

# CONTEMPORARY EDUCATION REFORM AND TEACHERS: THE MEANING OF THEIR POSITIONS IN THE REFORM AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THEIR OCCUPATIONAL CULTURE

YOSHIYUKI KUDOMI

## *Introduction*

The relationship between education reform and teachers has dual connotations in the present era. In other words,

1. Contemporary education reform, including reorganization of the curriculum, change in the school system and reformation of school management, finally reaches down to the job and daily existence of teachers and strongly affects their daily educational work. The result and evaluation of the education reforms are made on the basis of their daily activities.
2. Contemporary education reform makes schoolteachers 'a target' of the reform. The reform concerning teachers is not merely an area of education reform but also one of its most important focal points. At least in Japan, teachers' professionalism, their competence to teach children effectively and their places in society are under suspicion so that central and local governments try to use some people who worked for a private company as principals of some schools and to introduce systems of evaluating teachers' work and excluding 'incompetent teachers'.

And now in Japan, these reformations of the management on schools and teachers are called 'NPM (New Public Management)' as in western countries.

My colleagues and I have been conducting a research project<sup>1</sup> for three years, which regards the present age as 'the educational reform era' when the modern public education system setting out in the nineteenth century requires dramatic change in its nature. With this in mind, the project focuses on the 'job and existence of teachers' in this reform era containing the dual connotations mentioned above so as to synthetically explore the dynamics and associated challenges.

This paper will discuss a few issues that have become regarded as important during the research process. These are also significant points which we, the research group in Japan, will have to explore in the third and final year of the research project by using and analyzing some empirical data.

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<sup>1</sup> This research project is a 'Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research' funded by the Ministry of Education and Science for a project titled 'Educational Reform and Teachers' (No.15203032). The project lasts for three years (2003-2005) and has been carried out by eleven Japanese researchers (four sociologists of education, three historians of education and four researchers on education reform) and five foreign cooperative researchers (American, British, Swedish and Korean).

## I. *The Trend of Contemporary Education Reform: From <Professionalism + Bureaucracy> to <Devolution + Evaluative Management>*

Here I will present a general frame that hypothetically suggests the main trend of contemporary education reform in many countries. Table-1 shows three ideal types of administration and management over professional institutions, for example: a hospital, a welfare home for the disabled and an old people's home, and professionals of such institutions, for example: doctors, counselors and caseworkers. In addition, a school and teachers are also included, of course.

TABLE 1. THREE IDEAL TYPES OF ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT OVER SCHOOLS AND SCHOOLTEACHERS

Items	<A: Professionalism>	<B: Bureaucratic Control>	<C: Devolution & Target Control>
General Principle	Autonomy of professional group & trusting high occupational ethics	Authorizing the legal standard of professional occupation and institution	School-based management & accountability to public for its mission and target
Objects of Public Reliance	High ethics, devotion to clients & enthusiasm of professionals	Rationality, justice and equality of provision through bureaucratic processes	Explicit mission and target of each school; external evaluation; making efforts competitively
Treatment for School-teachers	Independent professionals & self-management of their group	Recognition of teaching qualification and practices by formal criteria	Accepting explicit competence markers and targets, external evaluation & different treatment
Weak Points of Each Type	Conspiracy among professionals & neglecting their public mission	Oppression of freedom and creativity by uniform control	Aiming not at the mission but at the criterion of evaluation; uniformity; losing professional pride

Type-A is named 'Professionalism'. Normally, the autonomy of independent members of a professional group controls the institution in this type. Moreover, it is an era where society has a high trust in their professional ethics. It is not certain that these professionals all have such trustworthy ethics, so it is better to say that such a high trust is not a reality but rather a fiction that has been constructed socially. The fiction is effective both to professionals and society alike. However, it has been said that such a system might easily produce an institutionalism (Waller, 1932), namely, where workers in the institution neglect the mission as the public agency and incline toward a conspiracy among them.<sup>2</sup>

Type-B is named 'Bureaucratic Control'. This type of administration gives privileged authority to state bureaucracy. Bureaucracy appears to have the ability to hold and maintain rationality, justice and equality. Bureaucracy manages the legal standard to obtain the qualifications of public professionals in medical, welfare and educational services. It also

<sup>2</sup> Classically W. Waller presented this in his famous book, "The Sociology of Teaching" about seventy years ago. Chapter 24 of his book is titled 'A principal reason why institutions do not function'.

administrates the formal criteria of professional work, such as the national curriculum or conditions to found an institution. Nevertheless it has been said that in this system there is a tendency for the creative or inventive ideas or projects to be oppressed by its uniform control (Gouldner, 1954).

