Actualizing Self-determinative Learning in Japan: Specious Virtue and Probalism

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Responsible citizens in many countries share a want for quality educational opportunities that are commensurate with their ambitions. Such is no less the case in Japan, where in the literature there is ample discussion on educational issues pertaining to organizational reform (Ho 2006; Azuma 2002; Kitamura & Cummings 1972; Hato 2005; Fenton 2006; Bendix 1945; Parmenter 2000; Silberman 1976, 1978; Spinks 1941; Wada 2000; Willis & Yamamura 2003; Kikuchi 2006; Lincicome 1993; Fulcher 1988; Haley 1987), curriculum redesign (Cogan et al. 2002; Doyle 1994; Fenton 2005; Fujiwara & Saburai 2006), methods and principles related to teaching and learning (Stern 1987; Doyle 1994; Fenton & Terasawa 2006; Gorsuch 2003; Horwitz 1998; Kita et al. 1994; Nunan 1998; Acar 2005; Brown & Wada 1998; Dalton 1998; Nunn 2005; Oka 2004), and comparative studies on intercultural features (Bacon & Finneman 1990; Duke 1966; Hu 2002; Parmenter 2000; Savignon & Wang 2003; Zhenhui 2001). Absent from the literature, are professional practitioner accounts of their respective epistemological approaches. It is believed Educators as agents of 'change' (da Costa 2006: 3) or 'renewal' (Conley 1993: 7)—in an era of tension between 'tradition and modernism' (Hanafi 2005: 384; Brown 2004: 2) would benefit substantially from undertaking a critical reflective of their epistemology and 'ethics of practice' (Robinson 2001: 521; Bricker et al. 1993; Carr 2000). In this submission an attempt will be made to proffer a scholastic epistemological vision that accounts for the 'fallacies and dilemmas, and/or paradoxes' in concert with an agent of renewal's 'professional practice'. All are linked by a common 'issue' (Denman 2006: 4; Beckett 2000)—'communicative' and 'deliberative action' (Chriss 1995: 594) and, in the case of Japan, an Asian 'tradition-bound' society (Fenton 2006b), it is a nation and culture that struggles with the forces of 'continuity and discontinuity'—a 'juxtaposing the old and the new' (Hanafi 2005: 384).

In a preceding paper, this author delineated the historical formation of Japanese educational policy, cultural, and institutional characteristics that are the composite of environmentally fabricated systems (Fenton 2006). And, in addition, if advocated assertively a belated need for a paradigmatic evolutionary shift to a postmodernist dimension characterized by globalization; not singularly with the irrelevance of fashion, entertainment and information domination; rather, education, economics and

business in concert with transparent governance. A 'decentralization' (Taylor 2006: 1), 'educational decentralization' (Rideout 2000: 256)—that enables the proliferation of creative autonomous local based initiatives which should foster a moral consciousness; an interpretive system of values; as too, an eagerness for self-determinative learning. A shift away from a modernist paradigm that is predicated on the notions of convergence, paternalism, and centralization of which fosters: 'officially sanctioned credentialism' (Lincicome 1993: 151); seeming transformations amounting to mere adaptations of 'style' (Silberman 1978: 385; Kikuchi 2006: 77); denial, suppression and marginalization of rudimentary problems (Wada 2001: 1); inadequate genuine consultation through cooperative dialogue (Hato 2005; Taguchi 2005); an inequitable notion that self interest somehow must equate with general interest.

This submission will speak to the pedagogic espoused visionary aspirations of inner-organizational collaborative learners. With an epistemology propagated on the works of indisputability one of the fore-leading philosophers, theorists and educators of critical pedagogy in the postmodernist era (*see* Friere 1970, 1994; Friere & Macedo 1995; Leistyna 2004), and Habermas' *Theory of Communicative Action* (1981) (*see* Habermas 1984, 1987 *discussed as examined in* Chriss 1995; Dellon 1999; O'Donnell 1999; Mitoric 1998), which girders Critical Theory, and runs counter to the 'techno cratic' and 'market-driven' 'commodification' of educational practice (Roberts 1996: 295). Wherein, "dialogue" which is viewed as a process of learning' (Friere & Macedo 1995: 5) is stifled, and the inherent 'Co-learner's Affective Domain' (Fenton 2006a: 4) that is comprised of 'motivational, cognitive, affective-emotional and social process', (O'Donnell 1999: 251; Noddings 2006: 238) is not esteemed.

