

## [Keynote Speech]

### “Quality and Governance of Education - Japan’s Experience”



#### **Eiichi Kajita**

President of Hyogo University of Teacher Education, Leader of the Expert Meeting on Analysis and Utilization of the National Student Assessment and Learning Environment Research of Japan

**Dr. Eiichi Kajita** is President of Hyogo University of Teacher Education, Japan. Assuming this office in 2004, he has held many prominent positions such as Vice Chairperson of the Central Council for Education of MEXT, Japan, Chairperson of various Sectional Committees of this Council, Ad hoc Meeting for Analysis and Application of National Student Assessment & Learning Context, and other educational institutions, as well as local governments. His research and publishing interests are in psychology and pedagogy and he has been the editor of the education practice and research magazine *Education Forum* (Semiyearly, published by Kaneko Syobo Co., Ltd).

## **“Quality and Governance of Education - Japan’s Experience”**

**Eiichi Kajita**

**President of Hyogo University of Teacher Education,  
Leader of the Expert Meeting on Analysis and Utilization of the National Student Assessment and  
Learning Environment Research of Japan**

Since around 2000, there has been growing concern throughout Japan about a decline in the quality of Japanese education, specifically in terms of 1) declining academic performance, 2) increasing absenteeism and neurosis and 3) increasing bullying and delinquency. Other issues include the disruption of classes, which prevents lessons from being properly conducted, and shocking misconduct and crimes committed by teachers.

Some had expressed concern about the possibility of declining academic performance as an adverse effect of the revised Course of Study that was introduced in 1992 to primary schools, in 1993 to lower secondary schools and in 1994 to upper secondary schools in order to give “latitude” to both students and teachers by reducing the educational content, lowering academic standards and decreasing the number of lessons. The next revision of the Course of Study was announced in 1998-1999, and fully implemented in primary and lower secondary schools in 2002 and in upper secondary schools in 2003. As this further reduced teaching content, lowered standards and reduced the number of lessons, there was widespread concern beyond educational circles about declining academic performance, and this became a major social issue.

In the 1990s, “student-centered” teaching was strongly promoted by the then Ministry of Education and academic circles, insisting that teachers should not give instructions but rather support students. During this period, the study of teaching materials and “lesson studies” were neglected, although they had traditionally been carried out as important prerequisites for lessons. Academic achievement tests were criticized, and the Ministry of Education implemented policies that limited the use of large-scale academic achievement tests, such as nationwide or prefecture-wide tests.

This trend changed drastically after discussions by the National Commission on Educational Reform in 2000. I was one of the 26 members of the commission, which was a personal advisory body to the prime minister. It issued “Seventeen Proposals for Changing Education” in December of that year. These proposals have gradually been put into practice since the January 2001 establishment of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology by combining the Ministry of Education and the Science and Technology Agency. The new policies were intended to enhance academic ability and emphasized the importance of committing to producing “results.”

In order to achieve these goals, the Central Council for Education was reorganized in 2001 as a larger body, uniting seven existing councils related to education. The Compulsory Education Special Committee played a key role in changing the educational policies of the 1990s. The report submitted by the Subcommittee on Curriculum in January 2008 proposed new curricula that would expand teaching content, enhance educational standards and increase the number of lessons. This will be implemented from April 2009 where possible, and fully implemented at primary schools in 2011, at lower secondary schools in 2012 and at upper secondary schools in 2013. The Subcommittee on Teacher Education discussed ways to improve the quality of teachers by reforming the teaching license system as well as pre-service and in-service training and submitted a report in July 2006. Based on this report, laws and ministerial ordinances

are being revised. Furthermore, following deliberations by a panel of experts, nationwide assessments of students' academic ability and learning have been conducted every year since April 2006, targeting all students in the 6th and 9th grades, in order to review Japan's educational system based on "educational outcomes" and to implement necessary reforms at the national and regional levels and at each school.

Thus the main pillars of Japan's educational system today are, 1) enhancing the standards of national curricula, 2) improving teachers' skills and 3) assessing educational outcomes and relevant contributing factors. These are organically combined and implemented to constitute the basic educational administration. The fact that I have been involved in all of these three areas, serving as chairman of the two subcommittees and of the panel of experts clearly demonstrates that these activities are closely linked.

With few natural resources, Japan must support a large population in a limited area and thus must maintain and promote its industrial sectors at high levels. Japan's unique culture, which has been strongly influenced by China and other countries and which has developed over many centuries, must be passed on and developed. As a member of the international community, Japan must also be able to contribute in its own way to the wellbeing of humankind. Children of future generations will play key roles in the future of Japan as it faces these challenges. Therefore they must develop academic skills in areas such as science and mathematics, which are critical for the nation's science and technology. English and other languages are also important in developing better relationships with other countries. So is traditional Japanese culture, which is essential for Japan's identity, as well as Japanese language ability and moral character, which provide the foundation for all of these skills.

