
Examining the Development of Japanese Education Policy

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Abstract

In 2006, Japan's Prime Minister Abe took office with the intention of building a "Beautiful country, Japan" (Abe, 2006). Abe swiftly formed the Education Rebuilding Council whose purpose was to discuss the current state of education and develop a set of proposals for education reform. This paper utilizes Critical Discourse Analysis as a research tool to examine a selection of texts from the Japanese Education Rebuilding Council Meetings held between 2006-2007. The paper discusses the emerging discourses of globalization, patriotism, and citizenship in Japanese society.

1. Introduction

1.1 Education Policy

In this paper, policy is viewed as the "exercise of political power and the language that is used to legitimize that process" (Codd, 1988: 235). By examining the policy process, alongside a discussion of the rhetoric of government (Dye, 1976) this paper will attempt to examine a small selection of policy proposals discussed at the Education Rebuilding Council (ERC) meetings in Japan since October 2006, to examine the values, assumptions, ideologies and discourses underpinning the policy process. Taking Ball's (1994) definition of policy as text and policy as discourse, this paper also recognizes the importance of policy as and in discourse. The paper will take a critical approach, probing beneath the surface to ask how and why the policy has been created. Most importantly, it will question, whose interests are served (Ball, 2007). By focusing on the impacts of such proposed changes to see what it is being advocated, we can begin to see how this will affect certain groups in Japan.

1.2 Critical Discourse Analysis and Policy Texts

There are numerous frameworks, which can be used for an analysis of policy texts however, for the purposes of this paper, an adapted framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2002) will be utilized.

The reasons for using this framework are three-fold; firstly, previous work such as that by Foucault, have focused on the historical and social context of the policy. In this respect, it is easier to establish the relations between the discursive practices, texts and events and the social, cultural structures, relations, and processes (Taylor, 2004). Yet, less attention is paid to the linguistic content. Secondly, by examining the language that is utilized, it becomes more evident as to who wields power with respect to the policy being analysed. Japanese is a language that is rich in linguistic features, ignoring the language and the way that it is used, would not give an accurate account of the powers involved. Finally, Taylor (2004) noted, there is relatively little published work on policy analysis in education, which specifically uses CDA, in recent years the number of works has increased, however, very few have been produced specifically on Japanese texts. Therefore, it was felt that there is a need to contribute to this field.

1.3 Context

“Policy ideas are received and interpreted differently within different political architectures, national infrastructures and national ideologies” (Ball, 2007: 4). In this statement, Ball draws on van Zanten’s (1997) definition, that a national ideology is a “set of values and beliefs that frames the practical thinking and action of agents of the main institutions of a nation state at a given point in time” (Ball, 2007: 44). Therefore, in this paper, it is essential to recognize the Japanese national ideology that is helping to frame the creation of these policies and to give a brief overview of Japanese education reform. To understand change in education, it is also important to appreciate the changes in economy, culture, and society.

Japan and Japanese people have been the focus of large volumes of what have been called “*Nihonjinron*”. *Nihonjinron*, are papers written largely by the Japanese that discuss issues of Japanese identity and self - esteem. They also discuss the tension between insiders (Japanese) and outsiders (foreigners) in Japanese society. They have charted the development of Japanese society since the end of World War Two and detail the way the country and its people have pulled together their traditional values and beliefs against the face of internationalization. Academics who have written extensively on Japan, such as Dore (1973), express the idea that the economic success seen during the bubble in Japan was largely due to the “mobalization” of traditional values. They detail that the search for a unique Japanese identity has been a strong part of the country’s rhetoric (Lock, 1988).

Lock (1988) observes that although the ideas of a strong unified Japanese national identity have been around for a long time, what is unique about them is that the “invention of tradition”

(Ranger and Hobsbawm, 1983) is recast around topical themes that provoke anxiety (Lock, 1988: 50). She cleverly observes similarities between Cohen's (1972) work on 'Moral Panic' and that of the Japanese *Nihonjinron*. On examination of literature moving into the 1990's and early 20th century, it appears that this is the case. There are two examples, worthy of mention here that also exemplify, a kind of 'moral panic' and a strong rhetoric calling for a reassertion of Japanese unique identity, those are the Japanese *Otaku* and *Kogyaru*. In the case of *Otaku*, amateur manga artists were thrust into the social spotlight and became "characterized as antisocial manga otaku" (Kinsella, 1998). The media spread this concept, and the artists became representative of a dangerous type of Japanese youth. It was described as an "otaku panic" (Kinsella, 1998), and was characterized as a social problem among the young in Japan. If we take a feature of moral panic to be an exaggerated fear of excluded minorities-such as otaku, a more individualistic Japanese society could lead to a state of moral panic.

