Because We Said So: Educational Reform in Occupied Japan

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ABSTRACT
The American occupation of Japan (1945-1952) decentralized the authoritative Japanese educational system, establishing local and prefectural school boards. When the occupation forces returned home, however, many of these policies were reversed. This paper proposes that motives to spread a particular democracy and a shallow consideration of historical context inhibited a growth of Japanese education. It also explores how a richer contextual understanding could have informed four areas of reform: training of education staff, communication between Occupation staff and unionizing Japanese teachers, concentration on ideology over methodology, and the evaluation of the centralized Japanese education system.

Keywords: Japanese education, democracy, reform, American occupation

Introduction
In August 1945 the war in the Pacific ended and the American occupation of Japan began. No historical precedent existed for this sort of relationship, nor was there a truly comparable situation elsewhere in the wake of the war.¹ Until August the American military government had been planning an invasion of Japan, and the responsibility of running the country that would go with it. The atomic bombing of Hiroshima and then Nagasaki signaled the shift away from invasion, and occupation plans accelerated. The American military government proposed to work behind the scenes, structured as a twin of the Japanese administration. Each member of the Japanese government worked with a corresponding member in the occupation.²

A section of the Civil Information and Education Division (CIE) of the Supreme Command of the Allied Powers (SCAP) was responsible for reforming the structure of Japanese education. The central purpose was the inculcation of democratic patterns.³ For administration, this meant a decentralization that would institute prefectural and city school boards of publicly elected officials, teachers' associations, and a parent teacher association.⁴ Reformers introduced a more democratic teaching methodology in the classroom based on developmental methods that had become popular at the end of the 19th century. For democracy to flourish in Japan, creative thinking, debate, and a curious mind had to be
fostered in the classroom. This ran counter to the rote drilling of the traditional Japanese classroom which created a sense of obedience, conformity, and acquiescence. The American educators intended to establish habits of democratic, political participation through the students’ formative years.

Structural reforms of education administration in Japan weakened after the occupation. After the Americans returned home, political power over education returned primarily to Mombushō[Ministry of Education]. Decisions about textbooks, curriculum, and teaching methodology were once again at the sole discretion of the central government. Drilling and a focus on memorization remained.

A critique in this paper is that when two competing systems clash, it is less useful to battle for control over a single “correct” message. Another alternative is for integration of the best components of each, creating a third philosophy which is richer than either of the initial two taken separately. Further, I argue that for this to take place there must be a historical, holistic, and relativistic understanding of each system by the interacting members. My thesis is simply that there existed a superficial understanding of the competing education systems in occupied Japan which led to reformers missing opportunities for synthesis.

This essay also extends Richard Tabulawa’s work farther back into the historical record. Tabulawa proposes that a “learner centered pedagogy is a political artefact(sic), and ideology; a world view about how society should be organized.” But, he implies that the imposition of a learner centered pedagogy from political motivations arose in the 1980s due to development efforts in less advantaged countries. While I agree with the analysis that enforcing a child centered teaching style is also a mechanism to enforce a particular democratic worldview, this paper shows that America adopted this technique at least as far back as the Second World War.

To investigate this tension, I examined historical documents at the National Archives in Washington, D.C., and interviewed Dr. Mark Orr, former head of the education section of CIE(1946-1949). Dr. Orr now oversees the Florida-Japan Institute at the University of South Florida. I had the honor of sitting with Dr. Orr on two occasions to present my research and receive his comments. To examine the reliability of Dr. Orr’s interpretations, I triangulated his descriptions with archival materials and a literature search. The interview material is included as a personal response to the data I gathered from texts.

I will discuss four specific areas where I believe opportunities were missed by the occupation reformers: the training of education staff, communication between CIE and the Japanese teacher’s unions; the occupation’s concentration of transforming ideology over methodology, and an inquiry into the merits of the centralized system that existed in Japan prior to 1945. The actions and motivations of the reformers in CIE relating to these four areas must be understood. I present the general principles with which the CIE worked, as well as a synopsis of occupation directives related to the four areas of my thesis. The amount of material on this subject is monumental; therefore, this section will be limited to basic directives and philosophies and should by no means be viewed as exhaustive.

Finally, I will elaborate on the four areas mentioned above. Specifically, I will explore the implications of four basic proposals: training of education staff should have included the analysis of centralized, yet democratic, European education systems; it was unwise for CIE to marginalize unionizing teachers—whom agreed with the educational methods being promoted in Japan—because of their politics; the fundamental concerns of the CIE were more democratic than educational, and merit existed in the methodology of the Japanese system.