A Propositional Epistemology on Demand

> Of himself Foucault says, my role—and that is too emphatic a word—is to show people that they are much freer than they feel, that people accept as truth, as evidence, some themes which have been built up at a certain moment in history; and that this so-called evidence can be criticized and destroyed. To change something in the minds of people—that's the role of an intellectual (Ball, 1990). (Oliver 1999: 221)

Envision yourself, as a foreign educator, who is schooled in the postmodernist paradigm of critical thinking. Familiar to only western professionals, catapult yourself back in time into a tradition-bound educational setting situated in another culture, and contemplate the following descriptive characterizations in Japan:

1. The mental well-being of the learner is irrelevant to the learning;

2. Training frequently relies on rewards and punishments to achieve the desired result;

3. Knowledge is not to be gained through problem-posing and solving, but rather by means of rote learning piece-meal stipends of de-contextualized information;

4. Framed in educational programs explicitly based on behaviorism which is showing signs of loosing its appeal;

5. Where the most significant challenge many educators report, is 'socializing' young people so that they can become 'useful' members of society (Fenton 2006);

6. In organizations where educators confide that 'school image' largely now takes priority over 'actual achievements', owing to the demographic changes and the 'profit motive' (Fenton 2006c);

7. Whereat schools are reportedly finding it hard to keep up with reforms dictated by a dominate centralized Ministry of Education;

8. In a society where 'a staggering 79% of respondents agree that 'education reform' does not reflect actual problems confronted by schools (Oct. 22, 2006, *The Japan Times*);

9. Moreover, 70% are of the opinion that 'society's understanding of school' has declined in the last 20 years.' (Oct. 22, 2006, The Japan Times)

Surely such a de-centering experience would be cause enough to prompt many professional practitioners to deliberate, question, problem-pose, reflect, resource, research, examine, deconstruct, reconstruct; all with an intention to implement, adopt, evaluate and enable, meaningful reform in their particular theatre of operation. This agent-of-renewal has recently undertaken this very trek-of-transformation: A soul-searching process that requires a tremendous degree of personal fortitude, integrity, genuineness and aspiration; encapsulated in this academic's professional epistemology.

This educator contends that educational learning must be equally rooted in both virtue and utility, irrespective of culture, discipline, situated learning context, or the broader environment. A progressive educator needs to strive to achieve the mindset of a philosopher, theorist, and action researcher; adept and originative at marshaling the resources in challenged conditions. All, with the embrace of flexible learning through pliancy in a timely fashion; which attends to the diverse needs of learners in varied settings, through the delivery of content to those in need; thereby ensuring equal access for all. Educators and learners alike must be willing, and then purposefully prepared, to readjust their respective roles accordingly. At the classroom level, collaborative groups engaged in pedagogically well-designed purposeful learning activities, invoking critical dialogue that is learner-centered, yet

authentic in context with learning outcomes of civic merit. Such is a prerequisite to a constructivist-based education, grounded in Critical Theory, situated within postmodernist paradigm. All of this, however, demands a convective shift in the mindset of all stakeholders within the broader society—learners, educators, communal resources, organizational administrators, bureaucratic policy fabricators, and the nation's political leadership which, I believe, can be achieved through transformative dialogue and action, coupled with measurable results.

Such an espoused epistemology may be fine, if not of equal merit with any other, were it unexamined, especially in the light of predisposed environmental conditions wherein it is proffered. So you may ask: Just what then constitutes *challenged conditions?* What is the justification for such an equally ascribed valuation of *virtue and utility?* Are educators not progressive by mere virtue of their acclaimed position achieved through their labor? Should we not just settle into our culturally preconditioned roles of teaching and meekly go about the business of dispensing some institutionalized formulaic prescribed curriculum? Is it not best that matters of philosophy, theory and action research be left to those interested in pondering such? Besides, is not such too abstract for any meaningful classroom application—something akin to "Trickle-down Economics"—in this case, an indirect benefit to those who *know little?* What of the roles of educators and learners? Teachers have the power, freedom and responsibility: Does such not go hand-in-hand; and, why should that ever change? Is not freedom the just reward for submission to authority? "Change", this writer asserts, is not some singular element impacting in an insular inconsequential fashion, but rather the effect of motional forces spurred on by positional adjustments of elements in time and space. How then is such a concept reconcilable with the espoused notion of flexible learning and its constituents—pliancy, timeliness, diversity, and equal access—all in varied settings? Why contemplate adjustment to the mindset of critically examining learners' diverse needs in varied settings, when the widely accepted maxim "what's good for one, is good for all" has hitherto served us so well, or has it not done so? What is to be understood by *collaborative engagement*, and by what means and purpose, to what extent and by whom?

