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# Why is Educationalization Ubiquitous but Marginal in Japan? : A Consideration on a Different Background of School Reforms

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*The concept of educationalization refers to the government's tendency to impose heavy responsibilities to solve social problems on the school system. In this paper, after briefly reviewing the concept of educationalization, I will show that it is a ubiquitous phenomenon in contemporary Japan through three cases. This will prove that school reforms intended to fix social problems are poorly resourced and powerless to change schools in general. This stagnation is due to (1) immature professionalism in educators, (2) loss of motivation for "conspicuous consumption", and (3) the absence of ideals, beliefs, and values to be expressed in school reform. Elsewhere, another series of school reforms are much favored, well-funded and powerful in Japan. After posing anti-ijime policies as the best example, I describe and analyze the background of this type by introducing the concept of "officialization of school problems". Strongly supported by school consumers, it has successfully received a hegemonic position. However, under the hegemony the relation between school and environment is over-simplified by the logic of neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism. After comparing both types, we find a modest utility of educationalization: it could interrupt the perpetuation of hegemonic ideologies and make it possible to see the outer world in its complicated reality.*

**Keywords:** school reform; educationalization of social problems; officialization of school problems; school consumers; interruption

## 1. Introduction

Most school reform attempts seem, at least in Japan, to fade away in a few years without completing their purpose. From the viewpoints of taxpayers, these failing experiences merely leave a sense of disappointment. Because more and more expectations continues to be

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cast on school reform, however, the wave of school reforms will never cease. Why do Japanese people, in spite of these failures, keep agreeing to grant resources to school reforms? This is our research question. David Labaree, an American educational sociologist, has already posed a similar question on school reform in the American historical context (Labaree, 2010). In his argument, the concept of the "educationalization" of social problems is the key. In this paper, we will also begin by considering the "educationalizing" situation as a clue to our exploration. However, our final goal is not to confirm the validity of Labaree's argument, but to find the factors of uniqueness in the situation that surrounds school reforms in Japan.

In brief, the concept of educationalization refers to the government's tendency to impose heavy responsibilities to solve social problems on the school system, and to blame it when it fails. Labaree explored the reason why American people continue to pursue educationalization in spite of its ineffectiveness. He called it the "school syndrome" (Labaree, 2010, 222-256). As we will see in this paper, however, discussion of the educationalization phenomenon has been most lively not in America, but in Europe. Furthermore, few researchers in Japan pay enough attention to this concept. This is partly because Japanese educational researchers have been more focused on research trends in the United States, rather than those in Europe.

After briefly reviewing the concept, I will illustrate some cases of "educationalization" in contemporary Japan. It will be evident that educationalization is also a ubiquitous phenomenon in Japan. Careful consideration of educationalization in Japan, however, highlights the fact that school reforms introduced by educationalizing social problems are largely positioned out of the mainstream of educational policies, and have little changing effect. Meanwhile, we will discover another, much more hegemonic series of school reforms. I describe and analyze the context by introducing the concept "officialization of school problems". After comparing both types of school reforms, I will argue for the modest utility of the educationalization of social problems.

## 2. Short review of the argument on "educationalization" in Europe

This section will briefly review the roots of and debates around the concept of "educationalization". In 2007 a group of European researchers of education organized a conference on the educationalization of social problems in Belgium, at which Labaree was invited to speak. Labaree presented a paper titled "The winning ways of a losing strategy: Educationalizing social problems in the United States"[1], which would later become a part of "Living with the school syndrome", the closing chapter of *Someone Has to Fail*.