Background
The Americans came to Japan with two things in mind: demilitarization, and above all else, democratization. Towards this goal, the occupation attempted to completely dismantle the old system and replace it with a system based on American values.

Reform was the responsibility of the Eighth Army in Yokohama. They reported directly to General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers. The Civil Affairs teams were in charge of, among other things, guiding education.

The Civil Information and Education Section was established as one of the Special Staff Sections of General Headquarters by General Order No. 183 of Sept 1945, to advise the supreme commander for the Allied Powers on policies relating to public information, education, religion, and other sociological and cultural problems of Japan.

In Tokyo, the CIE was a special section in SCAP that had direct jurisdiction over Mombushō in educational matters.

“The structure of the occupation was set up in separate sections that would correspond in some ways to the Japanese government. There was MacArthur’s side and the prime minister’s side. The head of the CIE’s education branch was equal to the education minister, and for every position in the ministry there would be a counterpart in the occupation.”

1 Dower, 1949:23.
3 Trainor, 1983:403.
7 Tabulawa, 2003:10.
Colonel Ken Dike headed the CIE early on, but he left in the spring of 1946 and returned to a job in the United States. He called up Lieutenant Donald Nugent. "Nugent had a master's degree in education and some teaching experience in Japan. He placed me in charge of the education section."14 Dr. Orr was in the last Civil Affairs Training class at the University of Michigan. He graduated on August 26th, eleven days after the Japanese surrender. While awaiting orders in California, Orr met Robert King Hall who, for a short time, be in charge of the education section of the CIE. "He left word that he'd be looking for me. I went by ship with several hundred officers and we were taken by train to Camp Zama. One day, a sergeant came in a jeep with orders for me to report to Tokyo and the CIE."15

For the most part, if I could make a general statement, the first staff consisted mainly of educators.15 They had either been chosen or volunteered and then educated at the school of military government at the University of Virginia, followed by training at a SCAP school. The philosophy of the education division followed the progressive ideas that dominated the early 20th century.16 These progressive perspective stemmed mainly from the writings of John Dewey, and while debate continues on how well the progressive school implemented Dewey's ideas, several fundamental positions on teaching are: learning through experience; a child-centered curriculum; active engagement of material by students; and avoidance of drilling and lecture in classrooms.

The occupation also set up military governments in each prefecture with their own education division. These people were curriculum oriented and visited schools to work directly with teachers. They were often short staffed with only two officers per prefecture. They did not have authority to set policy but were in charge of explaining and enforcing reforms that CIE passed through Mombushó. They worked with teachers and administrators through meetings and workshops.17

Reform Philosophy
In his memoirs, Joseph Trainor describes the seven main principles from which the education team at CIE operated. The broad theme was that CIE was to weed-out anti-democratic practices from Japanese education and replace them with democratic ideals. There were practical concerns for the division, but the following were explicitly described as secondary issues for CIE: the 6-3-3-4 school ladder, curriculum, a program of tests and measures, graduate requirements, collaborative learning, and a new course in social studies.18

The main strategy was to determine which principles of education were universal among democratic societies. The division knew that the patterns developed from these principles were relative to context. They believed that the principles were universal but their expression was relative. Once these principles were established, they were to be the measuring stick CIE used to determine real progress in education reform. Even so, there was little debate about the "universal principles of democracy" - the American occupation promoted the American definition.

The principles concentrated on two areas, the administration of education and the application of teaching methodology. The first administrative stance was that militarism and ultranationalism could not be part of school curriculum. Thus, the first directives of the occupation dealt with the removal of the military from schools. Second, decision making should be left in the hands of the people. Through local administration, communities could shape an education that best met their demands. This is reflected in the third principle, administration and authority should be decentralized. Fourth, there should be equality in education, and discrimination must be eliminated. The education of Japanese women is today a shining legacy of the reforms. 19

The first proposal related directly to teaching was that curriculum decisions should emanate from children's needs. This reflected the progressive nature of the educators in CIE. Second, inquiry and curiosity should always be fostered. Education should be based on sound facts and the experimental method should be applied whenever applicable. Finally, teaching should be considered a profession requiring special training. CIE also made recommendations for in-service training of teachers after they took positions.20