To draw on yet another maxim, "the devil is in the details", or rather is it that "details are bedeviling" when one sets to the task of defining, deconstructing and then reconstructing an epistemology? A concept map was designed for the set purpose of empowering cognitive processing though the visualization of this very undertaking. It was Gowin, who in 1977, introduced a 'heuristic device' that has been proven to be a most useful device in aiding individuals to comprehend the 'structure of knowledge' and 'process of knowledge construction (see Gowin 1981) ... concepts, events/objects, and records of events/objects (which we call facts)—come

together and are unitarily intertwined as we try to make new knowledge.' (Novac & Gowin 1984: 5-6). With the aid of this instrument, we can now proceed onward to the task of addressing the questions unraveled in this espoused epistemology.
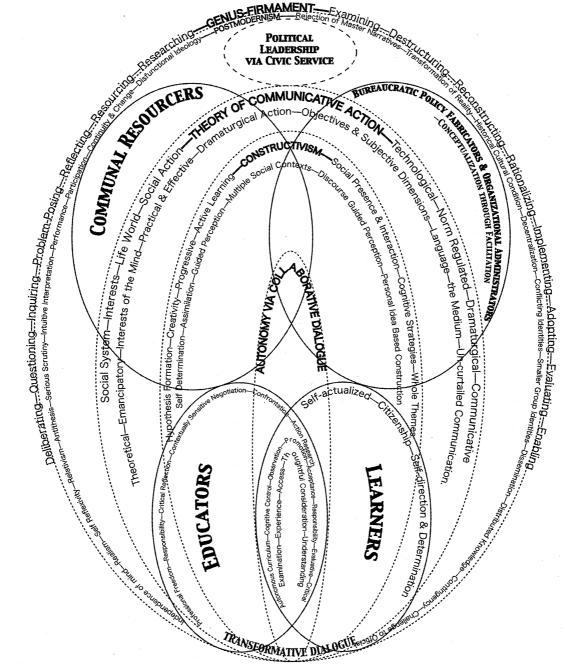
Praxis Elemental Concomitance

> The theme here is the de-differentiation of traditional system boundaries. This process comprises the blurring, erosion, effacement and elusion of established boundaries (be these hierarchical or horizontal). These boundaries can be between political, social and economic boundaries. Examples include boundaries between high and low culture, education and entertainment, teaching and acting, politics and show business, programmes and adverts, philosophy and literature, fact and fiction, author and reader, science and religion, producer and consumer. It is the dissolution of established distinctions. (Berton & Katsikeas 1998: 151)

Praxis Elemental Concomitance (Figure 1) may best be described as a concoction of related elements, interactional through a transitory arrangement of paradigm, theory, methodology, practice—all impacting a wide spectrum of related values and ideas, espoused by an equally diverse group of societal actors. Hence, the chosen word 'praxis' which marks the continuous relational influx between 'theoretical understanding and critique of society and action that seeks to transform individuals and their environments.' (Leistyna 2004: 17) Upon initial inspection of the diagram (Figure 1), one can observe a symmetrical arrangement of layered circular constructs varied in portional arrangement. The innermost of which is *Autonomy via Collaborative Dialogue* followed outward by *Constructivism, Theory of Communicative Action* and *Postmodernism*. Superimposed are clusters comprised of groups including: *Learners, Educators, Communal Resourcers, Political Leadership Via Civic Service*, and *Bureaucratic Fabricators & Organizational Administrators*— all encased by *Genus-Firmament* and interactional through *Transformative Dialogue*. Each orbital circular cluster has a shared set of values, principles and objectives both commensurate and communicative with the other non-competitive groups, whose respective merging interests are shared by the composite grouping. In yet another metaphorical sense, the two significantly overlapping circular clusters, situated closest to the well of *Transformative Dialogue*, could be viewed as the nourishing catalytic forces which provide the moral impetus for sustained societal well-being.

