so

on. These have been the subject of debate. In such instances, teachers and others on the front lines of education have often been painted as obstacles hindering 'educational reform,' leading to the introduction of a teaching license renewal system and the institutional reform of boards of education. Furthermore, even universities, whose academic freedom is guaranteed in the Constitution, are not exempt from pressure from the government and the business community to enact 'reform' and to 'innovate.'

The fact that the recent trend of 'educational reform' corresponds with the political principles of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who is critical of Japan's post-war democracy and has an overall objective of departing from the post-war regime, is clearly evident. The objective of this article is neither political analysis nor criticism of the current administration but rather to reveal the political nature of the practice of education while critically evaluating the policies of the party in power that guide present-day educational reform and rebuilding.

Before starting our discussion, in the next section I provide a short history of development education and citizenship education in Japan. In the subsequent section, I take up the recent discussion surrounding revision of the Local Education Administration Law<sup>3</sup> and the Basic Act on Education<sup>4</sup> and examine the nature of the politicization of education while considering one of the main points of discussion, namely political neutrality in education. I then focus on the type of citizenship education that has been promoted by the Japanese government in recent years, and examine the political significance attached to this education. Based on these examinations, I lastly extend consideration to the political nature of development education and participatory learning.

In the context of the above-mentioned examinations, I identify the present-day significance of development education and the implications for citizenship education, which I hope will raise questions relevant to discussion of the politicization of educational reform in the context of Japanese education policy.

## **Development education and citizenship education in Japan**

Before getting to the main point of this article, I will provide a brief history and an overview of the current situation with regards to development education and citizenship education in Japan.

### **Brief history of development education in Japan**

The first symposium on development education was held in Tokyo in 1979 under the auspices of UNICEF, the UN University, and the UN Information Centre. The main topic of discussion was the reason behind the slow implementation of development education in Japan, despite a 1975 recommendation by the Joint UN

Information Committee (JUNIC). This symposium served as a turning point, after which development education received substantial attention from development NGOs, UN-related associations, and youth organizations like YMCAs. Those private and voluntary organizations took the initiative in organizing similar symposiums in Yokohama (1980), Osaka (1981), and Nagoya (1982). Eventually, the Development Education Council of Japan (DECJ) was established at the end of 1982 with a membership that included academics, schoolteachers, and former Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV),<sup>5</sup> along with related organizations. The DECJ was renamed the Development Education Association and Resource Centre (DEAR) in 2002.

In the early stages of Japanese development education, when NGOs were commencing activities in response to the mass outflow of Indo-Chinese refugees at the end of the 1970s, Japanese development education was almost synonymous with the dissemination of information about the Third World. It was used by NGO fieldworkers to garner support and donations for their own projects. Schoolteachers who had volunteered abroad explained the distressed situations of poor developing countries and appealed for overseas cooperation. During the same time frame, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs dispatched a research mission every year to collect information about development education in the UK, Canada, Sweden, and other developed countries. This was how development education started in Japan.

Later, in the 1990s, development education became a participatory pedagogic movement. The introduction of world studies and other participatory teaching materials had a substantial impact on Japanese development education and brought about major changes in its methodology (Yamashita, 2002). For example, the 'Trading Game' (Christian Aid, 1982) introduced by Christian Aid at the end of the 1980s was the first teaching material that taught Japanese development educators how to teach about development issues in a workshop-like environment. To this day, it remains one of the most popular workshops in Japan. Besides this, the Japanese translation of *World Studies 8-13: A Teacher's Handbook* (Fisher and Hicks, 1985) was published in 1991 and had a significant impact on development education in Japan, at a point when the pedagogical philosophy and methodology of world studies was just starting to be presented theoretically and systematically.

International exchange among educators and practitioners was also becoming increasingly common in the 1990s. Well-known practitioners of world studies, development education, and global education in the UK were invited to conferences and seminars held in various parts of Japan. Conversely, Japanese NGO workers, schoolteachers, and academics joined study tours and workshops hosted by NGOs and development education centres (DECs) in the UK.<sup>6</sup> In 1999 staff members from DEAR made an official visit to the Development Education Association (DEA),

ActionAid, Oxfam, and the Birmingham DEC. Since 2001, board members and staff from DEAR have attended a conference at the University College of London Institute of Education (UCL IOE) in 2003, the first and second Europe-wide Global Education Congresses (in Maastricht in 2002 and in Lisbon in 2012), and Development Education Summer Schools in Härnösand, Sweden (2005) and Zagreb (2012). Through these experiences and exchanges with the UK and other European countries, Japanese development education has enthusiastically absorbed the fundamental principles of world studies, global education, and development education, which include critical thinking, global dimensions in education, and participatory and learner-centred methods that are all based on social justice and human rights. Today, those principles are shared broadly within the field of development education in Japan and are considered indispensable for cultivating global citizenship in the social context and cultural diversity of schools, universities, groups, organizations, and local communities.