As Richard Sennett told that after the Second World War in many developed countries we could see an era of 'welfare state' (Sennett, 1998: 23), which might be a combined system of A and B from the context mentioned above. Although there was explicit and sometimes keen opposition between A and B, there has been a link of basic complicity between them from the present perspective. In other words, both shared an idea of the distributive provision of service as a fundamental system. Accordingly, it is better to say that there was a type of <A + B>.

Type-C might be correctly termed 'Devolution and Target Control'. This type of management is the very one of contemporary education reform. People advocating such reform have strongly censured Type-A because professionals are not so highly ethical as to work for their clients but conduct themselves rather motivated by self-interest. For example, the Director of the Board of Shinagawa Ward in Tokyo, where the procedure of a parental choice of state schools was firstly introduced in Japan, said in a symposium,<sup>3</sup> "Teachers are not trustworthy people. It is important for us to put them in an institutional frame where they are oppressed to compete with each other to answer parents' needs." Such advocators have also criticized Type-B as it is important to implement de-regulation in many areas to introduce the necessary differentiation and an effective responsibility to answer the needs of clients. For example, the Japan Productivity Centre for Socio-Economic Development, one of the bodies for research and advertising within Japanese business circles, published a report, "Educational Reform for Choice, Responsibility and Solidarity", in 1999 and insisted strongly on de-regulation in the educational system.

Therefore, Type-C of management firstly includes devolution to give each school the authority of self-management and competition between such schools to provide a better service. The frame of devolution and competition thus compels each professional or institution to strive unavoidably to answer the clients' needs. This type secondly introduces the imperative for each school to state its apparent mission and targets to be devoted or achieved. The degree of effective achievement on these mission and targets is externally evaluated periodically and the results of the assessment are used as the basis for public funding of each school.

Devolution is the first phase of Type-C, while evaluative management is the second. These two phases complement each other, as it is thought that devolution is a condition representing progress on evaluative management. Moreover, the latter also stimulates the effective achievements of the former. Accordingly, it is said that in the contemporary reform the management system of <A + B> (= professionalism + bureaucracy) is replaced with a new management system of <C> (= devolution + evaluative management).

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<sup>3</sup> The symposium was held by the research group on 'Parental Choice of School' (chaired by Kudomi) at the 63<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference of the Japan Society for the Study of Education in 2002. The record of the symposium was printed in "The Japanese Journal of Educational Research", Vol.70, No.1, 2003 (in Japanese).

## II. *Why does 'Evaluation' Have a Special Privilege in 'the Educational Reform Era' ?*

Today is really 'the era of the Academic Achievement Test'. Firstly, IEA (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement), that has conducted international tests on Mathematics and Science about every fifteen years, has recently been conducting them every four years, as TIMSS1995, 1999 and 2003. PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) of OECD, on reading literacy, mathematic literacy and science literacy every three years joined in the international assessment of student academic levels from 2000. The results of such international assessment are observed with interest and issued in many countries.

Secondly, as is well known, a National Test scheme is introduced in many countries. In Japan, the assessment of student academic achievement in national level, which was previously conducted as a sampling survey about every ten years over four decades by the Ministry of Education, is now carried out biannually in the 2000s. Currently, the Ministry of Education and Science are considering whether to conduct an entire survey at the national level rather than a sample.

Thirdly, in Japan, many municipalities have carried out the entire survey on pupil academic achievement. These tests are done respectively, since no general and common test, such as SAT in the US, has yet been developed in Japan. Accordingly, there are so many tests and associated problems in Japan at several levels, namely international, national, prefectural and in individual cities or towns.

The results of these tests are used as the indicators for the assessment of 'school effectiveness'. The system of academic achievement test in each level is now one of the important means of executing new evaluative management over schools and teachers. Although the result is one of the important indicators for the assessment of schools, it is not the only item. To externally evaluate a school, there are some other items.

Just as G. Whitty stated concerning UK or the US (2002: 52-60), in Japan we have not yet found evidences which show that Type-C management creates better educational effectiveness generally, though we have heard some successful episodes. Nevertheless, the majority of parents and residents usually support contemporary 'education reform'. Type-C management gradually spreads to many areas in Japan.

Why is such reform supported ? In Table-1 above, 'Objects of Public Reliance' are invisible characters of professionals or bureaucracy in Types-A and -B. In Type-C, the 'Objects' are open and visible, as 'explicit missions and targets of each school' or 'external evaluation'. It is not sure that Type-C is a better form of public educational management than Type<A+B>. However, it is clear that Type-C is one of the responses to public suspicion or distrust of the invisible nature of Types-A and -B. If so, although it is an important criticism to point out certain problems of Type-C management, such as depriving professionals of their pride or hurting social equity among people, we might not be able to return back to the world of <A+B>. If we would like to get over the problems of Type-C, it might be more important for us to carefully consider a new type of public management which is open, visible and more suitable than the contemporary one.