In the leading essay, Marc Depaepe and Paul Smeyers pointed out that educationalization had been studied more in Europe than in North America (Depaepe & Smeyers, 2008, 379). According to their argument, the original term was the German word "Pädagogisierung" which was used to identify significant changes in people's attitudes about bringing up children. In a narrower sense, educationalization originally referred to the process in which the life world is redesigned with children as the standard, or alternatively, "the progressive institutionalization, structuring, and isolation of the life world of children" (Depaepe, 2012, 126, 129). They drew attention to the German context in which educationalization was originally discussed, offering several important points. As the welfare state appeared in postwar Germany, offending and brutalizing elements disappeared from the concept of education, and were

replaced by "psychological treatment", or disembodied educational intervention that tended to intensify emotional manipulation (Depaepe & Smeyers, 2008, 381). These circumstances gave education legitimacy as a general means of social intervention. It prepared the way for the appearance of a wider concept of educationalization as "the overall orientation or trend toward thinking about education as the focal point for addressing or solving larger human problems" (Depaepe & Smeyers, 2008, 379). They also pointed out that the process of educationalization was accompanied by professionalism, which they saw as derived from an increased expertise emerging from the scientization of pedagogy. Increased professionalism then came to provide a strategy for the solution of problems that initially did not belong to the professional field of educators (Depaepe & Smeyers, 2008, 381-382).

Other attendees of the symposium also made crucial contributions to the discussion of educationalization. Bert Lambeir and Stefan Ramaekers posed the question of whether it is possible to conceive of any social problem without an understanding of education, or whether social problems are conceivable without being embedded in some form of educationalization (Lambeir & Ramaekers, 2008, 435). They concluded that in some sense education cannot be completely freed from the educationalization of social issues. David Bridges provided a dynamic perspective on educationalization, which shed light on the way in which educational institutions collude with and even exploit the educationalizing tendency of government as a way of raising their social status and government funding (Bridges, 2008, 462). The crucial point here, and one that is often overlooked in research, is that Bridges emphasized the active, not passive, aspect of schools as agencies and educators as actors in the process of educationalization.

## 3. Labaree on "educationalization" with assistance from Veblen

Labaree, meanwhile, focused on the "failing" side of the educationalization phenomenon in the United States. It is important that, in spite of its failure to solve social problems, he never denies the significance of educationalization. This is the point that has left the deepest impression on me.

In *Someone Has to Fail,* Labaree demonstrates that all major school reforms in the American history, excluding the oldest one (the common school movement of the 19th century), were unable to fix the social problems assigned to schools (Labaree, 2010, 42). Why, in spite of its ineffectiveness, do American people still continue to pursue educationalization? This is Labaree's central question. He argues that we cannot understand the growth of educationalization in the United States without considering some of the social needs that this process expresses and the social functions that it serves. First, he shows that the tendency towards educationalization is deeply grounded in the characteristics of American society and culture, such as utility, individualism, optimism, and formalism (Labaree, 2010, 228-235). For him, above all, the last one –formalism—is vital. Schools are highly capable, Labaree argues, "[of formalizing] substance, [that is], to turn anything important into a school subject or a school program or a school credential" (Labaree, 2008, 459; Labaree, 2010, 233-234). This explains why American people came to see schools as a very convenient mechanism for expressing serious concern about social problems without actually doing anything effective to solve those problems. Formalism is also a key element of "the grammar of schooling", which

explains not only how schools work, but also how they shape society in its own way (Labaree, 2010, 24, 235; see also Tyack & Cuban,1995).

In my view, the concept that schools are a mechanism of expression is perhaps the most difficult one for Japanese people. To help us understand this point, let me introduce Thorstein Veblen's classic *The Theory of the Leisure Class,* especially his argument for expression as a latent function of consumption. As explained previously, Labaree's insight on the American way of educationalizing was inspired by the question: Why do Americans never give up on the educationalization of social problems, despite its ineffectiveness? This, in turn, raises another question: Why do Americans continue to be so tolerant, even though considerable money and resources have been *wasted* by the government? Also important in Labaree's argument is the contention that schools are the mechanism for *expressing* Americans' concerns, ideals, beliefs, and values. These two keywords, "*waste*" and "*expression*", are elaborately combined in Veblen's concepts of *conspicuous consumption* or *conspicuous expenditure,* as expressed in his statement in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* that "conspicuous consumption of valuable goods is a means of reputability to the gentleman of leisure" (Veblen, 1899, 36). Veblen's other point is that "conspicuous expenditure itself does not serve human life or human well-being on the whole" (Veblen, 1899, 46), but is just a self-expression whose purpose is to gain honorific merit. We can understand American tolerance of expenditure in relation to educationalization if, drawing on Veblen, we see it as a process of conspicuous consumption aimed at gaining a good reputation as a nation. But what kind of reputation? I venture to say that it is the reputation or honor of the USA as the most "civilized", advanced country in the world. That is, the process of educationalization cannot be understood without considering, in Iwai Hachiro's words, "the view from outside"[2].

