

**NEOLIBERAL GOVERNMENTALITY AND SCHOOL CHOICE IN JAPAN:
THE ROLE OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS**

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to understand the ways in which the school choice programs are implemented in Japan, by focusing on the role of junior high school principals who are one of the key actors in the education system. In particular, the study sought to answer the following question: How do principals in large-scale and small-scale public junior high schools respond to school choice programs in Japan? Drawing upon the concept of neoliberal governmentality used by Larner (2000) and Brown (2003), this research looks at how principals work as neoliberal subjects in managing market-driven school choice programs within the public junior high school system in Japan. The bulk of my data comes from semi-structured interviews with five principals in Tokyo and Saitama. This study finds that three principals (from two large-scale and one small-scale schools) articulate their views about school choice clearly. In particular, one principal of an large-scale school advocates school choice, and his opinions are in line with predominant narratives in the school choice literature in Japan, regarding school choice as the incentive for teachers to work hard and for the creation of distinctive schools. Two principals' views are more ambivalent. While they are in favor of general notions such as freedom of choice, they are against school choice in a practical sense, especially in reference to the predicaments that a principal of a small-scale school experiences. In terms of their actions, principals can be categorized into active and passive groups. Active principals of two large-scale and one small-scale schools incorporate endeavors to open up their schools to the community and primary school students and to improve students' academic performance. Passive principals of two small-scale principals, in contrast, do not pursue specific activities. Instead, they make the most of their given situation, their small school size. One of them tries to resist school choice programs. In sum, the introduction of the school choice program that is based on the market principle has the

potential for changing the meaning of public education that puts emphasis on holistic education into the one that is centered around market values.

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DEDICATION

To my parents

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

School Choice in Japan

In the past five years, more than a few public primary and junior high schools in Tokyo, Japan have had zero new student enrollment (Asahi Shimbun, 2006; AERA, 2006). Some schools were consolidated. Meanwhile, schools in Maehashi City, Gumma have experienced a great variation in the student population, by as many as forty students between schools, and the maintenance of appropriate school size has become difficult (Takii, 2009, 243).¹ One of the principals has claimed that “once a school is in the ‘losing group,’ the situation just gets worse, and it is hard to regain students” (Takii, 2009, 241). Maehashi City School Board has also found that the solidarity of the community has been weakened, and this was against the city’s motto to look after children locally (Takii, 2009, 243). In order to prevent the deterioration of these two situations, the school board has decided to abolish the school choice program starting 2011. Similar concerns have led the Koto District School Board in Tokyo to go back to the attendance zone system as a general principle (Takii, 2009, 244). These are some of the results brought forth by the introduction of public school choice programs since the early 2000s in Japan.

The introduction of public school choice programs at the compulsory education level needs to be understood in a broad context. Due to globalization of the economy, individual nations have come to recognize the perceived need to compete against one another in order to sustain their national economic development. In this process, many countries have turned to espouse neoliberal ideology in reshaping all aspects of their society. Central to this ideology is the dominance of the free market, which consists of two claims (Peters, 2007). One is the “claims for

¹ According to the Ordinance for the Enforcement of the School Education Act, the standard number of classrooms in a school is twelve to eighteen.

the efficiency of the market as a superior allocative mechanism for the distribution of scarce public resources” (Peters, 2007, 159). The other is the “claims for the market as a morally superior form of political economy” (Peters, 2007, 159).

Japan has not been an exception. Since the 1980s, the prime ministers, particularly Nakasone Yasuhiro, Hashimoto Ryutaro and Koizumi Junichiro, the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), and business groups have played a leading role in pursuing the neoliberal concept of restructuring, marketization, and deregulation (Watanabe, 2005; Nitta 2008).

Education was also one of the key areas targeted to be reformed to better serve the new economy (Watanabe, 2001). Various measures have been taken, including cutting back funds, reallocating them to the domains that contribute to economic growth, restructuring the rigid and standardized systems, and applying market ethos and ideas to the management of educational institutions.

This is where the public school choice policy becomes relevant. Partially based on market rhetoric, public school choice policy regards students as consumers of education and views competition among schools as the best way to be responsive to both the needs of consumers and to improve the quality of education.

In Japan, parental selection of upper secondary schools and tertiary education is normal practice. However, at the compulsory education level, municipal school boards have traditionally assigned a public school for each student to go to based on the attendance zone system, although private and national schools have always been an available option. As of 2007, 92% of all junior high school students attend public schools, while 7% go to private ones and 1% are in national schools.² The so-called school choice program (学校選択制) at the compulsory public education

² These percentages are calculated based on the survey conducted by MEXT in 2007 (MEXT, 2008d). According to MEXT, there were 3614552 lower secondary school students in Japan, and 3327531 students were in public schools. National junior high schools are founded by national university corporations, while public junior high schools are established by municipal school boards. Private schools are founded by private school corporations.

level is comprised of five specific types, and about 14% of all the municipal school boards in Japan have implemented at least one of these kinds at the junior high school level: free choice (29.7%), block choice (1.1%), neighboring area choice (19.5%), specially approved school choice (22.2%), and specific area choice program (35.7%) (MEXT, 2008).³ Free choice programs allow students to choose any school within their municipality. Block choice programs divide a municipality into blocks, and students can attend any schools within the block in which they live. Neighboring area choice program permits students to go to schools within neighboring districts, while giving some flexibility in particular cases. Specifically approved school choice program allows students to attend a particular school within the municipality, but it gives permission only to those students who live in a certain area to choose a school in their home area (MEXT, 2006). It should be noted that there are other kinds of school choice programs practiced in Japan.⁴ The primary focus of this study is free choice program. The use of the free choice programs is most common in Tokyo, as exemplified by the fact that 22 out of 26 municipal school boards (84%) use it, which is followed by Hiroshima (6 out of 9, or 66%) and Saitama (11 out of 21, or over a half).