Why does 'evaluation' have special privilege in 'the educational reform era' ? As D. C. Loutie said (1975: 134-161), the work of teaching is associated with 'endemic uncertainties' by

nature. The objects and results of the work are, in their essence, relatively unclear and not well fixed. In other words, it is very difficult for us to grasp them visibly. However, as I mentioned above, the nature of this invisibility is one of the most important focal points of public distrust and criticism in this era. From this point of view, the procedure of evaluation has a magical power to transform the invisible to the visible. It must be true that the visible, when thus converted by the procedure, is only a part or phase of the whole invisible substance. Nevertheless, it must also be true that, even if just a part, the conversion makes the invisible somewhat visible especially from the external view. Accordingly, evaluation is associated with a special privilege in this era, even if the procedure is not considered so suitable to assess the overall results of school education. As B. Bernstein stated (1996: 33), evaluation condenses the meaning of the whole pedagogical procedures. Moreover, as G. Whitty also pointed out (2002: 42-44), the evaluation scheme has a strong message to those being evaluated.

In addition, if the state holds the procedure and the criteria of such evaluation, despite retreat from the bureaucratic control of Type-B, it recovers more power as an 'evaluative state' (Neave, 1988) in Type-C. Carefully considering a new type of public management (which is open, visible and more suitable) is crucially important for teachers; not only because of their effective criticism of Type-C management, but also because of their holding the counter force to the evaluative state.

### III. *A Comparative Perspective for Research*

In order to examine trends such as  $\langle A+B \rightarrow C \rangle$  more empirically and to consider the meaning of teachers' position in contemporary education reform, the research group selected five countries, which are both in the category of decentralized countries, where state control over teachers was relatively weak such as the United States and the UK, and in centralized countries where the state had more power over teachers' activities, such as Sweden, South Korea and Japan. Table-2 shows our perspective adopted when selecting these five countries.

TABLE 2. THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN BUREAUCRACY AND PROFESSIONALISM ON EDUCATION POLICY AND SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION IN FIVE COUNTRIES

Items (1)	Items (2)	UK	USA	Sweden	South Korea	Japan
The level of centralization or decentralization Centralize (+) $\Leftrightarrow$ Decentralize (-)	Concerning state control over school curriculum	--	--	+-	++	++
	Concerning state control over school management	--	--	-	++	++
The level of maturity on welfare state Very matured (+) $\Leftrightarrow$ Not so matured (-)	Concerning social welfare by state	+	+-	++	--	-
	Concerning educational provision by state	+	+	+	+	+

These five countries have recently experienced a drastic education reform, including ‘devolution of educational management’, ‘evaluation systems on teachers and schools by external school agencies’ and ‘replacement of security of teachers’ position’. Although the historical and cultural backgrounds of the four foreign countries differ from those of Japan and among them, the trends of reform might be a certain response to the restructuring of the school system in the twenty-first century. Therefore, to explore experiences and change in these five countries comparatively is presumed to be useful in reflecting the themes of contemporary and future education reform in Japan and other countries.

We have set up several items stating the points for which we wish to understand the character of recent educational reforms in each country and consult them comparatively. The items in Table-3 are only temporary ones by which we conduct our survey and put the data in order.

TABLE 3. THE ITEMS TO UNDERSTAND THE CHARACTERS OF EDUCATION REFORM

Item 1: Reform of what	Item 2: From/to or toward what	Item 3: Concerning what
The transformation toward devolution (-) ⇔ (+)	From central to local	Estimate of education
		School organization
		School teachers
	From local to school	Estimate of education
		School organization
		School teachers
The transformation of state control over curriculum, pedagogy and pupil academic performance	Toward introducing new state control (-) ⇔ (+)	National curriculum
		Criterion of achievement
		National test
	Toward de-regulation (-) ⇔ (+)	National curriculum
		Criterion of achievement
		National test
The transformation of the quasi-market and evaluative state	Toward marketization in education (-) ⇔ (+)	Parental choice
		Self-management of school
		Privatization of school
	Toward evaluative state (-) ⇔ (+)	National criterion
		External evaluation
		Funding through evaluation
The transformation of the participation of parents or students	Toward the increasing participation of parents (-) ⇔ (+)	Classroom management
		School curriculum
		School management
	Toward the increasing participation of students (-) ⇔ (+)	Classroom management
		School curriculum
		School management
The transformation concerning teachers and their education	Toward more control over teachers’ professional work (-) ⇔ (+)	Evaluation system of teachers
		Ranking payment by merit
		Dismissal of the incompetent
	Toward more elaboration on teacher education (-) ⇔ (+)	Training for prospective teachers
		Criterion of teaching competence
		Professional developing steps

#### IV. *An Empirical Perspective and a Questionnaire Survey*

We have been conducting certain surveys to investigate the actual condition of ‘Japanese teachers and their work’ over recent years (Kudomi, 1992, 1999). At this time we plan a comparative survey to explore the conditions of teachers’ work and the way in which the dual relationship between ‘teachers and educational reform’ appears in five countries.