In the following section, I will outline a picture of educationalization in contemporary Japan, and then discuss its ubiquity and marginality.

## 4. Some cases of educationalizing social problems in Japan, and how they failed

Next, I will highlight three significant topics in Japan from the last 20 years that could fit the definition of educationalization—that is, looking to education to provide answers to social and political problems. This will confirm the scope and utility of educationalization as a descriptive concept in Japan.

### (1) The youth underemployment problem and the rise of "career education"

The first case is the introduction of "career education" to elementary and secondary schools as the solution to the youth underemployment problem. Before being hit by the worldwide economic crisis of 2008 (usually called the "Lehman Shock" in Japan), Japan had already suffered a decade of economic stagnation. Among many possible issues, the youth unemployment and/or underemployment problem was covered by the mass media particularly enthusiastically during this time. Words such as NEET ( "not in education, employment and training") and "*freeter*" (abbreviation of "free Arbeiter [part-time worker]") were on everyone's lips.

1999 was when the term "career education" first appeared in the official policy docu-

ments of the Ministry of Education (hereafter cited as MoE)[3]. The report pointed out serious problems connected to youth underemployment, such as the widespread disinterest of new graduates in full-time positions at a specific company (the so-called "freeter" aspiration), high rates of new graduates becoming "NEETs", and much higher rates of youth who experienced turnover within three years. In the report, these issues were represented together as a "(dis) connection problem between education and occupation". Furthermore, the responsibility for youth underemployment was largely attributed to young people's lack of aspiration to get a job, and their ill-preparedness to enter the job market. The appearance of educationalization, namely turning an economic problem into an educational one, was already obvious.

MoE's vision for career education began to be implemented as policy in 2003, when (having become the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, or MEXT) it created "*Wakamono jiritsu chosen plan*" (The Plan for Youth Independence and Challenge) in collaboration with the Cabinet Office and the Ministries of Economy and Industry and of Health, Labour and Welfare. However, the content and form of career education introduced into Japanese schools in the first decade clearly lacked a fair balance. First, primarily because of career education's initial focus on addressing youth underemployment, it was heavily biased towards targeting senior high school students. As a result, it lacked a systematic structure from early elementary school to the senior year of high school. Second, the central--and usually only--program implemented as career education in most schools was "job-experience learning" or internships. A few elementary and junior high schools installed an entrepreneur education program, but those were rare cases. The largest problem underlying the repertoire of career education in Japan was, as Komikawa Koichiro (2015) pointed out, its disconnectedness with practical vocational education (Komikawa, 2015, 18-19). Most career education programs simply emphasized the importance of job hunters' aspirations to get jobs or their mental attitude to job hunting activity (so-called "career consciousness").

Before being able to judge the effectiveness of career education, Japan was hit by another major economic crisis in 2008. Instead, the emerging problem of poverty was widely discussed, and the boom in career education came to an end. After the upset caused by the disaster of the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011, concern about career education diminished further. Since the Liberal Democratic Party (hereafter LDP) came back to power in 2013, Japan's economy regained stability. In the end, however, it is inconceivable that career education programs introduced in the early 2000s contributed to solving the youth underemployment problem of that time.

**(2) Spread of "childhood poverty" and setup of "learning assistance (free *juku*)"**

The second recent example of educationalization in Japan is the organization of so-called "learning assistance without tuition", annexed to junior high schools and sometimes using their buildings (usually called "free *juku*"). This approach was at the core of the government's policy to reduce childhood poverty[4]. It aimed to improve the achievement of students from lower economic backgrounds. *Juku*, or cram schools, are unofficial private educational institutions found widely around Japan, with two main functions. First, a supplementary function of improving school achievement through assisting students' school learning; second, an advanced function of helping customers' children pass the entrance examinations for upper level schools. Although *juku* are legally informal and poorly supported by the public sector, they are now an indispensable institution for almost all parents and junior high school stu-

dents facing senior high school entrance examinations. The very existence of *juku* was immediately identified when the government searched for an appealing strategy to reduce childhood poverty.