Junior High School Principals in Japan

For the purpose of better understanding the junior high school principals, who are the focus of this study, it is useful to outline how one becomes a principal and who a principal is in Japan.

³ The figures in the brackets indicate the percentage of municipal school boards (among the 13.9%) that have implemented a certain choice program at the junior high school level in Japan.

⁴ Other types of school choice include schools that integrate lower and upper secondary public schools beginning in 1999 as well as that combine primary and junior high schools starting around 2000. Also, the former Prime Minister Abe advocated the voucher program in 2006, and since around that time, the discussions have continued to this day.

Becoming a Principal

The prefectural school boards are responsible for the recruitment of principals, but the Ministry of Education sets the basic qualification for the application. Originally, the applicants were required to have a teacher certificate and five years of working experience as teachers. But in 2000, the Ministry loosened the qualification criteria, and now even without the certificate, as long as the applicants have ten years of experience in working in education related sector, they can apply (Okamura, 2007, 209-211). In addition, as an exceptional case, anyone who has outstanding qualifications that are necessary for a principal, such as company presidents, are allowed to apply for the position (Okamura, 2007, 209-211).⁵ The prefectural school boards also have their own criteria: the age restriction and the experience. In Tokyo and Saitama, for example, the applicants must be below fifty seven years old. In Tokyo, the applicants have to have over three years of experience in educational management, while in Saitama, they need to have over ten years of education-related job experience in the prefecture (MEXT, 2008c). The specific process of screening varies among prefectures, but most of them combine the written exams with interviews, and many also require the recommendation of a principal or a municipal school board (MEXT, 2008c).

Profile of a Principal

In Japan, the average age of junior high school principals is 56.7 years old (66.6% are between 55~60 years old and 23.8% are between 50~55 years old) (MEXT, 2008a, 6). The ratio of female junior high school principal is about five percent (MEXT, 2008a, 1). The top two previous jobs held by those principals hired in 2007 were the vice principal (78.1%) and the school board's administrative staff (20.9%) (MEXT, 2008c). As for their jobs as principals, they

⁵ As of 2008, there are eight junior high school principals who have neither a teacher certificate nor experiences working in the educational sphere in Japan (MEXT, 2008e).

make final decisions on every school-related activity, and they have the right and the duty to supervise the school staff (Okamura, 2007, 158). Conducting *daily educational activities* is the major aspect of authority held by the principals, while other kinds of authorities, such as setting the framework and standard, pursuing educational enterprises, and establishing schools, are held by the Ministry of Education, the prefectural and municipal school boards respectively (MEXT, 2005b).⁶ Also, principals do not have the power to create their own curriculum, to set the budget, and to select teachers, as will be examined in detail in the findings and discussion chapter.

Principals are not expected to teach a class, but they are not prohibited from lecturing the subject of their specialty (Okamura, 2007, 158). In Tokyo, principals are allowed to stay in the same school for three years at least, but they will be relocated after six years (Tokyo Educational Bureau, 2003). In Saitama, principals can work in one school for up to ten years, but those who have been in the same school for over seven years will be usually encouraged to be transferred to another school (MEXT, 2005a). On average, the principals are transferred to another school after serving one school for three years in Japan (MEXT, 2008c).

The assignment of a principal is done based on the guidelines set by the prefectural school boards, but the details of the process were not identified. In the case of regular teachers in Tokyo, however, they are expected to work in three different areas out of twelve regions in Tokyo, divided by the school board, until they work in five different schools (Tokyo Education Bureau, 2003). Their commuting time is set to be about one to two hours.

⁶ Examples of daily educational activities include preparing a yearly plan, deciding educational materials to be used in the school, issuing the certificate of graduation, and holding a training session for teachers. See Kuni, todofuken kyoiku iinkai, shichoson kyoiku iinkai, gakko/kocho no kengen kankei no rei(shichosonritsu no shochugakko no baai) [An example of the list of authorities held by the state, prefectural school boards, municipal school boards, and schools/principals (the case of public primary and junior high schools established by the municipal school boards)] for the complete list of authorities that the principals have.

Importance of the Study

The importance of this study is three fold. First, little is known as to how individual school principals have responded to school choice programs.⁷ According to Takayama (2009), the deficiency of the literature, especially those that situate Japanese education reform within the globalization of economic rationalism as well as the framework of neoliberalism, which lead to the educational restructuring, is partly attributed to the fact that Anglo-American scholars of Japanese education leave out Japan as something peculiar and make light of the influence of global change on the restructuring of its public education. Therefore, the significance of this study in part lies in revealing the relevance of economic rationalism and neoliberalism through the examination of a specific aspect of educational restructuring happening in Japan, namely school choice programs, with a particular attention paid to the roles of junior high school principals.