FIGURE 1. A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE SURVEY ON THE DIMENSIONS OF CONSCIOUSNESS OF TEACHERS

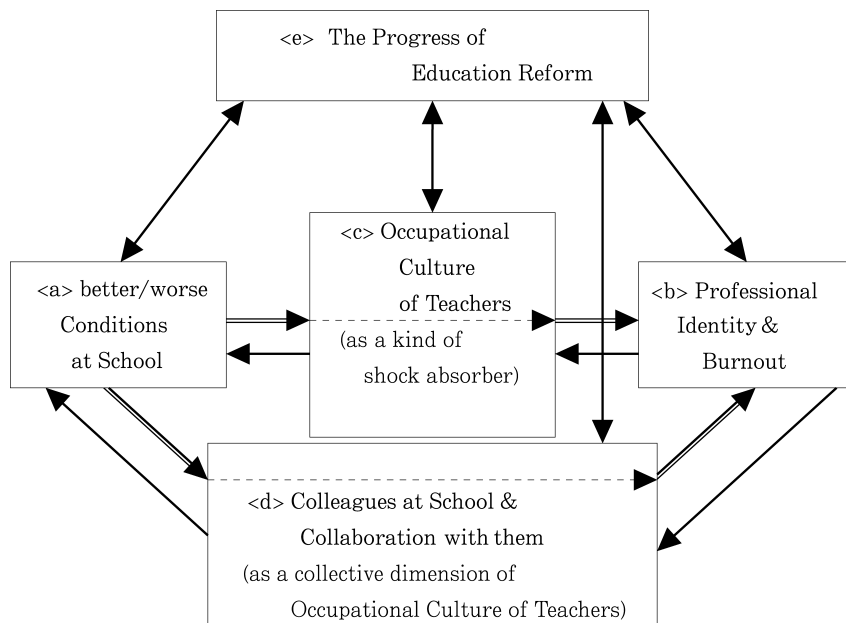


Figure-1 shows the theoretical framework for the questionnaire survey on “teachers’ awareness of their job, life and especially *the occupational culture of teachers* under the conditions of today’s education reform” comparatively among the five countries.

The occupational culture of teachers is considered a device for the cultural reproduction of shared assumptions and beliefs among teachers in a society (Hargreaves, 1980, 1982). In Figure-1, the occupational culture of teachers has two dimensions. The first is at <c> as an individual phase, and the second is the relationship among colleagues at school as a collective dimension of the culture (at <d>). In our previous survey in 1999 in Japan, the factors of better/worse conditions at one’s school (at <a>) did not co-relate with items of professional identity or burnout of teachers at the school (at <b>). Therefore, we think that two dimensions of occupational culture of teachers (at <c> and <d>) have a certain function as a kind of shock absorber. The culture usually operates to allow a teacher to retain their professional identity when exposed to danger. The dotted lines from <a> to <b> through the zones of <c> and <d>

mean that the influences of <a> on <b> are indirect and occupational culture has a function or operation to refract such influences.

The contemporary education reform (at <e>) must have serious influences on or must extensively change all of the other items (from <a> to <d>). However, if the occupational culture of teachers does not accept such influences or changes as new and necessary factors, the culture might operate to resist or reject such changes to enter the world of teachers' work and life. At the same time, contemporary education reform will also try to change teachers' culture itself. Moreover, as I mentioned above, it is vital that teachers themselves reform their culture and render it more suitable in this era; to cope with issues of educational reform. The direction adopted should be more democratic, such as 'a democratic professionalism' (Davies, 1996: 673, Whitty, 2002: 77) or others ?

The UK version of the questionnaire is seen as Appendix of this paper. Those questions are composed as corresponding to the framework of Figure-1.

<a> better/worse Conditions at School: Q1

<b> Professional Identity & Burnout: Q2, Q8

<c> Occupational Culture of Teachers: Q6, Q7

<d> Colleagues at School & Collaboration with them: Q3, Q4, Q5

<e> The Progress of Education Reform: Q9, Q10, Q11

Through our survey we may try to find a new and real direction in which teachers will do their work more effectively, collaboratively and hopefully in not such an exhausting way.

HITOTSUBASHI UNIVERSITY

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