*Kodomo no hinkon taisaku ni kansuru taiko* (The Outline of Policies on Childhood Poverty), published by the Cabinet Office in 2014, lists termination of the "generational chain of poverty" as its primary agenda, and regards schools as focal institutions functioning as the "platform" for anti-poverty policies (Cabinet Office, 2014, 3, 4). Most of all, it pinpoints school achievement as the most important way to end the cycle of class poverty. It states:

> (Security of Academic Achievement in School)
>
> To eliminate factors obstructing achievement such as regional or family background, and secure the achievement of school children, special measures such as small-sized and ability-grouped teaching, and *afterschool supplementary lessons* should be taken in schools. For this purpose, necessary assistance will be provided by national and local governments (Cabinet Office, 2014, 10)[5].

The mention of "afterschool supplementary lessons" cited above must be read with caution. Taken literally, it seems to suggest the increase of the number of teachers for afterschool programs. But this was not its intention. Implicitly, it suggests something like the setup of "free *juku*", and implies the following: Each parent in Japan should privately shoulder *juku* costs so that their children can achieve good grades in junior high school and pass entrance examination. Indeed, j*uku* are the most credible institutions for "afterschool supplementary lessons". Due to their low-economic status, however, some students unfortunately fail to enjoy the *juku* learning service. As a result, they largely fail to attain high enough academic achievement to enter prestigious senior high schools. This subsequently results in their low enrollment rate at university, destining them for minimum-wage jobs. Therefore, providing them with something like *juku* at public expense appears the best way to unchain them from generational poverty…..

It is easy to follow the logical leap in this narrative, but it is *this* deficient logic that motivates national and local governments and makes it possible for them to financially support "free *juku*", no matter how small the budget is. For this purpose, in 2018, the national government budgeted 387 million yen in the name of an "anti-poverty strategy utilizing local resources". At free *juku*, school volunteers mainly recruited from local university students or retired teachers assist targeted students. Volunteers are paid little and costs are low. At the beginning, some prefectures encouraged only recipients of public assistance to join free *juku*, but due to low attendance, most seem to be open to anyone interested.

It is difficult to discuss the effectiveness of "free *juku*" as a measure to fix poverty, as it is currently ongoing. Some reports claim that it has contributed to improving the rate of graduators who entered the public senior high schools, but this is without sufficient evidence. At any rate, it will take many years to judge the effectiveness of free *juku* as a measure to break the "poverty chain". Needless to say, childhood poverty is an overly complicated problem that is impossible to solve with any simple single measure. It is evident, however, that the educationalization of the poverty problem has accelerated since the LDP regained power in 2013.

**(3) Low voting rate among youth and the establishment of "citizenship education"**

The third and last recent example of educationalization in Japan is the establishment of citizenship education, later termed "sovereign education", which has primarily focused on high school students. Starting in 2015, voting rights were newly vested to eighteen and nineteen-year-olds. This emerged in the context of concern over declining youth voting rates over more than a decade. Citizenship education was expected to not only improve the youth voting rate but also raise their political consciousness.

Interestingly, initiatives to promote citizenship education in Japan were taken not by MEXT but by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (hereafter METI). In 2006 a METI research group published a working report on citizenship education, and simultaneously, *Citizenship kyoiku sengen* (The Citizenship Education Declaration) was published[6]. The report mentioned the social background necessitating the promotion of citizenship education in the UK, including the shrinking opportunity for citizens to participate in local communities, youth indifference to politics, and the low youth voting rate. In addition, both the report and the Declaration pointed out the international context in which most welfare states face a dead end due to financial crisis, and that each citizen should build on their own individual strengths to participate in the public sphere rather than simply relying on government. Based on this, the authors emphasized the need to promote inquiry-based learning in school and foster task-solving abilities in students.

