Rethinking Boundaries: Dilemmas and Potentials

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Modern society has made possible safer and more stable, comfortable, and prosperous lives; it is, however, currently in a state of critical dysfunctionality. This problem has been repeatedly pointed out since the previous century, with attempts at elimination or amelioration made in various areas of society through various systemic reforms. The education sector has been no exception. Nevertheless, this social dysfunction has continued, and has if anything been worsened throughout society in some cases by these attempts at reforming various areas.

This problematic situation can be partly attributed to our continued use of categorisations and systemic divisions formed in the early and development periods of modernity. These categorisations include centre/periphery dichotomies, such as adults/children, men/women, experts/citizens as amateurs, Western/non-Western, normal/abnormal, and so on; they also comprise the categories of family, nation, race, and ethnicity. Systemic divisions include those of government administration, academic field, school type, and curricular subject, as well as government/non-government and public/private or personal dichotomies. We continue to use these boundaries today, even though they remain neither commensurate with reality nor effective. We face a difficult task in today's mature stage of modern society, in which we must somehow find ways to sustain society in the political and economic context of a zero-sum, or rather negative-sum, game. Hence, it is necessary to critically re-examine the traditional categorisations and systemic divisions and redraw, overcome, or eliminate these boundaries. Simultaneously, it is necessary to highlight what has been excluded or lost from the traditional categories and systems in the process of modernisation—which focused on industrial development and production—as well as what has been sacrificed or concealed to maintain these traditional categories or systems. Moreover, these elements need to be examined afresh in terms of their potential implications for human lives. This process of re-examination is here referred to as 'rethinking boundaries.'

In recent years, various efforts to rethink and redraw boundaries have been conducted in Japan. These include attempts to integrate education at national or municipal levels with other areas of government administration such as welfare by means such as merging day nurseries and preschools, or establishing the *Kodomo Katei Cho* (a children's and families' agency). Nevertheless, these have yet to be realised, despite their importance.

Meanwhile, in 2016, the implementation of the Act on Securing Educational Opportunities Equivalent to Regular Education in the Compulsory Education Stage provided and reinforced the legal basis for evening classes at public junior high schools and for the alternative schools called 'free schools' in Japan, which have been making efforts to secure learning opportunities for those excluded from the conventional school system. However, these schools now face new challenges and demands.

School education, in general, is changing as well. For example, the introduction of

community school systems—the *Gakko Un'ei Kyogikai* (school management council) system—and the promotion of 'School as a Team' have allowed people other than school teachers to become involved in the management and operation of schools and classes. These participants include local residents, corporate representatives, non-profit organisation (NPO) staff, counsellors, social workers, sports coaches, and so on. Schools are also assigning an increasing number of people with corporate job experience to administrative and teaching positions. Nevertheless, the participation and commitment of children—who are the very beneficiaries of education—is still scarce compared to other countries. Furthermore, inclusive reforms in education for children with financial disadvantages, disabilities, and non-Japanese backgrounds, as well as those identifying as LGBTQ+, have not been adequately achieved yet.

Non-government and non-profit organisations engage in activities that transcend the boundaries of the existing systems or government administration. Their activities have been positively regarded for their ability to provide timely and flexible support to children and families facing difficulties, which is often difficult for national and municipal governments or corporations. These activities have also been criticised for their propensity towards reinforcing existing, problem-laden social structures or neoliberal values. This situation brings us to the question of whether school personnel and education researchers have been able to cooperate—without losing their critical perspective—with NGOs/NPOs to promptly respond to children's and families' needs for support to realise better education. Have they been hindering the necessary cooperation and solidarity with NGOs/NPOs and corporate organisations by facilely pointing out, without sufficient critical examination, that the logics of education and the market are different?

Therefore, for this Special Issue, we call for papers focused on practical and theoretical attempts to rethink various existing boundaries in order to aim at constructing a future society and education that are 'person-centred', not system-centred, i.e., involving the participation of the main beneficiaries such as children and those in need of support themselves. We hope that the papers of this Special Issue will allow the contributors, readers, and ourselves to jointly contemplate the future and reflect on modern society and modern education. Instead of merely criticising the products of modernity, we hope to take into account, and if possible harness, the past achievements of modernity to consider how to support children and their families in difficult situations without leaving anyone behind.

Thematic examples:
① Critical re-examination of boundariess constructed during modernity (e.g., nationality, normalcy, and soundness, etc.); critical re-examination of central and peripheral structures of modern education
② Practice and theory of education focused on what has been excluded, lost, or sacrificed in the systemising process of modern society
　・Desirable states of solidarity and ways to view the concept of wholeness in today's society where standardisation progresses rapidly while social division worsens
　・New changes and challenges faced by educational institutions responding to issues

previously beyond the system (e.g., evening classes at public junior high schools, alternative schools, etc.), and efforts to deal with these new changes and challenges

③ School reform by 'School as a Team', community schools, school management councils, etc.
　・ Practice and challenges related to children, local residents, and experts' participation in schools (this could also be discussed concerning the 'social participation in a new age' listed below)
　・ Rethinking teacher expertise

④ Possibilities and challenges of educational media (this could also be discussed in relation to the 'various impacts of the pandemic' listed below)

⑤ Coordinating education with other areas of government administration, such as welfare
　・ Systemic reform attempts such as plans to establish the *Kodomo Katei Cho* (a children's and families' agency)
　・ Efforts towards integration or cooperation with the welfare sector for well-being beyond caring or counselling, and the challenges thereof
　・ Efforts and challenges of lifelong education/learning to ameliorate the difficulty for young people to find employment, or desirable forms of lifelong education/learning itself

⑥ Issues and possibilities of the involvement of various actors (NPO/NGO, cram schools, school principals without teaching licenses, etc.) in the education sector

⑦ Social participation in a new age
　・ How to design/construct society and education that are person-centred in the sense of the participation of the beneficiaries, beginning with children themselves
　・ Bringing together local citizens and experts
　・ Practice and theory of cooperation and solidarity
　・ Who creates 'knowledge'?

⑧ Various impacts of the pandemic
　・ Limitations of the modern system manifested through the pandemic, or boundaries that the pandemic has concealed or made invisible
　・ Changes in school education during the pandemic