With regard to this point, we could say that Japanese development education is close to the equivalent of global learning or global citizenship education in the British and European contexts. However, it would be difficult to say that these principles have fully permeated the school educational system and curricula in Japan. This is mainly because, in Japan's teacher-centred and knowledge-based school cultures, most Japanese schoolteachers hesitate to practise education based on critical, participatory, open-ended, and learner-centred principles and methodologies. Teachers are especially reluctant to take up politically controversial issues in their classes. Article 14 of the Basic Act of Education promotes political education by stating that 'the political literacy necessary for sensible citizenship shall be valued in education' (Kyoiku kihonho [Basic Act on Education], Act No. 120 of 2006, art. 14, para. 1.). However, the majority of schools and teachers in Japan emphasize Section 2 of Article 14, which states that 'schools prescribed by law shall refrain from political education or other political activities for or against any specific political party' (Kyoiku kihonho [Basic Act on Education], Act No. 120 of 2006, art. 14, para. 2.). Accordingly, teachers tend overwhelmingly to avoid discussing politics in their classrooms, citing political neutrality as their reason for doing so. It is in this context that there is a role to be played by development education, a point that I discuss in later sections of this article.

### **The past and present of citizenship education in Japan**

Meanwhile, how has citizenship education been practised to date in Japan? Article 1 of the former Basic Act on Education, which was originally enacted in 1947 and revised in 2006 after rigorous debate on both sides, states that the aim of education is the following:

*Education shall aim at the full development of personality, striving to nurture the citizens,<sup>7</sup> sound in mind and body, who shall love truth and justice, esteem individual value, respect labor and have a deep sense of responsibility, and be imbued with the independent spirit, as builders of the peaceful state and society.*

(MEXT, n.d.; emphasis added)

Even though citizenship education in Japan is specified in the manner above, its historical evolution is far from a simple straight line. One of the origins of citizenship education can be found in the 'new social studies' education that was implemented just after Japan's defeat in the Second World War. After the war, a 'new social studies' based on John Dewey's progressive theory was introduced into primary and secondary education in order to spread democracy and replace the pre-war education programme, which had been defined by an Emperor-centric historiography.

Education for democracy was also delivered through out-of-school provision, especially at community learning centres (*Ko-min-kan* in Japanese), which were directly operated by local boards of education. Underlying this type of education was the low rate of senior high school enrolment. That is to say, in 1950, just after the inauguration of the new post-war school system, only about 45 per cent of junior high school graduates went on to senior high school, while the rest found employment after graduation. Thus, local boards of education offered night classes at community learning centres so that working youths could become members of the democratic nation of Japan by learning about democracy after they had finished work for the day. Social studies and other aspects of education for democracy were initiated under the guidance of the General Headquarters for the Allied Powers (GHQ) in order for Japan to be reborn as a democratic nation.

The senior high school enrolment rate rose rapidly from the 1960s to 1970s. In the late 1960s 'civics' was designated as a subject to be taught as part of the high school social studies curriculum. By 1974, when senior high school enrolment reached 90 per cent, education for democracy had almost entirely shifted from out-of-school to in-school education, and community learning centres no longer provided education for democracy to young people in local communities. As university entrance examinations became fiercely competitive in the 1970s, when university enrolment rates began to rise, 'civics' was increasingly criticized for being just as knowledge-based and just as likely to be tested using multiple choice-type questions as other subjects, such as geography and history, that appeared on entrance exams. Schoolteachers told their students to memorize the three branches of government, the number of the seats in the National Diet, and the three major principles of the Constitution of Japan. However, students rarely had the opportunity to discuss the significance of constitutionalism in any meaningful sense or explore how students

could participate and have their voices reflected in policy. This has been the reality of civic education in Japan since the 1970s.