A closer examination will first attend to the symmetrical arrangement of layered circular constructs and their relevance to this context, as too, the accompanying issues and dilemmas: *Postmodernism, Theory, Theory of Communicative Action, Constructivism and Autonomy Via Collaborative Dialogue*—their application, fallacies,

dilemmas and paradoxes in the context of Japan.

Praxis Elemental Concomitance

Figure 1

Postmodernism

Anyone having an appreciation of postmodernist painting may relate to Peron and Peron's (2002: 49) assertion that arriving at a commonly accepted definition is very nearly 'impossible' by virtue of design.

Figure 2. Revenge of the Goldfish, 1981

Lyotard, in his book, The Postmodern Condition, undertook the task of proffering a description of ' "the condition of knowledge in the most highly developed societies' (1984, p. xxiii)" ', and posited that the condition of western culture 'following the transformations which, since the end of the nineteenth century, have altered the game rules for science, literature, and the arts' (p. xxiii).' (Hassard 1993: 123) 'Post modernism is a term given to a set of related attitudes to contemporary civilization', and is defined by three features that sets it apart from the modern period: 'the failure of the Enlightment Project, the growth of intracommunal ethnic diversity' and the continued expansive growth of 'social, economic and technological' development (Winch & Gingell 1999: 175). Further Bauman (1997 in Winch & Gingell 1999: 176) assert that the modern period had a comprehensible 'rational' underlying the 'separation', in that the economy needed to be liberated from the constraints of 'traditional and religious interference' if advancements were to be realized.

In Peron and Peron's view (2002: 53) 'Postmodernism is a way of thinking' that closely adheres to the 'reality of our society, of becoming, without defining, or explaining.' It attempts to be a 'reflection of the trends that it is creating and which are changing at the same time'; a most intense questioning of the 'pre-established order: rejection of rules, trends, taboos', 'universal goals or knowledge—and the social institutions which claim to produce them' (Berthon & Katsikeas 1998: 153)... in the fields of art, politics, science, philosophy, architecture, the graphic arts, dance, music, literature and literary theory, or society as a whole ... 'a perpetual breaking up and questioning'; where 'order and chaos can exist in succession or

simultaneously.' (Peron & Peron 2002: 53)

Postmodernism is identifiable by several notable features and trends:

1. A decrease in mass production owing to greater automation (Winch & Gingell (1999) or robotics, and the relocation of such activities to outside markets, this writer submits. An increase in competition, surplus, investments and corporations (Hanafi 2005: 390) 'postindustrial' postmodernity came to be represented by 'alternative forms of technology, culture and society' (Hassard 1993: 122).
2. An increase in relatively 'small-scale specialist production'. (Winch & Gingell 1999: 176)
3. A growth in the importance of 'knowledge of knowledge and intellectual property as economic assets' (Winch & Gingell 1999: 176); as too the protection of such property though the implementation of copyright protections; ' "postmodern' reflects an epistemology" ' suitable to changed conditions of knowledge. (Lyotard 1984, p.53 *in* Hassard 1993: 123) The 'socio-economic method' is too 'socio-cognitive' in that 'knowledge' is 'co-created interactively' and the 'intervener-researcher' is not merely a 'simple observer', but an active collaborator in 'operations of the organization' at 'all levels', and is not excluded from meetings where 'essential information is communicated, and where the real decisions are made.' (Peron & Peron 2002: 52) 'Rather than making claims to subjectivity which cannot be explained away, they seek to understand the epistemological underpinnings of their craft and the consequences for their research.' (Tierney 1998: 228) And, an admission that ' "difference of opinion" makes sense" ' in spite of 'common standards that we share' (Ghiraldelli 2000 Online).
4. The end of 'class politics' that relaxed the 'normative bonds', which served as the adhesive binding 'working-class communities'. For the purposes here, normative bonds can be taken to refer to tradition-bound (premodernist) oligarchic societies, wherein extended families are synonymous with other organizational groupings. As the normative bonds loosened, the need for 'Pyschic discipline'— 'an increased need for individuals to discipline themselves through internal mechanism' and a corresponding search for ways in which to facilitate such (Winch & Gingell 1999: 176).
5. The '*globalization*' in business and politics, in fashion and entertainment, economics' (Taylor 2006: 1) and education that shows 'logic and sequence', with greater focus on 'world problems' (Ghiraldelli 2000 Online), as evidence by the broadening of curriculum content at various levels of schooling, e.g. social, environmental and cultural studies.
6. The use of Information Communication Technology (ICT): media networks, satellite communication, electronic databanks, online journals, virtual chat rooms, search