These principles are apparent in three documents early in the occupation, The Civil Affairs Handbook (1944), Education in Japan (1946), and the Report of the United States Mission to Japan (1946). The information and recommendations in these manuals illustrate a progressive stance on education and its influence on various proposals. Education in Japan was the manual for initial officers in Japan and the members of the first education mission.21

The first education mission to Japan played a substantial role in forming the policy that the occupation instituted. Headed by George D. Stoddard, commissioner of education in New York, the 27-member group arrived in Japan in March 1946. In less than a month the mission had studied "all aspects" of Japanese education and proposed reforms to initiate democratic education in Japan. The CIE relied heavily on the mission's report as a guide for reforms. 22

The standardized classrooms and lack of freedom for teachers concerned the members of the mission. Students were expected to memorize an enormous amount of factual information. 23 They recommended immediate teaching reform which would emanate from Normal Schools (teachers training colleges) newly

fashioned with a progressive ideology. The recommendations received high praise from none other than General MacArthur himself. "It is a document of ideals high in the democratic tradition. In origin, these ideas are universal." For many purposes, the term "democratic education" meant "progressive education" during the occupation. This new system emphasized the worth of the individual because conformity in education creates a costly sense of obedience. A democratic system of education attempts to determine different interests among students to tailor curriculum. In an opinion indicative of the lack of respect for a centralized system, the first mission reported that even without the existing militarization the Japanese system needed "modernization" because it was based on an old model of central authority. Education should not simply impart knowledge from the teacher, but start from the interests of the student. Monbushō's role should be stimulus for creativity and leadership.

The Education Mission offered suggestions related to the original focus of CIE: administration and teaching methodology. First, they recommended the dispersal of authority in the structure so that the ministry's power could not be abused. This includes eliminating the inspector system and allowing local decision making on curriculum and texts. Finally, the education mission suggested that administrators remove militarism immediately, make co-education standard, and draft objective standards for teacher certification.

Second, teaching reform promoted the interests of the student to foster democratic ideas. Teacher conferences and workshops were proposed to make the transition to the new methodology easier. Normal schools had to be converted to train for a new democratic education, and the supervisor's role had to reflect a relationship of helpful veteran educator. "Under the new method the training of teachers was a combination a liberal education, a specialization in what they were to teach, and a holistic understanding of education."

The report from the first education mission to Japan was the definitive work that influenced reforms by the occupation government. Almost all suggestions resulted in reform, and several of the orders were taken verbatim. The American perspective on education is evident in the formal orders issued by the CIE.

Reform Implementation

At the beginning of the occupation the Japanese were open to change. They had just suffered defeat and had to house thousands of allied soldiers. Many of their core beliefs about their emperor, religion, and authority were about to shift overnight. The shock seemed to render them acquiescent to change, and many times active participants in it. Even before they were ordered, the Japanese government had started a small reform movement of its own. Order #20 on August 25th and #118 on August 28th 1945, re-opened all Japanese schools and eliminated nationalism and militarism from the schools.

The first stage of the occupation’s basic policy to demilitarize education began during the last two months of 1945 and finished within the first four months of the occupation. It was generally agreed that we wanted to revert to the 6-3-3-4 pattern, mainly because this was a way to emphasize co-education. We wanted to break up the separate track system and give women the same opportunity as men. Co-education, along with comprehensive curricula and small school districts, were three guidelines the American occupation established. SCAP issued Directive AG350 to the imperial government stating the two broad goals of demilitarization and democratization on October 22, 1945. To this end, the same order stipulated that all teachers who had been dismissed due to liberal philosophies were to be immediately reinstated and considered for teaching posts. But during the occupation few teachers applied. The directive also informed Monbushō of their relationship to the CIE—they had to be prepared to provide detailed status reports at any time.

The October 31 directive, AG350, removed all teachers known to be militaristic, ultranationalistic, or antagonistic to the objectives and policies of the occupation. Between 1945 and 1947 roughly 119,768 teachers were either removed during the screening process or quit to avoid the process. Furthermore, for a short time during the occupation, members of Monbushō were chosen from trained educators not government bureaucrats.

The occupation forces immediately eliminated the moral education track of schooling that served the militaristic regime through directive AG000.8, dated December 31, 1945. Educators introduced social studies to replace propaganda in the history and geography classes. These courses would develop a critical mind and provide a practical implementation of the abstract democratic ideals. There appears to have been little explicit debate, however, in how exactly a western generated social studies curriculum differed in legitimacy from the propaganda it replaced.