In the 1980s Japanese society began rapidly to globalize, and Japan became increasingly interconnected with the outside world. What was happening outside of schools at this time? Indo-Chinese refugees were being taken in, NGOs for overseas aid were starting to emerge, there was an influx of foreign workers, there was trade friction between Japan and the US, large quantities of tropical timber were being imported, criticism of Japanese official development assistance (ODA) rose to its highest level ever, the Berlin Wall fell, and so on. However, Japanese school education – even civic education – was not able to provide students with any substantial insight regarding such actual events involving Japan and the world.

Given this historical context and the reality of civic education, it was natural that some social studies teachers began to question and to seek to reform how social studies was being taught. Those who experienced development education in the 1980s and 1990s began to practise it and managed to introduce global perspectives and current affairs into their classes. A series of global conferences organized by the United Nations in the 1990s supported the cultivation of public awareness regarding the need to address global issues; these conferences also had a considerable impact on school curricula.

In 2002 and 2003, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) revised school curricula and officially introduced the ‘period of integrated studies’ curriculum into the primary and secondary courses of study; these curricula are currently being implemented. The curricula were compulsory and described as cross-thematic, participatory, and learner-centred. MEXT recommended that schools and teachers should conduct problem-solving activities related to ‘international understanding, information, environment, welfare and health’ (MEXT 2008a: 110; 2008b: 116–17; 2008c: 351) and to make efforts to connect learning in the classroom to real life.

At this juncture, some schoolteachers and members of local boards of education began paying attention to the participatory methodology and global perspectives of world studies. As a result, development educators found themselves frequently being invited to classes or teacher training programmes as lecturers or facilitators. However, after an initial period of great fanfare, the experience-based methodology of the integrated study curriculum was subjected to a severe backlash, and baseless criticisms of ‘declining academic achievement’ were brought against it by members of the business community, some in conservative political circles, academics and educators, and even education-minded parents. In reality, it was simply unrealistic for most teachers, who were already extremely busy and overloaded, to deliver the integrated study curriculum, which requires substantial preparation and

coordination both inside and outside of school. Consequently, integrated study has not really taken hold in school education and seems to have come to a dead end. It is interesting to note that at around the same time, citizenship was introduced as a new subject in the national curriculum of England and Wales. This garnered much attention from some academics, teachers and CSO members in Japan; however, citizenship (education) to 'nurture citizens' has never been stipulated in the education policies of MEXT.

### **Revision of education-related laws and political neutrality in education**

In June 2014, a bill to reform the Local Educational Administration Law was adopted in a plenary session of the House of Councillors, with the goal of increasing the involvement of heads of local government in education. The direct impetus for this legal reform was said to have been a bullying suicide incident at a public junior high school in Otsu City, Shiga Prefecture, in October 2011, provoking an obfuscatory response from the school and local board of education that was reported widely in the media and today remains fresh in Japanese memories. Following this incident, the second Shinzo Abe Cabinet established a Council for the Implementation of Education Rebuilding.<sup>8</sup> The council submitted its first proposal, 'Response to the Issue of Bullying' (February 2013), and second proposal, 'On the Structure of the Boards of Education' (April 2013), to Prime Minister Abe. These issues were subsequently deliberated by the Central Council for Education under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and in legislative discussion, ultimately leading to the adoption of a reform bill in June by the House of Councillors.

One of the main points in the discussion concerning the reform was political neutrality in education. In response to the cabinet decision, the Japan Federation of Bar Associations issued a written statement laying out the reasons why it opposed the proposed reforms. The following is an excerpt from this statement:

*The basic content of the proposed reform not only weakens the authority of boards of education in local educational administration while strengthening the authority of heads of local governments but, also, is intended to increase the authority of the national government to intervene in the local administration of education. There is a risk that such reform goes against the original objective and principle of the local educational administration system, which is to guarantee political neutrality, continuity, and stability and to thereby advance the essential role of education to promote independence and autonomy and to provide sufficient protection of children's right to education, etc.*

(Japanese Federation of Bar Associations, 2014)

This discussion on 'political neutrality' recalls debate during the previous reform of the Basic Act on Education. Prior to revision, Article 10 of this Act, which stipulated

the nature of educational administration, stated, '*Education* shall not be subject to improper control, but it shall be provided to all citizens under the direct responsibility [of the government]' (italics added). Item 2 of the same Article continued, '*Educational administration* shall ... aim at the adjustment and establishment of the various conditions required for the pursuit of the aims of education' (italics added). However, the interim report issued by the Ruling Party Council on Revising the Basic Act on Education (2004: 3), established under the Junichiro Koizumi Cabinet (of which the then secretary-general Abe was also a member), contained the expression, '*Educational administration* shall not be subject to improper control, but shall be provided through a complementary division of roles and cooperation among national and local public entities.' That is to say, the interim report sought to protect 'educational administration' and not 'education' from 'improper control' by changing the subject of the provision.