From 2013 on, MEXT began conducting a preliminary study of the implementation of citizenship education primarily in secondary schooling. Its goal is to motivate students to participate in society and develop basic skills to survive as an independent "sovereign". They proposed lesson plans involving mock elections and other classroom activities associated with local or national-level elections. MEXT also encouraged principals and teachers to include citizenship education in existing subjects such as social studies, civics and home economics.

Citizenship education in Japan was originally, generally speaking, a focus of economic concerns, but recently its political significance has been increasingly emphasized. Accordingly, its purpose has shifted to a political one. Again, because the establishment of citizenship education is ongoing, we are not able to assess its effectiveness as a measure to fix problems. However, we already have some evidence of this: the youth vote rate data in recent national-level elections. Results in 2016, 2017 and 2019 elections were poor, and rather indicate that the youth vote rate is still gradually declining. The road to success for citizenship education, therefore, seems extremely difficult.

## 5. Discussion: Japan-specific analysis on school reforms

I did not find it difficult to locate recent examples of the educationalization of social problems in Japan. This is because it is a ubiquitous phenomenon. Furthermore, the social problems demanded of school reforms seem not to be fixed at all. On this point the situation is remarkably similar to the one in the United States described by Labaree (2010). However, it is too hasty to conclude that educationalization of social problems is nothing but useless and hazardous. As Labaree suggested, the scope of discussing educationalization is not limited to the criticism of school reforms. In this section, I will begin by examining more carefully the characteristics of school reforms associated with educationalization. Then I will ad-

dress another series of school reforms that have extremely different characteristics. It is useful for us to introduce the new concept of the "officialization of school problems" to describe the latter. Finally, I will argue for the modest benefit that educationalization conveys to schools.

### 5. 1 The marginality of educationalization, and why?

Bear in mind the examples posed earlier as school reforms brought up by educationalization: career education, free *juku,* and citizenship or sovereign education. The first characteristic addressed here is their "marginality": that school reforms are unable to attract much attention from mass media and public opinion.

It is noteworthy to add that none of these school reforms were accompanied by special legislation in education at the national level. Regarding the cases of career and citizenship education, MEXT was never willing to create a new subject. Instead, it suggested that teachers implement new programs by making time within existing subjects. In the case of free *juku*, special legislation was established in 2013 through the Child Poverty Act of 2013, but its scope crossed multiple ministries and its impact on MEXT's jurisdiction was not substantial. Largely, implementation of new programs that were recommended depended heavily on the spontaneity and enthusiasm of school staff. There were no penalties for failing these programs.

The absence of special legislation led to the second and third characteristics of these school reforms: poor resources and limited power. Without a legal basis, all three reforms suffered from a scanty budget. In result, the effectiveness of these school reforms were not enough to change schooling substantially.

Why, then, is the educationalization of social problems so stagnant, and its associated school reforms so disfavored in Japan? In my view, the immature professionalism of educators is one of the important factors. At least until the 1970s, educators in Japan maintained a relatively high status as intellectuals, a source of credibility as those asked to solve social problems. But nowadays, everything has changed. Due to the rise of the university graduation rate, the relatively high status of teachers is disappearing. While teacher education programs are widely accessible in university and college, the growth of programs at the graduate level has made little progress. Most teachers at elementary level never hold a master's degree. In these circumstances, it is understandable that some may hesitate to ask schools to solve any social problems.

It is also noteworthy that motivation for "conspicuous consumption" (Veblen, 1899) has been dramatically reduced for Japanese education. Recently international attention has moved away from Japan toward other countries such as China. There is no longer much room to urge this country to acquire a reputation or honor as the most "civilized", advanced country in the world. Furthermore, Japanese people tend to lose sight of any ideals, beliefs, or values to be expressed on the screen of school reform (partly caused by neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism). With few opportunities of considering "the view from outside", and without any values to be expressed, the educationalization of social problems cannot help but stagnate. These critical symptoms in Japanese education deserve to be labeled the "Japanese school syndrome".