Besides filling the gap in the literature, the importance of understanding principals' responses lies in the unique position that they occupy. Principals are placed between the central government, the Ministry of Education and local school boards (prefectural and municipal) on the one hand, and teachers, parents and children on the other hand. Some of the local school boards expect principals to play a dominant role in the education reform process within a school and in meeting the objectives set by the municipal and prefectural school boards as well as the Ministry of Education, as was the case in one of the school boards examined in this study. As Grace (1995) argues, principals are "at the focal point of the translation of policy into practice and they are in a strategic position to evaluate ideological and political claims and counter-claims about the consequences of change for schooling culture and for its outcomes" (116). This means

⁷ Part of a book chapter by Yamamoto (2004), a part of a report by Fukai (2005), newspaper articles by Yomiuri Shimbun (2007) and Sankei Shimbun (2006) and magazine articles by Kobayashi (2006) and Takii (2009) entail some principals' responses to school choice.

that how the principals think about the school choice programs and how they act in relation to the programs could have some important implications on the ways in which the programs are practiced within each school, and thus on public education, more broadly. At the same time, principals need to negotiate with teachers to increase their cooperation in the efforts to achieve the goals. They have to be more conscious about satisfying the needs of parents and children in order for their schools to be chosen as well. Thus, principals have to be responsive to various stakeholders of education.

Finally, the examination and assessment of the ramifications of school choice programs is essential before the nation-wide implementation of the program takes place.⁸ Discussions about the introduction of school choice programs in Japan have continued within the national government, as the business community has kept pressuring it by issuing their own policy proposals in favor of school choice.⁹ Also parents seem to have a relatively positive attitude toward the idea of school choice.¹⁰ Taking all of these into account, it is highly plausible that the introduction of school choice programs throughout the country could happen in the near future. However, if the implementation occurs without weighing the outcomes, there is a possibility of deteriorating the overall quality of public compulsory education in Japan. Hence, it is crucial to reveal the effects prior to the introduction. All in all, the objective of this study is to increase our

⁸ The municipal school boards can decide whether to introduce the school choice programs, and only 14% of all them have done so so far, as mentioned previously.

⁹ i.e. National government: Kisei Kaikaku Kaigi [Council for Regulatory Reform]. (2008). Kisei Kaikaku Suishin no tameno Dai3ji Toshin [Promotion of Regulatory Reform, 3rd Report] p.426-431, Kyoiku Saisei Kaigi [Education Rebuilding Council]. (2007). *Education Rebuilding by Society as a Whole, 3rd Report* p.19., Business communities: Nippon Keizai Dantai Rengokai [Japan Business Federation]. (2006). Gimukyoiku Kaikaku ni tsuite *no Teigen* [Proposals on compulsory education reform].

¹⁰ According to the surveys conducted by the Cabinet Office, the percentage of parents who “agree” and “somewhat agree” on the introduction of school choice have increased from 64.2% to 67.9% between 2005 and 2006 (Naikakufu, 2005& 2006). Another survey conducted by the National Congress of Parents and Teachers Association in Japan in 2007 reveals that while parents in the areas where a choice program is practiced, 54% of parents “agree” or “somewhat agree”, while 30.8% of them “disagree” or “somewhat disagree” (Japan PTA, 2008, p.42). On the other hand, those parents in places where a choice program is not practiced, 36.5% “agree” or “somewhat agree”, whereas 41% “somewhat disagree” or “disagree” (Japan PTA, 2008, p.46).

understanding of the ways in which the school choice programs are implemented in Japan, by focusing on the role of junior high school principals who are one of the key actors in the education system.

Research Question

How do principals in large-scale and small-scale public junior high schools respond to school choice programs in Japan?

The rest of this thesis consists of four chapters. Chapter 2 provides school choice narratives and political and economic context in Japan. Chapter 3 lays out my theoretical framework and methodology. Chapter 4 constitutes the findings of the interviews and discussion. Lastly, Chapter 5 centers on the examination of principals' responses within the framework of neoliberalism, followed by a final remark and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

SCHOOL CHOICE NARRATIVES AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND IN JAPAN

Globalization of School Choice

School choice has come to be practiced in many parts of the world (Plank & Sykes, 2003; Forsey et al., 2008). Plank and Sykes (2003) distill four overlapping trends that are conducive to the spread of school choice: the ideological shift from welfarism towards neoliberalism, the emergence of transnational agencies and their influences on the direction of education, such as the World Bank and the OECD, parents' changing preference about their children's education (i.e. credentialism), and the government's reliance on the 'quick solution' to educational and fiscal problems (xii-xvi).¹¹ However, school choice is a complex idea, and the term itself has multiple meanings in different social, cultural, economic, and political contexts.