With regard to 'improper control,' Naoki Iwakawa (2005: 91) explains that 'originally, Article 10 was borne of deep historical remorse regarding State control and intervention in the implementation of education in pre-war Japan' and that 'the control of educational administration by political bureaucrats is the most representative form of such "improper control"'. He further notes that 'it is for this reason that the role of educational administration in Item 2 is limited to external matters (i.e. the adjustment and establishment of the various conditions) and that a restriction was added to prevent interference in the internal matters of education' (Iwakawa, 2005: 91). Ultimately, the final report issued by the ruling party's council in April 2006 returned to the language of the original version of the law, with 'education' being the subject of the sentence, though in the end the Basic Act on Education was significantly revised.

Let us examine one more example with regard to this point. The discussion stemming from the Draft Basic Ordinance on Education in Osaka Prefecture, submitted in September 2011 to the Osaka Prefectural Assembly by the Osaka Restoration Association, a political party for which the former mayor of Osaka City, Toru Hashimoto, was a representative, is also still fresh in Japanese memory.<sup>9</sup> Political neutrality in education was a major point of contention in this case as well. The preamble of the Draft Ordinance includes the following language with regard to this issue:

*The concepts of political neutrality in education and the autonomy of boards of education have traditionally been understood to mean that governments must not involve themselves in any way in educational administration. As a result, teachers' organizations and educational administration have been treated as 'sacred ground' that is off-limits for discussion. However, as specified in Article 14 of the Basic Act on Education, the original meaning of political neutrality in education was that*



*'schools prescribed by law shall refrain from political education or other political activities for or against any specific political party,' and not that governments must not involve themselves in teachers' organizations or educational administration, i.e. that the community members should not exercise any influence at all.*

(Osaka Prefectural Assembly, 2011)

In this manner, the preamble, citing Article 14 of the contemporary Basic Act on Education, lays out a crude argument for government involvement in education so long as it does not undertake '(certain types of) political education.' It simply argues for 'political involvement' without concomitantly reaffirming Article 16 of the same Basic Act, which states 'education shall not be subject to improper control and shall be carried out in accordance with this and other acts.'

In response, the five members of the Osaka Prefectural Board of Education excluding the superintendent (Ikuno *et al.*, 2011: 1-2) clarified their position, stating, 'The Draft Basic Ordinance on Education should be retracted in its entirety. If it is approved, regardless of whether or not it has been revised or amended, we, the members of Board of Education, will resign en masse.' The reason given was that 'not only the content of the Draft Ordinance but, also, the framework itself goes against the spirit of the Basic Act on Education and other laws and regulations that try to strictly limit intervention by governments' (Ikuno *et al.*, 2011: 2).

It would seem that the same political intentions and motivations can be seen underlying the three cases described above involving the revision of the Local Educational Administration Law, the revision of Article 10 in the previous version of the Basic Act on Education, and the Draft Basic Ordinance on Education in Osaka Prefecture.

One such motivation is a type of overconfidence and a paternalism that believes that governments, and more specifically the heads of governments and politicians, can resolve the serious challenges faced by children and teachers in the classroom and can overcome the present crisis in education. Whenever politicians stress that the government is responsible for education, that message resonates and plays well with the public. However, the concomitants of this message – high-handed control by the state, the principle of competition, and top-down authority and coercion – are veiled thinly. These words do not evoke images or the voices of children and parents with diverse social and cultural backgrounds, nor the community residents and experts in related fields who should support them. If the argument is being made that the government is responsible for education, shouldn't the role of the government and administrative entities unequivocally be to establish and improve conditions and settings that enable each one of us who have the right to receive and an obligation to provide education to become actively involved in education?