### 5.2 Officializing school problems: another series of school reforms

Now let us turn to another type of school reform in Japan. Contrary to the school reforms caused by educationalization, these have received much more attention from mass media and public opinion, successfully obtained much more government resources, and for better or worse, have had an ability to substantially change schools. Let us look briefly at the best example: the anti-*ijime* policies.

In Japan, among a number of educational problems, *ijime* (roughly, "bullying") is the topic most frequently and eagerly covered by the mass media and scrutinized by educational policy-makers. Each time a student's suicide that appears to be caused by *ijime* occurs somewhere in Japan, the mass media frantically attack not only the parties directly concerned but also the "negligence" of the local board of education and METI as supervising institutions. Increased public distrust of educational policy at local and national levels has prompted the creation of new policies and new legislation. First of all, the definition of *ijime* was changed so that so-called hidden *ijime*, conducted out of sight of the teachers, could be counted in its statistics. Consequently, *ijime* numbers sharply increased, and in 2013 the Act on Measures to Prevent Bullying was established by the Abe Cabinet.

This story continues, however. In spring 2018, a new subject called *dotoku* (morals) was officially established in elementary and junior high school curricula. Although lessons for moral education have been conducted in classrooms since 1958, these were legally obscure and informal without any official textbook. The LDP had been pushing for *dotoku* for a long time, but it faced strong resistance from the JTU (Japan Teachers Union) and left wing parties, and the issue had no strong public support. Their chance came, however, and claiming it among other things as a solution to *ijime,* the Abe Cabinet changed the situation successfully.

I will pose one more example briefly: the case of *tokubetsu shien* education (special assistance education). *Tokubetsu shien* education is a brand-new name taking place of t*okushu* education, meaning education for the disabled. Influenced by the worldwide concept of "special needs education", its scope is not limited to students with physical or mental impairments. The general term *shien* enables it to envelope diverse minority categories in itself. Another point of *tokubetsu shien* education is the focus on students with *hattatsu shogai* (developmental disorders). This category was invented to underscore the existence of students who are without explicit mental or physical impairments, but suffer learning and other difficulties in the classroom. However, some scholars criticize the exclusiveness of the *hattatsu shogai* category because it enables teachers to legally dismiss the "difficult" students from their classrooms in the name of "assistance" (Suzuki, 2010). In addition, since *tokubetsu shien* education is based in multiple laws, it has successfully gained both human and financial resources.

To grasp the characteristics of the other series of school reforms described above, I will introduce a new concept, the "officialization of school problems". These school reforms focus on school problems officially recognized by the hegemonic social agencies, trying to fix them by changing the *inner* world of schooling. Their goal is simply to improve schools, such as by making students' classroom life more comfortably ordered, or by securing teachers' physical and mental safety. Needless to say, the improvement and transformation of the inner school world itself can be connected with social revolution, as in the case of *dowa* and human rights education in Japan. However, the school reforms mentioned here take a different

form that is anti-democratic, because the process of defining what the school problem is and how it will be fixed is exclusively monopolized by hegemonic social agencies such as the government, mass media, and corporate capitalism. Meanwhile, the chance of involvement by teachers, students and parents in the defining process is strictly restricted. Inspired by Apple (1993), we call the form officialization. This characteristic enables school reforms to attract much more media attention, receive more positive public opinion, and tend to gain financial support from the government by legislation for the sake of it.

### 5.3 School consumers as strong supporters for officializing school problems

While teachers' relative status degrades, their hegemony is taken away by official social agencies. The "problems" exclusively defined by them gather public attention, and their resolution is always well-funded by the government. However, one can raise a question: why can the official social agencies so easily gain hegemony in countries under non-authoritarian regimes? The key to this question is, as Labaree (2010) emphasized, the interests and power of "school consumers". School consumers, who send their own children to schools in the country, are not organized democratically, but are acting in accordance with their own desire. However, they tend to be influenced and mobilized by mass media that infuse hegemonic ideologies.