25 Department of State, 1946:63.
26 Department of State, 1946:6.
27 Department of State, 1946:.
32 With emphasis added Brinkman 1954:98.
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New textbooks were published with this democratic education in mind and guidebooks were published on how to progressively teach the new material. New history texts were written to separate “traditional mythology” and “scientific, historical knowledge.” School systems now could choose the curriculum to suit their particular needs. The Japanese passed the Fundamental Law of Education and the School Education Law in March 1947. For all purposes, the curricular reform to a “democratic education” actually meant progressive classrooms and a decentralized structure. Japanese teachers were informed that education should impart knowledge for its own sake; the child’s interests must be considered at all times; interdisciplinary studies and cooperative problem solving replacedrote drilling; teaching the “social use of arithmetic” instead of memorizing multiplication tables gained importance; discussion should replace lecture; and students should speak more. This reform of education would then create a sense of democracy in all areas of education.

On July 15, 1948, the occupation established a local school board system to publicly elect members. The prefectoral boards consisted of seven members, the local boards five, and all members served four-year terms. School boards also appointed a superintendent for their district. Thus, the prefectoral and local school boards were responsible for education in their area. SCAP ordered no new reforms after 1948 because they believed the structure under which democracy would flourish was in place. Mark Orr was able to return home, and the budget for the education section of the occupation was reduced.

Initial Reform Reversal

By the signing of the San Francisco Peace treaty in 1951, the efforts to democratize Japanese education had slowed considerably. After the Americans left, the responsibility of reconstructing the curriculum was left in the hands of the Monbushō, which did not completely understand the progressive philosophy nor completely believe in its merits. They aimed to roll back the majority of democratic reforms of decision making in the school system. Reform reversal began in 1953 in discussions about maintaining the Law for Neutrality of Education and discouraging teachers from joining political activities. On January 18th, 1954, the government published a report to make it clear that the police would enforce these laws and eliminate politics from schools. Thus, Monbushō first quelled the opposition, and then moved to legislation.

In 1956 the Japanese government abolished locally elected school boards by making positions appointive. A major reason for this was the Japan Teachers’ Union(JTU) political participation, namely their winning elections. All said, the local election of education officials lasted only during the six years of the occupation. The power of Monbushō over education administration was again becoming absolute.

By 1964 Monbushō once again dominated the curriculum and in Japan today education is highly centralized. Monbushō designs the national curriculum, approves textbooks, and recommends teaching methods. The power Japan’s central government maintains over teachers, comparable to that of other highly centralized governments, is a legacy of pre-war Japan and shows the influence of French and Prussian practices.

The occupation attempted to create a new method of democratic education in Japan. The new model placed an importance on the individual, not the traditional drilling methodology of the Japanese. This type of education was never adopted and this reflects a constant effort by Monbushō to supplant the liberal and decentralizing reforms of the occupation. Moreover, Monbushō has become stronger in modern times due to the occupation for three reasons. When SCAP abolished authoritative bureaucratic institutions, Monbushō filled the power gap. The occupation policies made Monbushō more professional and prestigious, and finally, the dependence on Monbushō for implementing reforms allowed them to circumvent ones that would diminish their power.

Four Areas of Opportunity

I will examine four areas of the occupation that might have been significant opportunities for increasing a general understanding of Japanese education reform. These areas will relate to preparation, focus, communication, and respect for the opposing view.

The perspective taken in this study embodies many of the general principles in anthropology. An anthropological lens provides a richer view of a cross-cultural encounter.

Cultural Anthropology, it can be said, is holistic, in that it is concerned with all aspects of human belief and behavior; historical, in its stress on the factor of time as relevant to understanding of human experience; and humanistic, in that its point of reference includes the individual who shapes his institutions even as he is being shaped by them.
The holistic, historical, and humanistic characteristics of anthropology along with the relativism it brings to a cross-cultural situation may illuminate the following areas of opportunity.