As will be seen in the proceeding sections, it is argued that the current education reform policy proposals could be seen as the government and ERC panel's reactions to their own moral panic. They are observing and promoting a rhetoric that the decline in morals and collapse of society is due to "outside" influences and the response is to reassert national self esteem (Lock, 1988: 50) and "build a beautiful country — Japan" (Abe, 2007).

In the 1950's, the Japanese government published *Post War Developments in Japanese Education — Education in Japan 1945-1952*. It stated that;

with recommendations made by the Japanese Education Reform Council, the basic constitutional provisions for education of the people...were expanded into statements of educational policy and were enacted...into law (Ministry of Education, 1952: 52).

As can be seen, the process for creating education policy in the new millennium follows the same path as in the 1940's — the formation of a reform council that discusses and recommends proposals. The 1952 document outlines the Fundamental Law of Education, which states the purpose of education is,

to aim at the full development of personality, striving for the rearing of the people, sound in mind and body, who shall love truth and justice, esteem individual values, respect labour, have a deep sense of responsibility, and be imbued with an independent spirit, as builders of a peaceful society and state (1952:1).

The statement emphasizes the idea of individuality with reference to independent spirit and individual values, yet it calls on people to become “builders” of society. This reference to building is also seen in the present day discussions and will be discussed in this paper. There is a spiritual element to the statement that is a reflection of Japanese religious practices and the use of the word “rearing” is a compassionate term that aims at enveloping and protecting the nation. In a post-war era, these sentiments seem to summarize the national feeling at that time.

Attempts at reform by Prime Minister Nakasone in the 1980’s suggested that the school problems encountered in their era (disrespect for school rules and violence) were due to weakness in moral education (Schoppa, 1991). A problem which he believed stemmed from the 1947 post-war policies that “emphasized the Western ideal of individual autonomy at the expense of traditional Japanese values” (Schoppa, 1991: 52). The Ad Hoc Council for education also published four reports between 1985 and 1987. The key discourses emerging from these reports are concerned with “internationalization” and “moral education”. In terms of internationalization, the committee suggested that one of the main goals of future education should be to train “Japanese within the world” “世界の中の日本人” — *sekai no naka no nihonjin*. However, this statement stood alongside quite a patriotic vision that by examining the outside world, Japanese could appreciate the “uniqueness of Japanese culture” and that children should remain patriotic. Schoppa (1991) observed that these statements did little to internationalize the school system as a whole as many recommendations such as the special attention given to returnee students were aimed at an elite number of individuals. However, despite this observation, both Schoppa (1991) and later Hood (2001), suggested that Nakasone was relatively successful in the area of nationalist issues.

In Nakasone’s own words, “education in Japan should play a special role in cultivating a proper national awareness and preserving the unique culture and traditions of Japan” (quoted in Schoppa, 1991b: 241). Education clearly needed to foster ‘patriotism’ and schools were urged to respect and understand the anthem and national flag. Gerow (2000) states that this approach is logical given two assumptions. One is that “Japan does not have a robust national identity and that the national arena is, in Hobbesian terms, a mean and brutish place,” he goes on to say that, “according to this scenario, Japan would sink under the aggressive waves of other nations without a strong sense of self” (Gerow, 2000: 85). However, the beginning of the millennium has seen a number of teachers refusing to stand to the flag and sing the anthem at school ceremonies, which has resulted in legal battles over the right to freedom of thought — it is therefore clear that

the debates surrounding identity, patriotism, and internationalization are ongoing and an essential component of education reform.

1.4 Recent Events

In recent years, a number of scandals have hit MEXT and have resulted in increased media attention and interest in national education. The latter half of 2006 saw students crippled by bullying while teachers, principals and Board of Education chiefs were reprimanded over the falsification of school records. Textbooks sparked international controversy and student and teacher suicides increased. All of these events have raised issues of accountability and have led parents, teachers, and social commentators to question and defend current education practices. When Prime Minister Abe took office, he immediately began work on reforming the education system alongside his Education Rebuilding Council (ERC). The first report from the ERC confirmed that:

Extremely serious conditions can be seen in school education today, including a drop in academic ability, the problem of compulsory subjects not being provided, bullying, truancy, violence in schools, disruption of classes, teachers with a lack of teaching ability, the ambiguous sense of responsibility among schools and boards of education, which can only be described as avoiding trouble at any price, and a slump in the international competitiveness of higher education (ERC First Report, 24th January 2007).