In the United States, for instance, there are numerous types of school choice programs, such as vouchers, magnet schools, and charter schools, just to name a few, and even within each type, there are variations in how and what an advocate tries to accomplish through the program. Although most of the actual implementation of school choice were not taken place until the 1990s in the United States, rationales for supporting the notion of school choice have been in development since the 1950s, and they can be grouped under seven themes: freedom of choice (Friedman, 1955), increasing the variety of options available to children (Friedman, 1955), efficiency in meeting consumer /individual students' needs (Friedman, 1955, 129; Areen and Jencks, 1971, 329; Chubbs and Moe, 1990, 32; Raywid, 1987, 766; Shanker, 1988, 16; Nathan, 1989, 307; Brandt, 1990, 20), improving students' academic performance (Chubb & Moe, 1990),

¹¹ Regarding the impact of transnational agencies on the domestic situation, the local school boards and school principals are influenced indirectly by them, while the Ministry of Education is impacted more directly. This is because the Ministry often refers to the proposals prepared by the agencies in legitimizing its decisions, and the local school boards and school principals follow the guidelines set by the Ministry.

accountability (Kemerer, 1999), desegregation (Blank, Levine & Steel, 1996, 155; Metz 2003, 27), innovation (Blank, Levine & Steel, 1996, 155; Metz, 2003, 28-29), and addressing inequality (Jencks, 1966, 22-27; Coons & Sugarman, 1971, 324).

In contrast, some of the arguments against choice include the exacerbation of social stratification, the negative impacts on students in an already disadvantaged position, the misfit of market analogy to reform education, and the undermining of public education system through the voucher program (Henig, 1995). Moreover, some studies have shown that school choice does not necessarily produce outcomes expected by the advocates (Lubienski, 2005).¹²

School Choice Narratives in Japan

The debate over school choice did not begin until the early 1980s in Japan. A few major differences between the United States and Japan include the use of choice for addressing inequality and alleviating racial segregation (in the case of United States but not in Japan); the more recent use of the rationale of improving students' academic performance through choice in Japan; and the role of teachers' unions in Japan in opposing school choice.¹³ It should be highlighted that very few literature on arguments in favor of school choice in Japan has been published since 2000, and most of such discussions had taken place in the 1980s and 1990s.

¹² For instance, the review of literature conducted by Lubienski (2005) reveals that schools tend to focus on creating a positive image through advertising in order to survive in the market, instead of making substantial changes in educational practices.

¹³ Unlike the teachers unions in Japan, in the United States, some teachers were supportive of public school choice, while opposing more radical forms of choice, such as vouchers (Shanker, 1988, 16). Shanker represented the voice of the American Federation of Teachers.

Arguments for School Choice in Japan

In Japan, key advocates for school choice are business related people and certain prime ministers. Four major rationales for proposing choice in Japan can be identified, all of which are similar to the reasons identified in the United States. They include guaranteeing the freedom of choice, respecting and nurturing students' individuality, improving the quality of education, and making teachers more accountable.

Freedom of Choice

Freedom of choice stems from the idea that parents and children should have the right to choose the school that they want to attend. Fukui (2006), a professor of administrative law at the National Graduate Institute of Policy Studies, claims that "schools should not impose students and parents on unwanted and harmful services that they do not wish to receive" and argues that they should select what they want according to their own criteria (264). This notion of freedom of choice is a part of most of the supporters' argument for choice and is usually compounded with other reasons discussed below.

Respecting and Nurturing Students' Individuality

Some groups supported choice as a way to respect students' individuality, criticizing that public schools are too rigid and too uniform. Yet what they mean by individuality and the reasons for nurturing it varied among advocates such as business groups and the Ministry of Education.¹⁴ As for the business community, the Kyoto Group for the Study for Global Issues, a think tank, formed by the founder of National and Panasonic, Konosuke Matsushita, was the first to propose the notion of school choice in Japan in its report published in 1984 (Schoppa, 1991).

¹⁴ Fujita (1997) points out the vagueness of the term, individuality (46-48), and Cave (2001) argues that the ambiguity of this word [kosei] allows it to be used to justify a wide range of proposals with very different implications (173).

The group recommended the idea as a way to respond to the changing characteristics of necessary workforce of the 21st century. The report states that “the 21st century will be a society of a concentration of high level knowledge and skills due to the advancement of information technology and a society of diversification” and that this society kind of requires diverse and superior employees (Kyoto Group, 1984 reproduced in 2006, 11). According to the group, choice will bring increased competition among teachers, which in turn enables them to offer education based on each student’s individuality. This idea also gained a strong support of one of four groups in the Ad Hoc Council on Education.¹⁵ In 1996, a prominent business group, the Federation of Economic Organizations (FEO) made a similar claim, asserting that the 21st century would require more creative workers, rather than average and equally skilled employees.¹⁶ The FEO (1996) focused the need for the kind of education that is based on “the students’ ambitions and abilities”. In short, business communities advocated choice to nurture students’ individuality to serve the shifting demands for workers- this is obviously a benefit to their own needs.

Unlike the Kyoto Group and the FEO, it appears that the Ministry of Education does not tie the importance of valuing students’ individuality to the kind of workforce necessary for the 21st century. Instead, the Ministry supports choice because “as the society changes and values diversity, it has become difficult to serve the need of every child based solely on the judgment of

¹⁵ AHCE consisted of four groups, and each group was in charge of discussing different educational issues. The First Group (第一部会) dealt with the basic education reform direction for the 21st century, and some of its members, particularly, Kenichi Koyama, was a keen advocate for the liberalization of education (教育の自由化). On the other hand, the members of the Third Group (第三部会), such as Arita, was opposed to this idea (Koyama 1987, p.204-212). Takayama (2009) argues that the idea of individuality “became multi-accentuated” through the discussions (p.134). The notion was originally liked to the progressive type of education that the teachers’ union promoted, but the AHCE gave a new meaning to the idea, putting emphasis on ability grouping and responsibility, which derive from neoliberalism.