Training
The educators in the CIE had little knowledge about the reform movements in pre-war Japan. They were trained from two main texts: *History of Japanese Education and Present Educational System* (1937) by Hugh Keenleyside and A.F. Thomas and *Japanese Education* (1939) by Daisaku Ikeda. For the most part, the staff of the CIE had experience as educators, but their training emphasized language skills, general Japanese history, and "the system-the greater East Asian thing we wanted to dismantle and their (the Japanese) thinking about it."60

Keenleyside and Thomas, like Ikeda, describe Japanese education as the centralized model of the German system. They did not mention the reform effort of the early 20th century, or the progressivism of the fledgling unions. Their book would not provide information to the occupation forces on developmental education in Japan. Ikeda gives an overview of the history of Japanese education and then describes the state of education in the beginning of the 20th century. He presents the different levels and concentrates chapters on other forms of education such as women's schools and technical schools. It also makes little mention of the progressive movement before the war. Furthermore, the only reform movement mentioned in any initial documents of the occupation can be found in *Education in Japan* (1946). It talks briefly about the reform to the Prussian model from 1936 to 1940. Thus, the only reformers the Americans were aware of were conservative educators proposing a uniformed nationalism in the schools.

There was no part of the training that compared the European systems to the American system, a comparison which would have provided insights into how the Japanese teachers could be trained to teach better, not just more democratically. If the American reformers were better versed on other instances of a centralized system, they may have been able to adapt their goals and integrated them into the Japanese system. The situation of "our way" or "their way" could have been mediated. More importantly, the question "what would the Japanese structure look like with a democratic philosophy" could have been analyzed further.

Instead, the initial members of the CIE staff to enter Japan saw education simply as a thought-control institution. They did not see the evolution through the 19th and 20th centuries and its similarities with the American developmental reforms. They did not notice that culture will reflect not only the forces acting on it in the present, but also those from an earlier period.61

Unions
Shortly after signing the Potsdam declaration calling for peace in Japan, a left-wing movement of teachers reemerged in several cities around Japan. The roots of this movement lie in the efforts in the 1920s and 1930s to organize teachers into socialist organizations which were not sanctioned by the central government. This movement culminated in the Nihon Kyōshō-kin hōsoku (Japan Teacher Union) or Nihonkyō in 1947.62

These teachers demanded the same type of decentralizing structural changes as the occupation; furthermore, the union members were for a progressive child-centered classroom. Unfortunately, the CIE itself had little to do with the teachers' unions of Japan. The education section interacted with professional teachers' organizations and not political associations.63 The labor section of the occupation handled the teachers' unions independently as an economic and political matter and they believed that unions could improve the well-being of teachers.64

But the educators of the occupation avoided direct dealings with the teachers in the unions because of their political stance, and this hampered communication between two like-minded groups of reformers.65

During the occupation of Japan, however, the Labor Division of the economic and scientific section of SCAP (to the displeasure of the educational division of the CIE) legitimized and encouraged teachers unions to improve teachers' economic welfare and political power. Both Divisions wanted to give teachers a voice in the political process and to make school administration policy formulation more democratic. The JTU disappointed the education division because of its domination by leftwing Marxism.66

This sentiment is also evident in the interview with Dr. Orr, who made it clear that the CIE wanted little to do with the unions. His comments rarely touched upon the conflict between teachers and Monbushō over teaching methodology, but centered on a concern about the ideology of the union participants.

A large part of the antagonism that goes on between the central government and the teachers is a political difference. There are many teachers who favor some sort of socialism. As I recall there was one union which was influenced by the Communist Party, and some of the communists were getting elected to school boards. That frightened the Japanese government. The teachers were too leftist in their sentiments and that was part of the problem. Teachers there are more highly respected than ours, and yet there is always this conflict because of

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60 Barnard, 2002: 183; Riesannon as well; Hatch, 1983: 35.
64 Wray, 1991: 479.
65 Wray, 1999: 244.
Democracy over Methodology

The occupation’s theory was to decentralize the structure of the administration, believing that democratic patterns would surface. This concentration turned attention away from the fundamental mechanics of education. “It didn’t work, the whole decentralization issue, which was to make it more like us-more local control, more local authority, more local participation, get the parents involved.” It should have been clear to anyone with a historical understanding of Japanese education prior to 1945 that a decentralized system was not feasible in Japan. There were some people, however, working in the field to reform the classroom behavior of teachers. They came to Japan under a program Mark Orr initiated.

Orr established the Institute for Education Leadership (IFEL) as a program to train on the local level. Educators came from America and worked with a counterpart in Japan. Together, the teachers carried out the orders for new education. The main premise of the organization was to get information about what teachers were doing in the classroom to decision makers in the CIE. Between 1948 and 1952 over 9000 educators participated in the program, and specialists from all fields of education consulted Japanese educators for three days, or sometimes several months. There were two complaints about the IFEL program. First, Monbushō mainly chose educators with ambitions to administrate. This allowed Monbushō to fill the program with people it wanted to run the system, which led to the second complaint-the program allowed Monbushō to strengthen its grip on education.