Another political motivation is to bring the domains of education and politics closer together. The aim of doing so is not to achieve the goals of education itself but rather to use 'education' as a means for realizing some other, political goal. What, then, is that political goal? To be brief, I posit that the objective of educational rebuilding and educational reform is to construct a nation based on a certain political ideology. In the next section, I will examine this point in greater detail.

### Questioning the political nature of 'citizenship education'

In Part 2, 'Status of the Implementation of Measures to Support the Nurturing of Children and Young People,' of the White Paper on Children and Young People (Cabinet Office, 2013; hereinafter referred to as the '2013 White Paper'), there is a section titled 'Promoting education regarding social development and social participation (citizenship education)'. The section contains the statement 'In order for children to act as independent members of society and to adopt an attitude of proactively participating in society through the exercise of rights and responsibilities, it is necessary to promote education related to social development and social participation (citizenship education)' (Cabinet Office, 2013: 105). It goes on to introduce relevant measures and programmes being implemented under the jurisdiction of each ministry or agency.

In this section, while outlining the citizenship education-related programmes being implemented by central governmental agencies, I will examine their objectives and content from the standpoint of political neutrality in education.

**Table 1: Ministerial responsibility for social development and social participation education**

Programme or measure	Ministry in charge
Measures for school education	Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport, Science, and Technology (MEXT)
Legal education	Ministry of Justice
Tax education	National Tax Agency
Education in financial matters	Financial Services Agency
Education about workers' rights and duties	Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare
Consumer education	Consumer Affairs Agency/MEXT
Providing information/increasing awareness regarding the social welfare system	Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare
Providing information/increasing awareness regarding diplomacy and self-defence	Ministry of Foreign Affairs/Ministry of Defence

Source: Created by the author based on Cabinet Office data (Cabinet Office, 2013: 105–7)

Looking at Table 1 leaves the strong impression that 'citizenship education' at the level of the national government has not been implemented as unified educational and awareness-building activities related to the law, taxation, finances, the economy, labour, and social welfare, but rather that such efforts have been carried out in vertically segmented fashion with each ministry or agency being responsible for the area over which it has jurisdiction. Although the Declaration on Citizenship Education announced by the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry (METI, 2006) in 2006 garnered attention as a document to guide the implementation and promotion of the above efforts, the 2013 White Paper contains no reference to the declaration.<sup>10</sup> Meanwhile, MEXT, whose implementation of citizenship education is not explicitly mentioned in the 2013 White Paper, provides the following explanation:

*With regard to school education, instruction on the democratic system of governance, political participation, the legal and economic systems, as well as the rights and obligations of labor is already provided primarily as part of the social studies curriculum in elementary and junior high school and as part of the civic curriculum in high school. In addition, information and instruction on the appropriate attitude of citizens as consumers is provided primarily as part of social studies and home economics curricula at a level that is appropriate for the students' developmental stage. The new Course of Study attempts to enhance curriculum content with an emphasis on social participation by including instruction on, for example, 'important laws with regard to civil life' (elementary school), 'the importance of contracts' (junior high school), 'citizens' participation in the judicial system' (elementary, junior high, and high school).*

(Cabinet Office, 2013: 105)

It appears that the basic stance of MEXT is that such education related to social development and social participation is already being carried out in school education and, therefore, that there is no need to introduce anew the concept and term 'citizenship education'. Indeed, the aims of the social studies curriculum in elementary and junior high school include 'nurturing fundamental citizenship qualities needed to act as a member of a peaceful and democratic country and society living in international society' (MEXT, 2008a: 10; 2008b: 17). That said, what is actually being done (or not being done) to 'nurture fundamental citizenship qualities' in the classroom? On this point, Toshiro Kameyama provides the following analysis:

*Students are expected to learn about the democratic system of governance and the rules of society, but they are not asked to participate in the setting of school rules. They are taught to 'obey the rules' but do not learn how to 'make rules'. In other words, they do not receive instruction on political skills in the larger sense of the term.*

(Kameyama, 2009: 101)

Kameyama's point is a prime example of McLuhan's (1994: 7) concept that 'the medium is the message,' which is often invoked in development education. That is to say, in order to learn democracy, the methods used to manage schools and classrooms need to be democratic, and the relationships between a teacher and students and among teachers also need to be democratic (Ishikawa, 2008).