¹⁶ The FOE and Japan Federation of Employers’ Association (JFEA – 日経連) were integrated and became the Japan Business Federation (JBF – 日本経財団体連合会) in 2002.

the supplier of education such as schools” (MEXT, 1997). Thus, “in the society where individual and diverse choices are recognized”, children and parents also should be given choice in the area of education (MEXT, 1997). Hence, unlike the business communities, the Ministry of Education simply saw the need to appreciate children’s individuality to its own sake in responding to social changes.

Improving the Overall Quality of Education

Those who champion choice for improving the quality of education believe that public education has been deteriorating. The problems they identify include school violence, truancy, breakdown in classroom discipline, bullying, juvenile crime, the increase in students’ reliance on cram schools and the overheating competition to pass entrance examinations (Fujita, 1997).¹⁷ Yet, some variations are found in the ways in which they frame their claims. Some supporters of choice directly apply the idea of free market economy to the area of education in order to improve the quality of education. For example, by praising the economic growth that Japan experienced in the post-WWII era, Taichi Sakaiya (1983), a former bureaucrat of the Ministry of Trade and Industry and a member of the Kyoto Group, maintains that the key to its economic success is attributed to the principle of free market where “good money drives out bad”, and he proposes that the same mechanism should be applied in the sphere of education (12).

In comparing private educational institutions with public education, others highlight the cause of problems in public schools. In a cram school, which requires tuition to be paid by the students, teachers are aware that it is essential to provide a high quality education because if they cannot

¹⁷ Some advocates of choice for students’ individuality also see these problems, and they believe that respecting individuality would help to alleviate these issues. It should be noted that since the late 1990s, the focus of the educational crisis narratives have shifted to the perceived decline in the students’ academic abilities, rather than other school related issues, and this was used by the Ministry of Education to legitimize its shift to market-based governance (Takayama, 2008b). See p. 46 for details.

satisfy the students, they would stop coming, and eventually the cram school would go bankrupt (Tsurumaki, 1987; Katayama, 1994). On the contrary, public schools would not be closed even if they offered a low quality education. The proponents believe that the problems of public education derive from the lack of a sense of urgency among teachers to improve themselves, and giving a choice to parents and children is the only way to create an incentive for teachers to compete against each other to cultivate their professional skills (Nippon Keidanren, 2006, 2004; Kyoto Group, 1984).

Accountability of Schools

Since the late 1990s, some defenders of school choice have underlined the notion of choice to make schools more accountable to parents and students. The Japan Productivity Center for Socio-Economic Development (JPC-SED) promotes choice for accountability in its report published in 1998. Just like the advocates of choice for quality improvement, JPC-SED (1998) claims that the current public education is malfunctioning. However, JPC-SED sees the root of the problems in the absence of trust, or solidarity among teachers, community members, students, and their parents. This trust can be regained only by allowing parents to choose a school because schools would work hard to offer a better education to be accountable to them.

Isao Kurosaki (1997; 2004; 2006), a professor of educational administration, also supports school choice based on this reason, but his argument is slightly different from JPC-SED's argument in that he combines accountability with the autonomy of teachers and calls for a system of "checks and balances" (2006, 101). Kurosaki (1997) contends that what is fundamental in reforming public education is to grant educators the opportunity to conduct educational activities based on their own educational principles, and not based on the public guideline. In turn, teachers have to be responsible for the consequences, and this is where the

idea of accountability comes in. Since the 2000s, groups such as the Japan Business Federation (2004; 2006), the National Commission on Education Reform (2000) and the Committee for Deregulation and Promotion of Privatization (2000) have proposed to combine a school evaluation system with school choice so that teachers would be even more accountable to parents and students.

Arguments against School Choice in Japan

The main opponents of school choice are teachers' unions and educational scholars. Their arguments include four themes: uncertain quality improvement; worsening stratification and equity; deteriorating teachers' working conditions; and the loosening of community ties.

Uncertain Quality Improvement

Some are skeptical of the proponents' idea of using choice as a tool to improve the quality of education. Ichikawa (2006) points to the often-ignored fact that the freedom of choice is ensured at high school and university education levels in Japan (73). He argues that if choice could improve the overall quality of education, all schools except compulsory public primary and junior high schools that are not traditionally affected by choice, must be excellent entirely, but that is not the case in reality (Ichikawa, 2006, 73; Oshio, 2003, 207-208). In this way, Ichikawa questions the effectiveness of choice for educational quality improvement.

Worsening Stratification and Equity

Japan Teachers Union (JTU), All Japan Teachers and Staff Union (AJTSU), and a number of educational scholars (Sanuki, 2003, 163; Oshio, 2003, 206-208; Saito, 2004, 17; Fujita 2005, 155-156) assert that school choice would categorize schools into “good schools” and “bad schools”, and this would lead to worsening stratification among schools and localities. Sanuki (2003) is particularly concerned about the impact on the schools in poor neighborhoods. He contends that these schools would come to face more and more problems, unless a strong support system was to be developed (Sanuki, 2003). He summarizes this process as the vicious cycle of difficulties: “worsening school environment=>not chosen=>fewer students=> fewer teachers=>lower educational level=>increased problematic students (“good” students avoid) =>escalation of school problems” (Sanuki, 2003, 163). Thus, some educators predict a division of schools resulting from the introduction of school choice programs.