engines, fiber optics (Taylor 2006), translation devices, mobile technologies—phones, computers.

7. A movement toward 'decentralization' ranging from the 'balkanization of nations', the formation of 'autonomous regions', the 'proliferation of grassroots movements, local initiatives, and bottom-up change' (Taylor 2006 Online) and the 'fragmentation, change and/or destruction' of organizations (Peron & Peron 2002: 53); the 'transfer of authority from a higher level of government to a lower organizational level (Brown, 1990; McGinn and Street, 1986).' (Ho 2006: 590)

8. A growing concern for '*ethics* and *values formation*' (Taylor 2006 Online; Cogan, Morris & Print 2002; Ots 2002; Pitiyanuwat & Sujwa 2002; Morris, Cogan & Liu 2002) and 'ethics of practice' (Robinsion 2001: 251; Car 2000, Schon 1987; Denman 2006) with the aim of realizing healthier 'citizenship' (Schaps & Lewis 1998: 23).

With respect to Japan, Camaroff's (1994 *in* Buthon & Katsikeas 1998: 153) concept of '"double visage" of 'social phenomena" which holds that many such phenomena are not 'experienced in a unitary, unparadoxical fashion', but rather in a 'dichotomous, paradoxical manner'—drawing on the establishment of the World Wide Web to illustrate his point: … 'it can liberate people from the confines of traditional time and space'; or 'it can be addictive, encouraging compulsive behavior'. It is both 'constructed' and 'constructor'. Continuing on the topic of technology as it applies to the first noted feature and trend of a postmodernist society, Japan was very slow to actually adapt to the Internet. A considerable lot of which had to do with single-minded, slow, top-down decision making regarding installation of fiber optics. Equally slow, were public organizations in all fields, in the embrace of said technologies, which is ironic in perceived techno-savvy society. On the other hand, Japan, as did other Asian countries, adopted mobile technology at a much faster rate than say their North American counterparts—but again, how is that technology being used and how well has it been integrated in educational settings, or is it primarily a tool used for secretive communication and personal entertainment?

There has been an early increase in relatively small-scale specialist production; protection of intellectual property and the implementation of agreements on copyright protections have been slow in coming. There is tacit acknowledgement that openly expressed difference of opinion is a healthy attribute. While there is some evidence of a move away from the custom of life-time employment and devotion to one's family, Japan remains a very oligarchic society, where the family is viewed—in many unfortunate cases in recent years—as a safe haven from the demanding rigors of corporate life. It is indeed a common observation that many young adults continue to live at home well beyond the traditional years of marriage, under the guise of taking care for their parents. Those that do marry, seldom have more than

a (stastical Handbook of Japan, 2005) if any, giving rise to a generation of what is commonly referred to as "little emperors".

On the feature of decentralization in general, Japan appears to have shown little progress. Both in private or public sector settings are replete with decision-making that paternal top-down, even for the smallest of determinations. A recent comparative study assessed *educational decentralization*—'seen as a major policy to increase efficiency, flexibility, accountability, and responsiveness for economic development in both developed and developing countries'—in Japan, Korea and Hong Kong (Ho 2006). Even among these three, Japan is considerably far from the analytical counts of Hong Kong, and in many regards, nearly identical to those of South Korea whose first democratic elections were held in 1987.