Regardless of whether the education is called legal education, tax education, economic or financial education, consumer education, development education, or environmental education, the real issue is whether the learners use the experiences and information they have gained to adapt themselves to the status quo unquestioningly or to analyze the status quo critically from multiple viewpoints and to promote change and reform. The meaning of 'social development and social participation' will differ dramatically depending on which of these is the case.

The following point by Kiyoshi Karaki recalls the discussion stemming from the introduction of citizenship education into the secondary education curriculum of England and Wales in 2002:

*In the context of globalization of society as a whole and the relativization of nation-states ... the 'citizenship education' at the center of attention was deemed necessary, on the one hand, to strengthen national identity because of the anxiety about the instability of nation-states while, on the other hand, to nurture a post-national identity that enables citizens to contribute to new societies replacing the nation-state (global society and civil society).*

(Karaki, 2007: 44)

I will leave further discussion of citizenship education in the context of the UK to other literature, but note here that the document commonly referred to as the Crick Report, which played a significant role in the introduction of citizenship education into the UK National Curriculum, identified the three following strands of citizenship: (i) social and moral responsibility, (ii) community involvement, and (iii) political literacy (QCA, 1998: 40-1).

The report was set against the backdrop of an expanding European Union (EU), increasingly multicultural and multi-ethnic communities, growing disillusionment with politics, the low education level of British youth having to navigate the interstices of such communities, and social problems such as delinquency and unemployment. Regarding the newly introduced subject, it is in this context that the argument for 'patriotic citizenship,' intended to unify the nation and promote patriotic solidarity among citizens under a new national identity (i.e. 'Britishness'), was pitted against the argument for a 'democratic citizenship' based on diversity and tolerance that incorporates the viewpoints of human rights and 'minorities' and is linked to global society and developing regions of the world.

Based on the experience in the UK, it would appear that the various types of education mentioned above (legal education, tax education, etc.) will eventually converge with either patriotic citizenship education or democratic citizenship education. If that is the case, this constitutes the political nature embedded in 'citizenship education' and signifies that citizenship education is not politically neutral. Herein lies the difficulty of implementing democratic citizenship education in public education, whose major premise is the education of national citizens.

### **Questioning the 'political nature' of development education**

Next, I will shift the focus of my examination further towards the root of the issue. For example, does the stance of the facilitator who designs and implements development education workshops have to be politically neutral? Can the stance of the Development Education Association and Resource Centre (DEAR),<sup>11</sup> which is a specified non-profit corporation, be described as 'politically neutral'? In May 2014, DEAR (2014) submitted a petition to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs outlining demands for reform of the ODA Charter. Isn't it clear that activities such as proposing policy measures are political? To skip to the conclusion, the legal basis for requiring organizations such as non-profit organizations (NPOs) and the activities of DEAR to be 'politically neutral' is weak.

The Act on the Promotion of Specified Non-profit Activities (NPO Act)<sup>12</sup> specifies that the 'main purpose [of NPO activities] shall not be to promote, endorse, or oppose a particular political doctrine' (Tokutei-hieiri-katsudo sokushinho [Act on Promotion of Specified Non-profit Activities (NPO Act)], Act No. 7 of 1998, art. 2, para. 2.). However, 'the intent of the act is to prevent the obstruction of activities such as the promotion of certain political measures or even the promotion of a given political doctrine as a subordinate purpose' (Saito and Tanaka, 2008: 28-9). While the delineation between 'main' and 'subordinate' purpose is admittedly subtle, I would suggest that the reason why the NPO Act does not deny the right of citizens' organizations to be political is that the NPO Act does not see a reason for the existence of NPOs if they do not question and hold opinions regarding the status quo and authority and do not seek change or reform but simply attempt to conform to the status quo. The NPO Act can be understood as guaranteeing that specific non-profit activities and other activities of NGOs and NPOs are not stripped of their political nature.