JTU, AJTSU and some educational scholars are anxious about the implications of the stratification on students. JTU (2006), for example, claims that the stratification “would limit all children’s opportunity to develop their abilities and their potentials, and they would be deprived of educational equity” (31). Fujita (2005) cautions that the polarization of schools would foster a sense of inferiority and distorted superiority as well as discriminatory feelings among children (155).

Some educational specialists are also worried that the stratification of schools sort students based on their abilities and that this could end up in the loss of diversity within a school (Oshio, 2003, 209; Fujita, 2005, 156; Ichikawa, 2006, 73). According to Fujita (2003), “school is a collective and unfinished (or half-finished) good when students choose and enter a school” (94).

He argues that the performance of a school and its evaluation depend on the students who are recruited to each school, and therefore, school choice might differentiate schools in terms of the attributes of students and their parents (Fujita, 2003, 94). Critics claim that this goes against one of the goals of compulsory education, which is to let students from diverse social and cultural backgrounds study together (Ichikawa, 2006, 31) and instead, leads to narrowing students' experiences (Fujita, 2005, 156). The homogenization of the population of a school and the subsequent limitation of students' experiences are a concern to some.

Sanuki (2003) and Saito (2004) criticize school choice by saying that the acceleration of stratification is the very reason for the implementation of school choice: it is intended to distinguish a small group of children who have the potential to be elites from those who are not. By creating multiple tracks in the public education system, the government seeks to use resources more efficiently by allocating more resources to these good students (Sanuki, 2003, 165; Saito, 2004, 20).

Deteriorating Teachers' Working Conditions

JTU and some scholars maintain that school choice would aggravate educators' working conditions especially with the combination of the newly implemented teacher evaluation systems. JTU (2007) argues that the recent education reform based on the market principle has made teachers busier, and the number of teachers who have mental and physical health problems are three times more than people who have other occupations (10). Ichikawa (2005; 2006) stresses that choice programs would simply escalate parentocracy, or the situation where the parents are given too much power to take part in the issues within schools, given the current condition where teachers' professional authority is already neglected, while the criticisms of schools by parents and media have increased. In the meantime, the national government and local school boards can

avoid being responsible for the outcomes and shift the blame on the teachers even though the outcomes are not necessarily their own faults and are led by wider issues (Sanuki, 2003, 166).

Loosening Community Ties

Some scholars (Sanuki, 2003, 163; Fujita, 2005, 156; Ichikawa, 2006, 73) point out that school choice programs could weaken community solidarity. According to them, school choice separates those students attending their neighborhood schools from those who chose other schools, and as a consequence, community ties as well as their parents' relationship would be loosened. For them, this is problematic because the fragmentation of a community may result in the deterioration of the vitality of the community and local support for children.

Table 2.1 summarizes and compares the narratives for school choice in the US and Japan.

Political and Economic Restructuring in Japan

As Hoods (2001) argues, education reforms based on market principles, including the school choice policy, between 1980s and 2000s need to be understood as a continuous process (74-75). He suggests the “tsunami-model” of reform. According to this mode, the idea of market-based education reform, proposed in the early 1980s, were not applied immediately. However, these proposals made in the 1980s were “used as the basis of discussions” and as the time progressed, the ideas have come to gain enough support to be put into practice in the 1990s and 2000s (Hoods, 2001, 75). This view seems to be in line with other educational scholars who claim that the root of contemporary education reforms based on marketization in Japan lies in the foundation of the Ad Hoc Council on Education made directly under Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro in 1984, which lasted for three years (Fujita, 2005; Ichikawa, 2006; Watanabe, 2001; Takayama, 2009).

Actors in Educational Reforms in Japan

Before examining the ways in which market-driven educational reforms happened, it may be useful to look at who is involved in policy making procedures and their influence in both formal and informal fashions, using Schoppa (1991)'s categorization of actors, based on the traditional two wing model of Japanese politics (conservative and progressive). The members of the conservative camp are further divided into internal and external actors. The former includes the Liberal Democratic Party and the bureaucracy, including the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), and the latter consists of the business community and educational administrators at the prefectural level.¹⁸ On the other hand, teachers' unions belong to the progressive camp.¹⁹

Although variation exists even within each group of actors, generally, in the last three decades, prime ministers have taken a leading role in the advancement of market-based education reforms, with the strong support of the economy-related bureaucracies and business communities. The Ministry of Education was against such kind of reforms in the 1980s, but since the late 1990s, it has come to reluctantly accept them to a certain degree (Watanabe, 2001). In contrast, teachers unions have been the prime opponent of market-driven educational reforms.

¹⁸ Business groups are collectively known as *zaikai* (財界) and three major business organizations were formed in the mid 40s: Federation of Economic Organization (FEO –Keidanren), Japan Association of Corporate Executives (JACE - Keizai Doyukai) and Japan Federation of Employers' Association (JFEA – Nikkeiren) (Hirose, 1985, p.265). However, in 2002, FEO and JFEA were integrated and became Japan Business Federation (JBF – Keidanren).

¹⁹ 28.1% of all the public school teachers, or 284859 teachers, are affiliated with JTU, as of 2008, and this marked the lowest participation rate in its history (Asahi, 2008).