In the short space of time since these comments were written, three education reform bills have already been passed by majority vote by the house of councilors. The laws will introduce a new teacher license renewal system, create new vice principal and chief teacher posts at primary and middle schools and will revise the School Education Law. These reforms have been developed through regular discussions by the ERC, chaired by Prime Minister Abe.

1.5 Prime Minister Abe

Assuming the post in 2006, Shinzo Abe had the unenviable task of following Mr. Koizumi who was a popular Prime Minister and one who was internationally known for his efforts to 'reform.' Koizumi's rather swiftly called election in 2006, in order to continue with the post office privatization reform, showed that his efforts to reform had not gone unnoticed. The feeling among the Japanese people and government were that reform was a way forward.

In order to assert himself in the role of Prime Minister, it was essential for Abe to continue

the reform precedent set by Koizumi. Abe entered the government vowing that education reform was a top priority of his administration. He established the ERC shortly after taking up his post in Autumn 2006. In much the same way as Tony Blair began his term in the UK in 1997 with the words, “*Education, Education, Education,*” the potential reforms that Prime Minister Abe wished to pass have formed an essential part of his political rhetoric. The council, which deals with a number of education related matters, primarily the review of the fundamental Law of Education, is composed of twenty members selected by Mr. Abe. They consist of what could be described as experts and ordinary people many of whom have no experience directly in the education system -an Olympic athlete, writers, journalists, multinational company presidents alongside university professors, and Mr. Abe’s “close aids” such as the chairman of Japan Rail Tokai, Yoshiyuki Kasai. It has been called a “diverse panel” (Nikkei Weekly, 2006) by the media.

Mr. Abe, the grandson of a former Prime Minister, entered the post with both support and criticism. The youngest Prime Minister in the post-war era, Abe faced a barrage of criticism from the opposition and media for his patriotic stance and although began to foster stronger ties with neighbouring China, he was criticized for not focusing on issues closer to home such as the gap between the rich and poor. A number of embarrassing scandals, namely the public’s missing pension records and scandal — tainted ministers, resulted in a general election of the upper house - a battle which his Liberal Democratic Party lost. Despite the loss, Prime Minister Abe vowed to press on with his reforms. The concluding remarks from his general policy speech immediately after the loss and shortly before his resignation, confirmed that he wished to create a statecraft that:

while adapting to severe changes in the environment surrounding our country, safeguards and nurtures the values that Japan possess intrinsically, which we can still find in our daily lives... such as a sense of self discipline, compassion and warmth for others....statecraft that advances the creation of a beautiful country (September 2007, Prime Minister Abe, General Policy Speech).

Despite Abe’s determination to reform education, the beleaguered Prime Minister resigned suddenly in September, just 11 months after the establishment of the ERC.

After Abe’s resignation, political commentators suggested that,

Nothing has changed about the nationalist atmosphere that made a politician who is ‘patri-

otic' only in words into a Prime Minister nor the structural factors behind that nationalism" and that "unless the nationalist atmosphere changes, the overall turn to the right is not going to stop so easily (Takahashi, 2007:2).

The patriotic discourse that is evidently clear through the Prime Minister's rhetoric and in media reports in both Japan and internationally, will no doubt have an influence on education policy. Yet, as Archard (1999) states, "teaching a nation's future citizens about their nation need not of itself be a patriotic education in the sense of being a blinkered or sentimental education" (p.171), therefore, it could be argued that developing public spirit and the attitude of loving our country and our hometowns - the goals of compulsory education- are not negatively patriotic. This paper will explore such ideologies and discourses in the proceeding sections.

2. The Education Rebuilding Council & Policy Development

2.1 The Development of the Policy and Reform Bills

The ERC held regular meetings from October 2006. The policy proposals examined in this paper have been taken directly from the minutes of the meetings that were held between October 2006, and July 2007 and the First Report of the ERC published on January 24th 2007 entitled, *Education Rebuilding by Society as a Whole-First Step toward Rebuilding the Public Education System* (ERC Translation). Using CDA as a research tool this paper will now describe, interpret and explain the extracts of the ERC meetings that will be used as a basis for Japanese policy reform in conjunction with items from the media that help to exemplify this discussion.