What, then, is the case for development education? I would suggest that a similar explanation is possible. That is to say, development education is clearly a form of 'political education.' Nonetheless, its purpose is not to praise or to attack specific political doctrines and positions. The political nature stems not so much from existing political ideologies as from the attempt to promote mutual understanding and to

build consensus with the goal of rediscovering and recreating the values and rules necessary for creating the future and society. This is the political nature embedded in development education. Regarding this political nature, Yasuko Minoura (1999: 12) explains DEAR's definition of development education as follows: 'One of the goals [of development education] is to encourage individuals to participate in the creation of an equitable global society in which all people can live together. This is, in a sense, an ideology'. In order to realize such a lofty goal, the political nature and ideology embedded in development education must not fall into narrow-mindedness or self-righteousness but, rather, must promote varied discussion and flexible learning based on tolerance and a sense of joint ownership. This is the meaning of the participatory learning that development education has emphasized up to this point. That said, such participatory learning carries with it the risk of becoming an end in itself and for the extent of its impact to be limited to the classroom or seminar room.

After noting that the methodology focus of world studies in the UK had been criticized for being 'strong on methodology but weak on content' and as being 'a collection of religious and emotional activities', Mariko Akuzawa (2000: 28) argued that 'it was political education that compensated for these shortcomings of participatory learning'. Regarding the role played by political education, she concluded, 'It emphasized political realism and put a halt to the delinking of participatory learning and the real world' (Akuzawa, 2000: 29).

It was Bernard Crick, the individual responsible for putting together the Crick Report introduced in the previous section, who (starting in the 1970s) pushed for political education. Ironically, in contrast to this political education, in which participatory learning was preserved for its own virtues, in the curricula of citizenship education addressed by Crick's own report, 'development of (participatory learning) skills and attitudes were emphasized for the purpose of taking on the social and economic challenges by building cooperative relationships with others and engaging in repeated discussion' (Akuzawa, 2000: 30). Akuzawa points out that the lesson to be learned from the experience in the UK is that 'it is necessary for us to rethink what kind of society we should deem to be ideal and how we can use the skills and attitudes gained through the study of methodology in participatory learning to resolve real social problems' (2000: 30).

## Conclusions

The current administration in Japan has strengthened political intervention in education while emphasizing political neutrality in education. Consequently, schools have been compelled to exercise excessive self-regulation as a result of trying to remain faithful to the idea of political neutrality in education. In the majority of classes, although students have been given information on politics and government,

opportunities for the students to engage in discussion about real politics and to express their own political views and voices have been avoided or kept at a safe distance. However, as revealed in this article, whether we like it or not education is already being politicized, and schools are compelled to align or deal with real politics and policies. This is analogous to the concept of a 'hidden curriculum' in pedagogy. There is no doubt that students are aware of such contradictions in school and such conflicts among teachers.

There is no reason why schools and classrooms must be flavourless, odourless, and sanitized spaces from which politics have been completely removed. Consensus is formed by pitting political opinions one against another, by acknowledging each other's views, and by examining existing politics and policies critically and from multiple viewpoints. It is such learning, which entails the proposal of alternate plans, starting in the classroom and school and expanding outward to the community, society, and the world, that is the fundamental goal not only of citizenship education but of the practice of education itself. While it may contribute substantially to the fostering of the political literacy necessary for sensible citizenship, this type of learning does not correspond to 'political education or other political activities for or against any specific political party' (Kyoiku kihonho [Basic Act on Education], Act No. 120 of 2006, art. 14, para. 1.), which are prohibited by the current Basic Act on Education. Rather, the denunciation or elimination of citizenship education would constitute the type of 'improper control' of education prohibited by the same law.

That said, in much the same way that such justifications for political education were criticized not only by conservative elements but also by the liberal left in the UK during the 1970s, it is impossible to avoid the objection that such discussion is nothing more than idealistic argument and empty theory removed from the realities of the classroom. Even for development educators with practical experience, a great deal of courage and preparation is needed to bring up and deal with controversial issues related to politics, foreign policy, peace, or human rights in the context of a classroom or workshop. It is understandable that development educators will, at least at times, hesitate or shy away from such topics. However, the 9/11 attacks in 2001 and the 3/11 Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011 raised tough questions for development education, leading to much discussion within DEAR. Although no conclusion or resolution has yet been reached, the lesson learned by DEAR has been '*Motto Hanaso!* [Let's Talk More!]' (DEAR, 2003; 2012) This was the result of the organization 'prioritizing the creation of opportunities and ways to discuss controversial issues in a democratic manner and for participatory learning' over 'clarifying the organization's stance and announcing its political position' (DEAR, 2012: 1).