Nakasone and the 1980s:

Emergence of an Ideology on Market-Based Educational Reforms

The official proposal for school choice originates in the Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone's Ad Hoc Council on Education (AHCE) founded in 1984 (Schoppa, 1991; Watanabe, 2001; Fujita, 2005; Ichikawa, 2006). Originally, it was the Central Council for Education (CCE), an advisory council for the Minister of Education, founded in 1952, that had led education reforms (Ichikawa, 1995). However, the establishment of the AHCE came to influence the direction of education reforms in Japan, although it did not belong to the Ministry of Education, and meanwhile, CCE was canceled (Namimoto, 2004, 93).

Nakasone's strong emphasis on the notion of *jiyuka*, which suggested the introduction of competition and market mechanism in the area of education, was partly shaped through his involvement in the Provisional Commission for Administrative Reform (PCAR) in 1981, which dealt with Japan's prolonged budget deficits (Schoppa, 1991, 68). Although the PCAR itself did not recommend the privatization of education, through this engagement, Schoppa (1991) argues that "Nakasone had become committed to a philosophy of fiscal conservatism and its companion ideology of privatization and free-market competition", applying the same idea to his education reform proposals (68). His idea was supported by the Ministry of Finance (MOF), the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), and the business community that saw the need to change the rigid education system in order to reduce educational costs, to respond to the globalizing economy, and to develop well-trained workers with diverse skills to maintain the nation's economic competitiveness (Nitta, 2008). The school choice proposal emerged in this context.

There were also strong opponents to such reform proposals, however. The Ministry of Education and the *zoku*, or a faction within the LDP that focused on educational issues, preferred

the status quo because they were afraid of losing the centralized control of education (Schoppa, 1991). The Japan Teachers Union was also against market-based education reform as it thought that such reform would limit some students' educational opportunities and also lead to deteriorating teachers' working conditions (JTU, 2007). Failing to reach a consensus within the conservative camp, or what Schoppa (1991) calls "immobilism", Nakasone was unable to realize the market-based education reform proposals including school choice in the 1980s.

Hashimoto and the 1990s:

Partial Realization of Market-Based Educational Reforms

The Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryutaro came into power in 1996 and pursued structural reforms. Hashimoto outlined six areas that require structural reforms, and education was one of the targets, besides administration, financial system, fiscal, economic and social security structures. In this way, education was officially and clearly positioned as "a part of deregulation plans for the revitalization of economy" (Ichikawa, 2006, 32).

The "immobilism" of Japanese educational politics in the 1980s ended in the 1990s, leading to the issue of notice to allow the flexible use of the school attendance system in 1997. Under Hashimoto's administration, the notice to allow the flexible use of school attendance zone system was issued by the Ministry of Education, indicating the Ministry's change in the attitudes toward market-based reforms. According to Watanabe (2001), this shift resulted from the fact that the Ministry lost its confidence in maintaining its supervision that it strengthened in the 1980s (124). The Ministry's decision to reinforce its supervision was offered as an alternative path to the liberalization of education system, and this was supposed to tackle various problems such as bullying and truancy whose causes were partly seen as rooted in the rigid education

system (Watanabe, 2001, 124). Nevertheless, the Ministry failed to redress the issues in the 1990s, and this led to its acceptance of such reforms to a certain degree (Watanabe, 2001, 124).

However, the Ministry of Education was not the only actor enabled the market-driven education reforms to be introduced. According to Nitta (2008), the fragmentation and weakening of education interest groups, particularly teachers' union and the increasing influence of non-educational specialist bureaucrats were part of the reasons for this change (7). In 1989, Nikkyoso was separated into two groups: Nikkyoso and Zenkyo (one third of Nikkyoso members). The schism of Nikkyoso was combined with the weakening of the LDP education *zoku* and the lack of organization of progressive political parties (Nitta, 2008, 133). Thus, the major groups of players who were against such reforms in the 1980s lost its political influence in the 1990s, contributing to the creation of a favourable atmosphere for the advocates of competition-based education reforms.

The absence of these education interest groups provided the Japanese business community, Keidanren, with the opportunity to influence education policy making further (Nitta, 2008, 133). The business community's central demands were to produce new elites who can survive in the global economy and to reduce overall educational cost (Watanabe2005, 255; Fukai, 2000, 39). Nitta points to the striking similarity between Keidanren's reform proposals and the Program for Education Reform, particularly "the recommendations for school choice and for the establishment of integrated six-year secondary schools" (133).²⁰ In this way, the market-led education reform proposals have come to be put into practice gradually.

²⁰ Business groups made various policy recommendations in the 1990s, including JACE (1995)'s *Gakko kara Gakko he* [Transforming School into Combined Institution] and JPC-SED (1999)'s *Sentaku, sekinin, rentai no kyoiku kaikaku* [Education reform based on choice, responsibility and alliance].

Koizumi and the 2000s:

Intensification of Market-Based Educational Reforms

Between 2001 and 2006, the Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro pursued structural reform more rigorously than ever before based on his slogan “structural reform without sanctuary”, further impacting the direction of education reform of the era. Koizumi established the Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy (CEFP) and the Council for Decentralization Reform (CDR) to achieve his goals. Business communities continued to increase its influence by directly engaging in these councils, instead of simply submitting their recommendations (Ichikawa, 2006, 93).