While there appears to be an growing concern for *ethics* and *values formation*, as evidenced by the recent introduction of legislation impacting issues including: protection for endangered species, anti-smoking, recycling, privacy of information, sexual and gender discrimination, etc., there is a limited understanding of the underlying importance and broader implication of such. Hanafi's study of 'historical options' and subsequent construction of three philosophical models, situates Japan in the 'Eastern model of juxtaposing the old and the new' (2005: 384). The model addresses the dilemmas and tensions surrounding traditionalism and modernism, 'The old is for the private sphere, the new for the public sphere.' The division of labor is preferred to confusion in the name of equality, women's rights' (2005: 390). For Hanafi, (2005: 390), as this writer suspects it to be for a growing number of Japanese citizenry, 'The question is':

> Is it possible to have two ways of life? How can man live with double truth, double ways, and double behaviour? In moments of individual or national crises, tradition prevails over modernism. In case of dishonour, suicide is the natural response. The harmony at the very basis of this balance between the public and the private is well maintained in normal situations. In moments of danger, the imbalance appears. The majority chooses tradition, but the minority represented by the Americanized youth chooses modernism. The majority feels the need to preserve tradition as a guarantor for a continuation of history. The minority feels the need to defend the individual against the oppression of the collective system. On the surface, the dualistic system works. At the roots, the latent frustration and feelings of oppression are tremendous and incurable by "workaholicism" or alcoholicism.

Theory of Communicative Action

Habermas' (1984) Theory of Communicative Action is defined as ' "the interaction of at least two subjects capable of speech and action who establish interpersonal relations (whether by verbal or by extra-verbal means)" ' (Chriss 1995: 551). Habermas' theory is in accompaniment with a range theory, all of which in some way address issues pertaining to Critical Thinking. Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse are several of the leading thinkers who led the way in founding critical theory.

> ... extending its influence in sociology, largely through the successes of a number of applied research programs (such as Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, and Stanford's [1950] study of authoritarian personality). (Chris 1995: 546) ... critical theory's major goal has always been to link theory and practice (Frankford 1994 /in/ Chriss 1995: 548).

Such was an expansion from Marx's legacy, with the objective of identifying, uncovering and ameliorating 'oppressive social structures or circumstances'; a shift away from Marx's legacy preoccupation with 'political power and economics' to 'philosophy' and 'psychoanalysis', with the aim of a complete analysis of the 'pathologies' plaguing 'modern culture' (Chriss 1995: 546; Mitrovic 1999: 219). Habermas' vision of critical theory—neo-critical theory—emerged in the early 1970s with some 'elements of the Horkheimer/Adorno version of critical theory'— retaining their 'critical view of positivism and their goal of establishing a new theory of knowledge', which would empower a rigorous examination of truth and opinions through discussion, or 'dialogue' (Freire 1970), and take into account the 'social, historical, and cultural contexts within which that knowledge is formulated and accepted' (Chriss 1995: 546; Mitrovic 1999: 219). In exhaustive fashion, Habermas meticulously expands on the rudimentary concepts of *social action, interests, life world, social system, regulation as communication, etc.'* (Mitrovic 1999: 219)

> Regarding differences in the character of actions, Habermas distinguishes four forms of action, namely 1. teleological action, 2. norm-regulated action, 3. dramaturgical action and 4. communicative action.

In Habermas' view, 'social systems' are sustained through 'instrumental action', enforced through external surroundings, as too by 'specially regulated stereotyped communicative action', with the characteristic of creating *system dependence of people and groups'* (Mitrovic 1998: 220; Ingram 1993: 297) affording them the appearance of subjects in the broader political system, subservient clients for the bureaucrats, as an interdependent consumers in the economic system. By controlling

the media—'money, power, influence, value', and the systemic avoidance of societal rewards for acquisition of other languages—'the social systems affect human behavior', irrespective of direct interaction and personal desires (Mitrovic 1998: 220).

On the role of institutions and organizations, Habermas faults them for becoming too narrowly focused over time, exclusive, unresponsive, inattentive to those in need, resulting in a loss of legitimacy. 'They are dominated by money and power orientation, bureaucratization, and politicization.' The main challenge then is how best to rescue the social 'system structure onrush, that is what conditions are necessary to ensure and develop the subject autonomy in the not-yet conquered communities'; which, this author takes to apply to educational communities. Habermas' view to a solution lies in 'affirmation of the "communicative rationality", in strengthening of the civil society autonomy', in affording greater opportunities for free action and mutual communication among societal participants, arriving at rational decisions founded upon reasoned argumentation and consensus. (Mitrovic 1998: 220-1) The seeming alternative is the strengthening of authoritarian government forms and system enforcement. The top-down approach is costly—stifling human potential and squandering material resources. At the other end of the spectrum is the 'routinization of bureaucratic authority', wherein power is transferred to 'managers and administrators' and the roles of 'intellectuals' and educators is reduced to 'interpreters' and providers; and 'legalism' becomes a pronounced societal feature (Pieterse 2005: 15).