A schedule of the meetings of the ERC can be seen in Table 1. Through examining the

Table. 1 Timeline of meetings and reports submitted to parliament

Meeting 1	18/10/06
Meeting 2	25/10/06
Meeting 3	29/11/06
Meeting 4	21/12/06
Meeting 5	24/01/07
Meeting 6	29/03/07
Meeting 7	23/04/07
Meeting 8	01/06/07
*Meeting 9	23/10/07
Report 1	24/01/07
Report 2	01/06/07

* 1st under the direction of Prime Minister Fukuda

minutes of these meetings and the reports, a number of extracts have been singled out for more in — depth analysis as it is thought that these extracts contain vital discussion point that are likely to or have already transpired into Education Reform Bills. By tracking extracts through the year, it is clear to see how and where the ideas have originated and also shows the progression of the policy — making process.

This paper will briefly examine two documents. The first extract is from the official First Report produced by the ERC (Appendix A). It was produced on 24th January and the text selected is from Section 2 — *Basic Concept to Rebuild Education*.

The second extract is taken from the minutes of an ERC meeting held on 18th October 2006 (Appendix B). The comments in this section are taken from Mr. Heita Kawakatsu, an ERC committee member. His comments were selected as they indicate how the content of the First Report (Extract One) was developed and negotiated and provide a clearer picture of the decision making/power process.

By selecting both types of text for analysis (a report and meeting minutes), we can gather greater information about how the policy came about, illustrate the key themes and tensions emerging from the report, observe whose interests are being served, and the political rhetoric behind them. By approaching the reports in this way, it will become clear who the main actors are in terms of power relations and a closer analysis of their contributions will help to legitimize the policy.

2.2 Extract One —ERC First Report January 2007 (Appendix A)

The report outlines the discussions thus far and sets out seven recommendations to rebuild the education system (seven recommendations and four urgent measures). The dominant discourse in this extract is that of the notion of moral decline. Abe’s continuing rhetoric of the need to move towards a “Beautiful Country Japan” (2007, 1st Report p.8) is also carefully developed through this extract.

The opening paragraph raises three points of concern. Firstly, the report states that the ERC has “carefully deliberated” the issues, however, on reading the minute meetings, it appears that the issues were not “deliberated”, committee members stated their opinions in four short meetings prior to the first report being compiled. As has been noted in the media, the public feel that the discussions have not been thorough enough. The second point is that the government appears to

be quite frank in initially signaling out criticism of today's education including "false egalitarianism" and "bureaucratic formalism." Yet, in the latter section of the extract they turn their attention to society as the cause of the decline in standards and quite clearly point a finger at society stating,

people in every area of society....have forgotten that they too are responsible for the education of our children and have not only failed to act but have even acted in opposition to education in some cases (2007, 1st Report, p.10).

This remark could be seen as an attempt to pass the responsibility onto society as a whole; a society whose everyday lives are heavily influenced by the government. The irony of the following sentence, "Children must model themselves after the adults they see around them" was particularly noteworthy in light of the government's scandals, disintegration, and general unruly behaviour at the time of the report. It has been suggested by the media that in fact the government should hold themselves accountable before society. In a country that does not generally engage in apportioning blame, the comments in the extract apparently blaming the "deterioration of education" on the breaking of "warm human ties" could be seen as startling and disturbing. The reason for the decline in the public's positive involvement in education is not explicitly stated, however there is reference to previous ties that "bound our families." It could be suggested That the forces of globalization and the influence of western culture and lifestyle could be partly responsible, as could the decline in economic conditions in Japan, yet globalization is never explicitly singled out as a main cause of decline. However, it is an example of rhetoric that could support the notion of moral panic among society. The unveiling of the annual *Kanji* (Chinese character) of the year, supports this notion. The kanji (selected by the general public) for 2007 was "偽" — *nise* — which means, 'fake, imitation, deception, or bogus.' The third placed kanji was "嘘" — *uso* — which means 'lies.' In choosing these kanji, the public indicated their strong discomfort at the state of society during that particular year. These choices are a marked contrast with the top kanji of previous years, "命" — *inochi*-life (2006) and "愛" *ai*-love (2005) (Kanji Kentei, 2007).