Thus, the majority of teachers never fully understood the goals and methods of the new education. The occupation forces worried that “their importance was not being realized.”

The dependence on the ministry’s strong administration skills to communicate reforms to schools around the nation hindered the occupation’s goal of decentralization. The orders of the CIE were to use the present administrative system to communicate the reforms to the teachers. Reforms were designed by the CIE, approved by SCAP, and then applied through supervision of the Monbushō. It is interesting that the occupation assumed it could reform a top-down structure through top-down prescriptions.

The occupation attempted to transplant a democratic structure into Japan through the very people that would be most detrimentally affected. A different perspective could have emphasized mediating change that is introduced as little disorganization to the current system and disruption of the culture as their leftist interest and the unions. Many people believe that teachers should not have a union; it’s contentious on campus.

The goal of spreading democracy began to be supplemented (or perhaps supplanted) by a growing motivation to suppress communism.

The problem for Monbushō was that with the removal of militarism from schools, leftwing communists groups were disrupting the goal of social solidarity that would help economic revival. The actions of the Japan Teachers Union, which the occupation helped create in 1947, began to worry both the central government and the occupation. Monbushō proposed the JTU should be shut down due to the threat of a communist revolution. But even with an unpopular political orientation, today the JTU constitutes the only powerful countervailing force to the ministry’s overcentralization, standardization, and excessive educational emphasis on producing students for narrow national economic goals.

The occupation needed a large cohort of progressive teachers to replace the militarists who were removed from the schools in 1943 to reform a rote classroom into a developmental one. The majority of the policy suggestions from both these associations were nearly identical, yet the fundamental policy shift in decision making was never realized. Two influential groups were working independently toward the same goal, and Monbushō was able to hold them both off at once.

Monbushō portrayed the unions as counter to the efforts of a democratic education. Discrediting “those troublesome communists” also discredits their education platform. The fear of communism allowed Monbushō to weaken the reform proposals and undermine the leftist educators. Knowing this, it is difficult to see that occupation staff had much access to policy suggestions from the union teachers.

With that under control, it was easier for Monbushō to wait out the occupation forces, stall decentralization efforts at the highest level, and then reappropriate the reigns of policy making. A large contingent of influential, progressive Japanese educators was kept out of sight. Dialogue between the education staff firmly trained in the progressive method and the liberal teachers who wished to adapt the Japanese system to the progressive ideas may have provided a richer understanding of education in general.

Further, Duke points out the irony of this specific situation. Those the Americans trusted the most (Monbushō) wanted to initiate occupation reforms the least, and those the Americans trusted the least (unions) wanted to establish the occupation reforms the most.

71 Wray, 1999:245.
72 Wray, 1991:472.
73 Wray, 1991:472.
possible, not, as the occupation proposed, complete adaptation of their model and the ideology that went with it.69

The Benefits of Centralized Education

The French ambassador paid a visit to occupation education headquarters and met with Dr. Orr. “Why?” he asked, “are you completely changing the structure of Japanese education in this way?” The French, rightly, thought that this was a pretty good system. Further, the French ambassador pointed out that he was from a democratic country and his centralized education had served him well. Why then, should Japanese education be structurally reformed when curriculum was the issue? Dr. Orr spoke directly about this tension.

The Japanese have never given up rote learning. It’s drill, drill, drill, particularly for math and language. And maybe it’s appropriate. Certainly with a difficult language like Japanese with Kanji is there any other way but practice, practice, practice? You see we didn’t worry then but we worry now. Are we creating technicians, or are we helping create thinkers and stimulating imagination? Well, I don’t think the Japanese wanted too much of that because then you begin to question the system. There was some discussion about altering the curriculum but not the structure. You wish you could make it a good one; it’s as simple as that. But we had just been through Japan from 30 on, to Pearl Harbor, to the behavior in World War II and we wanted no part of that. We were too colored by the war experience and how the system had been manipulated by the center. All we knew about the Montsushō was that it was a thought control agency. The central government, through the ministry, dictated to the Japanese people what they would believe and how they would behave. Basic to this whole thing was this exaggerated regimentation, the lock-step educational system—everybody should perform at this level, you don’t hold anybody back, the expectation that the student will learn to be a good cooperator, get along with the fellows, don’t ask too many questions.70