While teachers tend to shrink from control-oriented education policies and politically controversial issues, the role of development education is to provide places for freely discussing such policies and issues in a democratic and participatory way in in-school and out-of-school education settings. This is the present-day meaning of development education. On the other hand, if government-directed citizenship education will become more and more knowledge-based and focused on national identity and interests, the role of development education is to introduce global and local perspectives and diversities into the ensuing static citizenship education and to transform it into a dynamic citizenship education with problem-solving and action-oriented approaches.

At the same time, the current form can be considered an important first step in the maturation of Japanese development education into democratic citizenship education. Further, I believe that the goal of '*Motto Hanaso!*' can more readily be achieved. Becoming silent whenever politics are discussed, avoiding discussion of topics on which opinions may diverge – these are what are meant by 'apolitical' attitudes. Such attitudes must be avoided at all costs in development education that functions as political education and democratic citizenship education in order to nurture active citizens with a global perspective.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> 'Zest for living' (*Ikiru-chikara* in Japanese) implies the well-balanced skills and abilities – such as a healthy body, a well-rounded character, and solid academic prowess – that equip a person to live in a fast-changing global society. This term has been considered a key concept in Japanese education policy since it was introduced in the First Report of the 15<sup>th</sup> Session of the Central Council on Education titled 'The Model for Japanese Education in the Perspective of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century' (MEXT, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> The 'period for integrated studies' signifies the time allocated for studying cross-curricular themes and comprehensive issues such as international understanding, the environment, health and welfare, ICT, and so on. It was officially introduced into all school curricula with the revision of the Course of Study in 2002.

<sup>3</sup> The official name of the law is the 'Act on the Organization and Operation of Local Educational Administration' (1956, last amended in 2014).

<sup>4</sup> The Basic Act on Education was revised following fierce controversy in 2006, but it was originally enacted in 1947 in accordance with the spirit of the Constitution of Japan, which stipulated that the realization of democratic society should depend fundamentally on the power of education.

<sup>5</sup> JOCV is a programme that provides technical assistance to developing countries by dispatching young Japanese citizens overseas for a period of two years; it is administered by JICA (the Japan International Cooperation Agency) as the implementing body of the Japanese ODA.

<sup>6</sup> According to Hiromi Yamashita (2002: 3), 'more than 100 practitioners from Japan have visited the UK ... eight British books have been translated into Japanese and at least ten British practitioners have been invited to Japan.'

<sup>7</sup> This quotation is extracted from a tentative English translation by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT). The English word 'citizens' is commonly translated as one of two words in Japanese. The first of these is *koku-min*, which literally means 'people who belong to a nation state' or 'people with nationality'. The other is *shi-min*, which literally means 'people



who live in a city' and occasionally implies 'members of civil society'. The Japanese original of the provision uses the term *koku-min* to mean 'legally recognized nationals of the nation of Japan' and does not suggest a sense of the value of global citizenship beyond nationality and national boundaries.

<sup>8</sup> The Council for the Implementation of Education Rebuilding is a private advisory body to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

<sup>9</sup> The Draft Ordinance included various provisions including assigning responsibility for the setting of educational goals to the head of local government and expanding the authority of school principals over teachers and school staff members. However, after encountering opposition from opposition parties and current educational board members, it was put back for further discussion. After winning the 'double election' (for both for the Osaka city mayoralty and the Osaka governorship) in November of 2011, the Osaka Restoration Association rushed to pass the Draft Ordinance, but MEXT pointed out that certain elements of the Draft Ordinance might violate existing laws. The Draft Ordinance was eventually adopted by the Osaka Prefectural Assembly in February of 2011 after being repackaged as the Fundamental Ordinance on Education Administration in Osaka and the Ordinance on Osaka Prefectural Schools.

<sup>10</sup> This declaration is a summary of the report issued by the same research group (2006) made available to the public. However, there is no indication that METI actually implemented citizenship education after the issuance of the declaration.

<sup>11</sup> The Development Education Association and Resource Centre (DEAR) is a Tokyo-based coalition of development educators and practitioners in NGOs, youth organizations, teachers' groups, and so on. For details, see the DEAR website, [www.dear.or.jp/eng/index.html](http://www.dear.or.jp/eng/index.html) (accessed 20 January 2016).

<sup>12</sup> The Act on the Promotion of Specified Non-profit Activities (NPO Act) entered into force in 1998 to promote the sound development of specified non-profit activities in the form of volunteer and other activities freely performed by citizens to benefit society.

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