The third point of concern in the opening paragraph is the need to build a school system that, "truly meets the needs of the people's expectations", yet it is never made clear who's expectations these are. Are they the committee members? The governments? Students? Parents? Or society as a whole? A recommendation further on in the extract also refers to "society's diverse needs." If this is referring to the general public and society, it could be said that their voice has yet to be heard in discussions surrounding education. It could be said that the ERC is not composed of regular members of society and that the real voice of the people has been ignored. Therefore, the

section of society that have the most invested in the education system, are not able to state to the government what their expectations are.

The extract proceeds to list a number of strategies for reform. It appears that a number of the reforms have similar meanings and are extremely vague, such as, “assuring the quality of education based on objective evaluations using multiple measures.” These statements are not qualified and lack deep rationale and purpose.

At the end of this extract, there is an explicit reference to “open [ing] ” a “beautiful Japan” to the world, a Japan that is “respected” and “trusted” by the international community. Does the government feel that at present Japan is not respected and trusted? Or is this just political rhetoric?

As stated previously, there are more than five uses of the word “build” alongside “create.” Again, emphasizing the importance of the idea that the ideal country and society is yet to exist. It still needs to be built. There are also borrowed words from the English language that are currently academic buzzwords in education. The use of the term “accountability” is included in this report and has not featured to such a great extent in Japanese policy discussion in the past. The proposal also uses extremely emotive language such as “deterioration” and “warm human ties” to capture the public’s imagination and to possibly create a feeling of guilt.

2.3 Extract Two — ERC Meeting Minutes: Mr. Kawakatsu (Appendix B)

In an attempt to confirm the origin of the First Report, when examining the meeting minutes of the ERC, Mr. Heita Kawakatsu’s comments stood out, as they appear to form the basis for the report mentioned in section 2.2. It can be seen that his comments have been firmly included in the final report and that themes he addressed previously have been given great attention.

The comments from Mr. Kawakatsu are presented along with those of other committee members in a set of minutes that has released to the public via a government website. The committee members attended an hour-long meeting in which they were asked to outline their basic ideas on education and education reform. This was the first meeting of the committee, therefore, the aim of the session was not to discuss in depth any particular point but to state their individual visions for the future of Japanese education and personal standpoint on controversial issues.

There is a strong patriotic discourse in his extract. Kawakatsu is strongly echoing the political rhetoric used by Prime Minister Abe in his post election speeches. He utilizes the key phrase, “美しい国” or “*beautiful country*,” that is seen as Abe’s catchphrase. It is clear from the start that by utilizing such language he appears to align with Abe. He refers to the past Edo and Meiji eras in Japanese history and the language that was used then to “rebuild” the country. The Meiji era highlighted the need to build a “strong” country that kept internationalization at arms length, while the Edo period referred to building a “correct” country — a country that holds strong moral values and followed the hierarchy of the samurai. Therefore, throughout history, the Japanese education bills have stressed the need for social order. In the Edo period the rigidity of the system was emphasized, many commentators have suggested that the bills presented by the ERC are also following this vein. By reinforcing the hierarchy of the past and rigidity of the system, the youth will obtain the strong moral values, essential for creating a “beautiful Japan”. Yet running alongside the patriotic discourse that is urging the need to reform the country, is the secondary discourse of globalization. It is evident that his reference to Tokyo University, which is seen as the center of Japanese educational excellence, while discussing an increase in the number of foreigner “*academics*” is a direct sign of how universities are no longer purely Japanese institutions and that the need for professors and lecturers from overseas is vital to the future of academic institutions.

Kawakatsu also utilizes emotive language to stir his audience. While talking of the “shape of the nation’s heart”, “strength” and “beauty,” he proceeds to refer to the country’s past to evoke a reaction. The dialogue is spoken in a relatively informal manner. This can be seen in the way the sentences are not complete, there is an absence of honorific language and the Japanese sentence final ending です (*desu*) is absent. Sturtz Sreetharan’s (2006) work on Japanese males politeness suggested that the absence of です (*desu*) indicates a rougher more aggressive style. The absence of such an ending is said to be blunt and assertive (Reynolds, 1991, Shibamoto, 1987). Kawakatsu may be attempting to assert himself among males in the group by omitting the です clause-final politeness. As the committee is male dominated, it is likely that he may feel that this kind of speech is acceptable.