In effect, Habermas believes that 'practical issues of social life', in a postmodern society, can be attended to through reasoned discourse among relevant groups and their members. However, such requires the provision of critical prerequisites: abolishment of 'compulsion' or coercion in communication; cultivation of 'universal communication ethics'; institute adequate democratic processes among people and social groups. Habermas places particular emphasis on the 'role of speech act' wherein 'communicative rationality or communicative mind', rooted in communicative action, can be realized. (Mitrovic 1998: 221-2) The Theory of Communicative Action should be seen, herein, as a template for expansive methodological investigation, toward the end of empowering a belated paradigm shift to a fully postmodernist Japanese society.

Constructivism

Constructivism refers to the notion that individuals construct their own meaning based on one's perception of reality. Constructivism is primarily concerned with the means in which individual and collective learners 'construct the social and

psychological world in specific linguistic, social and historical contexts' (Fenton & Terasawa 2006: 222-3; Oxford 1997). Burner (1966 *in* Fenton & Terasawa 2006) originated the theme that learning is an active process, whereby scaffolding of information is undertaken in conjunction with pre-existing foundational knowledge. The learner resources, selects, examines, critiques, reasons, evaluates, constructs, hypothesizes and engages in determinations with the aid of cognitive structures, (e.g. schema, mental models) (Fenton & Terasawa 2006). Constructivism runs counter to the tradition bound, teacher-centric, dehumanizing method of 'information banking' (Freire 1970). The theory and related methodology offers a more holistic and beneficial approach to learning, when flexible student elected curricular content and assessment is contextualized in a way that accounts for learners' understanding— through active engagement in learning activities that use analysis, debate and critical thinking. It is expected that such an approach will foster in students the ability to validate the relevance and authenticity of information for social-using discussions comprised of peers and communal resources (Fenton 2005; Fenton & Terasawa 2006).

As Oxford (1997: 36) notes, constructive views strongly impacted the "whole language' movement in English', with constructivist ideas having...

> ... spawned hundreds of books and articles and currently influence classroom teaching practices and teacher education techniques (beneficially or otherwise, throughout North America, Europe, the Far East, and other parts of the world. In the midst of this ferment, "constructivism has become a new catchword... There are many people who are using the term who don't know what it means" (O'Neil, 1992, p.5). For the dangers in "regionalizing" constructivist ideas that are only dimly understood, see Philips (1995).'

Oxford's (1997) cautionary note proved well-founded. Kern (1995), Yang (1998), Rao (2002), Jarvis & Atsilarat's (2004) called into question the suitability communicative language teaching (CLT) methodology—a chief tenant of constructivist learning theory—in their respective Asian contexts. In a bid to examine that unsuitability-criticism that is owing to differing learner styles, Savignon and Wang (2004) in the contexts of Taiwan; and, Fenton and Terasawa (2006b) in that of Japan's, undertook duplicate studies with a reliable instrument. The results of both studies largely refuted those findings of theirs. The point being that while it may be the case where theoretical ideas relating to constructivism are not properly understood, resulting in ineffectual application of related methodology; it can also be that the broader societal constructs or praxis do not lend to such; hence, therein lies the justification for a through examination and transformative dialogue on the broader societal paradigm itself.

To illustrate the point-at-hand, Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT)—a bureaucracy unmatched in scope and power among OECD countries—formulated a range of measures to ferment "'Japanese with English Abilities'" (MEXT 2003: 1), that were recently implemented with some cosmetic changes (Taguchi 2005). The espoused goals were to use utilize 'authentic real-life' content in 'group activities' that generated 'interaction' in 'learner-centered classrooms that develop an autonomous learning style' (Taguchi 2005: 3). Taguchi's study, as did Kikuchi's (2006: 7), revealed that educators were greatly hampered by the stated objectives of the national curriculum which actually impeded active practice in a communicative setting coupled with no external changes to the intended complementary examination system. Hato (2005: 33) in her study, too revealed 'flaws in the action plan', which was implemented in a coercive fashion, with 'unattainable objectives' by those lacking in knowledge.