There was a general lack of consideration of the potential of a centralized system with a progressive curriculum. This was evident from the outset as the United States Education Mission to Japan reported that even without the ultranationalism and militarism of Imperial Japan, centralized education is tarnished by the prospect of entrenched bureaucracy.71 It can be questioned, and has been by the Japanese, whether a centralized system is less democratic or not. “Teachers in both countries and each level report they use question and answer methods and depend on the textbook to determine what to teach.”72 American educators would probably not look with horror at centralized education the way the occupation forces did.73

Furthermore, the occupation explicitly lowered the academic standards of math and science because they felt the requirements were too difficult. Instead, children should be instructed in general lessons that overlap and relate to their everyday lives. Mombushō argued, convincingly, that the American progressive education was detrimental to a high level of success and it would lower the level of literacy.74

One argument is that reform should have concentrated on the curriculum not the structure, but CEJ ignored that possibility. The Japanese did not think they could reestablish the centralized structure and used educators to produce engineers—lots of them. They needed to rebuild Tokyo, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, national infrastructure, their industrial sector—every city besides Kyoto had been destroyed. Get math and science in schools now! They did, and 30 years later the Japanese were one of the greatest economic powers in the world. Their employees were well educated, their middle class was enormous, and during the bubble economy of the 1980s they were buying up portions of the very country that tried to reform them. American educators were then saying that Japanese schools could not do wrong, Their students were respectful and obedient, their test scores were astronomical, and their economic success unheard of. Suddenly obedience and economics was the measure of a successful education.

Conclusion

“My conclusion was final. I think the Japanese system is too highly disciplined and our system not disciplined enough. Is there a balance somewhere between the loose and the tight ways of providing education to children?”75 That then, is the rub. Balance could have been sought, but a superficial understanding and motivation hindered this possibility. Instead of asking what this balance might look like, the occupation had predetermined that their method was the proper way.

My own conclusion is that this paper introduces more interesting questions than answers. Although there is an analysis of occupation rhetoric compared to the actual reform implementation, this paper is admittedly more historically descriptive than theoretically rich. This is not to say that historical analysis is unimportant. Further, as an initial project it somewhat intentionally begs several questions to explore in future research by myself and others. I highlight but a few in closing.

First, whose ideas of democracy are implied by a particular theory of democratic education—and what, specifically, are those ideas? Once this factor is examined, one can ask who is benefiting from this particular form of democracy and who is detrimentally affected. The universal and natural characteristics the occupation spoke of then become more subjective and questions of power relations can be examined more clearly.

72 Jacobson et al., 1992:156.
The second question is if a prescriptive policy can ever truly bring about democratic processes. This alludes to the French ambassador’s inquiry above: if a centralized curriculum is heavy in civic literacy, community responsibility, and critical application of knowledge to the empirical world, can it produce a democratic society? A critical response would be skeptical of the contradiction of a centralized institution producing local, democratic self-sufficiency. If the occupation seriously hoped for democratic reform, perhaps they should have allowed the local communities to make fundamental decisions. Instead, they were more concerned with how central reforms would be implemented on the local level.

Finally, and as important for the historical period as the contemporary, scholars can analyze the rhetoric of promoting democracy to discover if it is merely masking intentions of those in power—intentions that do not live up to the discourse being espoused. For example, General MacArthur publicly promoted free speech, a free press, and the freedom of assembly. But, during the occupation virtually anything published in the newspapers had to pass SCAP inspection, and the occupation actively suppressed union gatherings that undermined their efforts. It is difficult to reconcile these behaviors with a democratic philosophy.

Therefore, this paper is a condensed description of educational reform in Japan under the American occupation. It analyzes areas where implementation hindered or contradicted the rhetoric of the administration and suggests how this might have been avoided. It also leaves serious theoretical inquiries for future research and debate. As we explore contemporary issues like education standardization and centralization, the globalization of particular domestic policies, and a perpetual drive for social justice, it is useful to reflect on the past for comparative insight and inspiration.

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**ABBREVIATIONS**

CIE | Civil Information and Education Division

SCAP | Supreme Command of the Allied Powers

**GLOSSARY**

Mombushō | 文部省
Nihon kyōshokuin kumiai | 日本国機関組合

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**REFERENCES**