In summary, his speech is dominant, is composed of a number lexical elements similar to that of Abe, and is a strong attempt to establish himself on the committee. The points he raised did not contribute any more to the debate than had already been discussed. Therefore, it could be suggested that his remarks were merely a way of establishing his presence and a show of support for Abe’s ideas. When comparing with the Extract One, it is clear to see that the final proposals

included in the report are in a similar vein to those expressed by Mr. Kawakatsu. This indicated his position as an influential member of the committee.

3. Dominant Discourses

The dominant discourses that emerge from the discussions of the ERC in Extract one and two are globalization, patriotism, and morality. The Japanese government could be said to be striving to both embrace the economic opportunities presented by globalization, while at the same time dismissing the negative influences of globalization that have caused a decline in morals.

3.1 Globalization and Internationalization

Despite the apparent embracing of globalization, it is recognized that due to the government's patriotic stance, patriot leader in Abe and choice of vocabulary in policy documents, there are often negative comments in both Japanese and Western media that accuse the government of anti — foreign sentiment. Therefore, political commentators have warned that:

Japan needs a political initiative that can counter globalization and neo — liberalism in order to help stop the accumulating frustrations from economic social inequality from leading to nationalism and anti — foreign sentiment (Takahashi, 2007:3).

It is yet to be seen if the new Prime Minister Aso's government will do this. It must be realized however, that although globalization may change parameters of state policy, it does not override or remove existing peculiarities (Dale, 2007).

The discourse of rebuilding or “making” “作る” alongside globalization could be strongly interpreted as a defense against globalization. It could be argued that “building” has positive connotations, for example the erection of a new building can come with prosperity and a sense of hope for a profitable future, however, in these reports, it could be suggested that the term “作る” is negative. The term is often used after a comparison to the “world” or another “country”, therefore, it could be interpreted that Japan feels the need to build a defense against these changes. Building under pressure could lead to fateful results. To “build” a nation is an enormous task, therefore, the political rhetoric of “*building* a beautiful Japan” could be seen as too great a burden for the educational system to bear.

It is difficult to ascertain whether the ERC has a clear notion of what nationhood and citizenship actually mean in this complex world. The discrepancies and difficulties in translation

of the terms between English and Japanese also cause great difficulty for an outside observer which could suggest that perceptions of these concepts are extremely contentious.

Green (2007) acknowledges that forming citizens and shaping identities is a primary function of education (Green 2007: 195) and was mainly used by states after wars. Japan engaged in such reforms after World War Two and are doing so again, in what could be said to be an attempt to be an emergent power in a globalizing world. They see the need to reform citizens and shape identity against the face of globalization.

As Rizvi states “the discourse of globalization was institutionalized around a set of converging ideas based loosely on neo — liberal economic theories, popularized earlier by Regan and Thatcher” (p.195). It appears that the Japanese policy reform discourse is also running along these lines. There has been speculation in the media that the government is policy borrowing from the UK and the US. Yet on closer inspection, it appears that the government is actually recycling policy that emerged from post - war Japan.

3.2 Moral Education as a Reaction to the Forces of Globalization

The new education laws are said to “allow children to acquire a good understanding of their heritage and become intelligent and dignified Japanese” (Hiroo Nakashima, lawmaker, said during Upper — house debate, 2007) and that it is important to “thoroughly instill in children the minimum social rules and standards expected of members of society” (2007, Second Proposal). Critics however argue that this kind of education is a return to war-era education. The recent crackdown by local boards of education to ensure that all teachers and children stand for the national flag and anthem follows these lines, and has been held in great debate in the media. Teruyuki Hirota a professor at Nihon University, stated in a national newspaper that:

strengthening moral education may result in students being forced into one particular standard of morality — set by the government. This is opposite of a multicultural society, in which people live with diverse values (21/06/2007, Daily Yomiuri).

As can be noted, there is a great divide concerning how the country should improve the moral values of its citizens. The role of education in this task is debatable. It appears that the ERC proposals are proposing that education should function as a means of reproducing the society. Yet, Usher and Edwards (1984) state that the pluralization of cultures undermines the modernist goals of national education as a unified project and that education can “no longer readily function

as a means of reproducing society or as an instrument of large scale social engineering” (Usher & Edwards, 1984: 211).

4. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to use a loose CDA framework as a means of opening dialogues and to examine Japanese education reforms. As Taylor (2004) states, this interdisciplinary approach to analysis provides a useful way of looking at policy.

This paper has provided the basis for further discussions regarding the development of Japanese education policy. It could be suggested that there is evidence of “discourse driven” social change in Japan at present. The discourses of morality, globalization, the need to “re-build” the country, and patriotism are dominant discourses that are projected throughout both the policy texts and the media. As Rizvi (1997) states, “it is clear that global processes can no longer be overlooked when analyzing educational policies” (p.10) and never more so than in the case of Japan.

Yet, the legitimacy of the apparent urgency and seriousness of the damning comments uttered in the extracts could be called into question. As stated previously, the Japanese ‘moral panic’ was seen in the 1980’s, 1990’s and again now. The government appears to be reiterating rhetoric that has been so prominent in the past and the discourse in these texts can also be found in previous discussions on education. It was essential that Abe took office in a dominant fashion and by utilizing the phrase to “build a beautiful country” in conjunction with a somewhat urgent focus on education, he would secure himself in a strong position with the people by accentuating the ideas surrounding moral panic. It could be thus concluded that the ERC policy proposals are nothing more than Abe’s elaborate means of asserting power and control over a society that is bombarded by negative media portrayals and government rhetoric that indicate the country is in moral decline and that the ERC did not, actually, further debate on education reform as the discussions revolved around old ideas that were consequently producing all too familiar discourses — with very little tangible change. This leads us to question, and further explore the government’s rhetoric and the future of Japanese education reform under the new Prime Minister Aso.

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Appendix A

Extract One: ERC 1st Report January 2007

The Education Rebuilding Council has carefully deliberated a full range of issues that have become the focus of criticism regarding today's school education, including the "education establishment's" "false egalitarianism," "bureaucratic formalism," "closed and opaque decision-making process," "lack of true accountability," and "lack of crisis management system." We believe that it is necessary to build a system of school education that truly meets the people's expectations by implementing full reforms and improvements aimed at the following:

- * Ensuring that all children have the opportunity to acquire basic academic abilities and respect for social norms.
- * Rebuilding our public schools to guarantee an environment that parents and guardians can trust and where children can learn quietly.
- * Providing the kind of education that ensures diversity and helps each child develop his/her particular abilities to the full.
- * Creating an environment in which schools and teachers can apply their creativity while constantly

striving for self improvement.

- * Assuring the quality of education based on objective evaluations using multiple measures.
- * Achieving school management that incorporates the views of those receiving education and is accountable to the community.
- * Implementing a flexible but consistent education policy covering early childhood through higher education, based on society's diverse needs.

We are also acutely aware that a major factor contributing to the deterioration of education today is that the warm human ties that once bound our families and communities have weakened, and people in every area of society, including the family, the community, business, organizations, government and the media, have forgotten that they too are responsible for the education of our children and have not only failed to act but have even acted in opposition to education in some cases. Children model themselves after the adults they see around them. Each and every adult must strive earnestly to be a worth model for our children. It is inconceivable for adults to act selfishly, indifferent to the course of our children's sound development. The time has come for society wide efforts to rebuild Japanese education.

Our goal is a "beautiful country Japan" open to the world, respected and trusted by the international community, peopled by physically and emotionally healthy and dynamic individuals. Hereafter, we will continue our deliberations with a view to building an education system unique to Japan, focusing on reform of educational content, improvement of teacher quality, reform of the education system, nationwide involvement by society as a whole, and an emphasis on concrete implementation of reforms.

Appendix B

Extract Two: EFC Meeting Minutes: October 18th 2006

[N.B. due to space constraints the following text is an extract from the full text that was selected for analysis (due to space constraints). The full text can be found of the ERC homepage: <http://www.kyouiku-saisei.go.jp/>]

美しい国づくりという理念に心から賛同。美しい国づくりとは、「国のたたずまい」と「心のかたち」の両方を含むものだと思う。規範意識を高める事も重要だし、科学技術の水準を高める事も大切。美しい国づくりとは、これまでの「強い国づくり」から一種の旅立ち、ということである。強い国づくりとは明治時代に学問から始まり、実学と呼ばれた。それ以前には、正しい国づくりとして江戸時代の儒学がそれにあたる。美しい国づくりには、それにお怖じた学問があり、これからは、これらを総合した、新しい国づくりの為の地についての学問が必要。