In a study of 'problem-solving incapability in Japanese society', as it pertains to 'environmental and social problems of many kinds', Wada (2000: 1) asserts that the 'real causes of the problems' are often 'denied', 'suppressed' and 'marginalized' by Japanese society, owing to the 'strong pressure' from powerful elites who focus narrowly on 'defined and short-term economic efficiency'. And then, as a perceived remedy, 'only superficial and impotent measures' are implemented.

Autonomy via Collaborative Dialogue

> Dialogue cannot exist, however, in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people. ... Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself. It is thus necessarily the task of responsible Subjects and cannot exist in a relation of domination. Domination reveals the pathology of love: sadism in the dominator and masochism in the dominated. Because love is an act of courage, not of fear, love is commitment to others. No matter where the oppressed are found, the act of love is commitment to their cause — the cause of liberation. And this commitment, because it is loving, is dialogical. ... Only by abolishing the situation of oppression is it possible to restore the love which that situation made impossible. If I do not love the world — if I do not love life — if I do not love people — I cannot enter into dialogue. (Freire 1970 Online)

'Self-managing' (Seddon 1999, Online), 'Self-Directed' (Kera 1999, Online), 'selves-directed' (O'Donnel 1999: 251), 'Teacher-learner autonomy' (Smith 2001: 1), 'Learner-Centred' (Nunan 1988), 'Learner Autonomy' (Thanasoulas 2000: 1), all pertain to the broader concept of 'rational autonomy', wherein 'rationality' is seen to be a 'vital educational aim' (Winch & Gingell 1999: 21). Facilitating "autonomy" is about

enabling and empowering informed, rational, discerned and responsible free initiative. This requires the removal of oppressive political, social, institutional and organizational constraints that inhibit, obstruct, stifle and restrict learner-educator's heartfelt and valuable contributions to society.

Narrowing the scope to education, Thanasoulas (2000: 1) draws on Holec (1981: 3, cited in Benson & Voller, 19997:1) who defines it as ''the ability to take the charge of one's learning'', going on to identify several aspects of its application; which, asserted here, have equal implications for learners and educators: situations, context, skills-set, innate capacity, responsibility, right of determination. Thanasoulas (2001: 1) takes the view that 'autonomy' needs to be thought of as a 'departure' from 'education as a social process' and too as a 'departure' from 'education as a social process', and too as a 'redistribution of power'. Little (1991: 4 *in* Thanasoulas 2001) holds that 'capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making and independent action' are all prime characteristics of autonomy.

What then of the values associated with educator-learner autonomy? Core values decided on here include: collaboration, cooperation, integrative curriculum, flexible methods in delivery of content, flexibility in teaching/learning styles and roles, life-ling learning, inclusion and valuation of all participants, responsibility and accountability, engaging communal participation. Learner autonomy is inseparable from educator autonomy; neither can be fostered in the absence of greater trust and freedom from the oligarchs. To realize greater autonomous learning in the Japanese educational setting, educators need to be seeded self-directed determination over the selection of their modeling practice—broadening their ability to acquire a wider repertoire of attitudinal perspectives, skill-sets and content related expertise.

Conclusion

In many countries thoughout the world, citizens long to participate in quality educational opportunities of their design and for their purpose, absent the dictates and constraints present in an oligarchic tradition bound society. This submission speaks to the salient paradigmatic approaches used to articulate what is valued in Japanese society regarding education. It does not attempt to address all approaches, nor does it attempt to arrive at any conclusive outcomes based on the literature review. It attempts to analyze the state of Japan's education system through a literature review and personal observation. This writer holds that educational learning must be equally rooted in both virtue and utility, irrespective of culture, discipline and situated learning context, or the constraints imposed by the broader environment. Moreover, it addresses many of the fallacies, dilemmas and paradoxes

within Japanese society, which are detrimental to the educational well-being of its citizenry. Such, this author holds, can only be addressed through meaningful transformative dialogue and action by the relevant parties.

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