Here I take again the case of anti-*ijime* policies as the "best example" of the officialization of school problems. The interest and power of school consumers make the *ijime* problem one of the issues of greatest concern in the realm of education. Most of them are vaguely afraid that *their* children's safety will be threatened if schools leave *ijime* to take its course. Vocalized by the mass media, such sentiments are effectively utilized by the government to implement their own policies. The effectiveness of the special law and *dotoku* in fixing the *ijime* problem is of course questionable, but for consumers everything is fine. This formalistic solution has wholeheartedly satisfied school consumers, as it expresses their grievance about the school system. As is the case, strong support by school consumers for the policies make it difficult for people in schools to criticize and resist the official school reforms. Disobedience to consumers' will to reform is severely attacked and punished, not only legally but also socially.

Let us turn to the case of *tokubetsu shien* education. As we see, this school reform is expanding the scope and scale of special education, compared with the former *tokushu* education. It is usually criticized on the point that its creation of new disability categories will only promote "smooth and efficient" class management. It is important that the desire for "smooth and efficient" teaching is shared not only by teachers but also by school consumers. They support the exclusivity of *tokubetsu shien* education, concerned that inclusion and diversity in classrooms may negatively affect their own children. Consumers may also support it on the grounds that t*okubetsu shien* education will relieve their own children from condemnation and contempt if their children learn slowly.

Officialization of school problems, by reducing the number of school tasks in line with hegemonic ideologies, drives the second type of school reform to consider the outer world as simply as possible. Support by school consumers for reform would accelerate teachers' and students' involvement with further competition. It also paves the way for market capitalism to be the hegemonic ideology in school reform.

### 5.4 Conclusion: The paradoxical "utility" of educationalization

In closing this paper, I will discuss the modest benefits of the educationalization of social problems. Educationalization, I will argue, may play an important role as a shield to protect schools from the tyranny of school consumers.

As discussed so far, the officialization of school problems, focusing solely on improving the *inner* school world, successfully attracts support from school consumers. Because their interests heavily weight their own children's benefit, they expect much more from hegemonic school reforms. They pursue their family's own interests with little interruption. From the standpoint of schools, the diversity of the environment is screened, and its complication is over-simplified by the logic of neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism.

Educationalization can be seen, meanwhile, as an alternative way to understand the complex relations between schools and their environment. During the time involved in school reform programs associated with educationalizing social problems, teachers, students, and everyone in schools are liberated from the logic of gains and losses favored by school consumers. Irrespective of whether the problem is political, economic, or social, they can enjoy an invaluable opportunity to see the external, non-school world as complicated as it is, sharply different from the over-simplified view that neo-liberalism, neo-conservatism, and market capitalism usually enforce. In a sense, this is close to a strategy that Gert Biesta recommended in the name of "interruption" (Biesta, 2006, 150). Although the social function of schools seems temporarily interrupted from the viewpoint of consumers, teachers and students may create democratic learning together. This is also the moment that Veblen pointed out when conspicuous luxury paradoxically preserves "the non-invidious interest" and the "sense of human solidarity and sympathy" (Veblen, 1899, 333).

Furthermore, I would like to contend that it is useless and senseless to condemn the ineffectiveness of school reforms to fix social problems. Even if we abolish the policy of educationalization, there is no assurance that substantial, sufficiently resourced measures would be implemented. Since the government approves only ridiculously small-scale budgets for educationalization, these will inflict little damage on more effective measures. We do not, therefore, have to assume a zero-sum relationship between educationalization and other substantial measures. Paradoxically, educationalization may be a slight sign of hope at the height of neo-liberal ideology and the tyranny of market capitalism.

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**Notes**

1 Published later as Labaree (2008).
2 Iwai (1995) indicates the influence of the theory of new institutionalism on Labaree's argument.
3 The description here and in the next paragraphs relies on Komikawa Koichiro (2015).
4 Sakurai Chieko (2017) eloquently criticized the neo-liberal bias of government policy, using the word "kyoikuka (educationalize)". Although this is very important, no mention in the source of the concept of educationalization was found.
5 Emphasis by the author.
6 For the *Declaration*, see: http://www.moj.go.jp/content/000012452.pdf (last accessed on October 30, 2019); For the *Report*, see http://www.akaruisenkyo.or.jp/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/hokokusho.pdf(last accessed on October 30, 2019).

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