The traditional educational interest group, JTU, on the other hand, remained fragmented and had little impact on educational policy-making processes (Nitta, 2008, 158). The Ministry of Education was again under the pressure of the Prime Minister Koizumi and his partners’ restructuring proposals. Also confronted with the fiscal and administrative pressures for decentralization, the Ministry of Education responded by reconfiguring “its administrative control from input management towards output management” as a way to maintain its administrative authority (Takayama, 2008a, 142).

Under the rule of Koizumi, various measures were taken to reform the education system using the market discourse. In 2003, the *School Education Law* was revised to officially allow the municipal school boards to introduce school choice programs. Moreover, the *Law on Special Zone for Structural Reform* was put into effect in 2003 to revitalize local areas by loosening regulations. In 2004, the establishment of a school run by a for-profit company was approved for the first time based on the law, epitomizing the privatization of education. In total, for-profit companies, the LAC (Language, Culture, and Activities) and Asahi Juku, founded two schools at the compulsory education level in Kanagawa and Okayama prefectures respectively, and twelve

senior high schools were established by other companies in some areas of Japan (Asahi Shimbun, 2007).

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

Theoretical Framework: Neo-liberal Governmentality and School Choice in Japan

In this study, I use neoliberal governmentality as a framework to look at the response of school principals to school choice programs in Japan. Drawing upon a Foucauldian notion of governmentality (1991), Larner (2000) and Brown (2003) criticize the ubiquitous interpretations of neoliberalism as too simplistic. Larner (2000) argues that predominant explanations of neoliberalism as a policy framework and as an ideology are inadequate because they do not capture the prominence of the current shift in governance (14). The first type shows transformation in the political agenda from the one centering on Keynesian welfarism to the market-based one due to globalization of capital (6). While recognizing its usefulness in laying out the outcomes of neoliberalism, Larner (2000) maintains that this argument is still unsubstantial since such view fails to explain why neoliberalism has been so successful in structuring political arrangements and people's way of thinking (9). The second kind of interpretation, based on Neo-Marxism, does provide some answers. Success is attributed to the spread of the discourse by hegemonic economic and political actors (12). However, this again is not quite sufficient for Larner (2000), as he supports the post-structuralist idea of discourse, which is understood "as a system of meaning that constitutes institutions, practices and identities in contradictory and disjunctive ways" (12). Brown (2003) also criticizes that the neoliberalism tends to be understood merely as economic policies, and as a result the political rationality aspect of neoliberalism is ignored, and the difference between liberalism and neo-liberalism is not grasped (para7). In short, both Larner (200) and Brown (2003) highlight the idea of governance in neoliberalism. Governmentality "features control achieved through formation rather than repression or punishment" (Brown, 2003, note 2). Specifically, neo-liberal governmentality is an

indirect governance of institutions and individuals by the state through normalizing market rationalities and thus making them prevail in and govern every sphere of human life (Brown, 2003, para 9).

The normalization of market rationale is achieved through the configuration of a new relationship between the state, the market, and the individual. Besides monitoring the market, the state itself must “*think and behave like a market actor* across all of its functions, including law” (Brown, 2003, para 13). First, the state concentrates on setting up policies and laws based on market and market values in areas where the market discourse did not prevail previously and focuses on meeting the demands of the market, which emerge from these new arrangements (Brown, 2003, para 22). Then, the state measures its success on the basis of its capacity for maintaining and developing the market, and such success is the reference point of state legitimacy (Brown, 2003, para 12). At the same time, the state manufactures subjects who evaluate their actions founded upon the market rationale of maximizing benefits and minimizing costs (Brown, 2003, para 16). In turn, the state controls individuals “*through* their freedom” to act and avoids being responsible for the consequences of individual actions taken based on their own decisions (Brown, 2003, para 16-17). Thus, whereas neo-liberal governmentality may imply less direct involvement of the government, it does not signify less governance (Larner, 2000, 12).

In this way, Brown (2003) argues that:

Neo-liberal governmentality undermines the relative autonomy of certain institutions from one another and from the market -- law, elections, the police, the public sphere -- an independence that formerly sustained an interval and a tension between a capitalist political economy and a liberal democratic political system. The implications of this transformation... is the erosion of institutions, venues, and values organized by non-market rationalities in democracies (para 21).

This is where Brown sees the major departure of neo-liberalism from liberalism that protected the ethical realm of moral and political values against the invasion of economic order (Brown,

2003, para 22). Consequently, Brown (2003) maintains that what is at risk in the current era is the liberal democracy where the fair and equal treatment of people is emphasized (para 23).

The sphere of public education is certainly one of the areas that has been impacted by the rise of neo-liberal governmentality, through the marketization of education. The implementation of school choice policies in various parts of the world, including the United States, the United Kingdom, and Israel since the late 1980s, illuminates a way to realize the marketization of education: to restructure educational institutions and to institutionalize the market and market values among parents, children, and educators (Taylor et al., 1997, 89). Parents and children are regarded as the consumers of education and are given the right to choose a school that serves their best interest (Taylor et al., 1997, 92). Educators and school administrators are defined as the supplier of education and are supposed to respond to the needs and wants of the consumer (Taylor et al, 1997, 92). Succeeding, both of these groups are made accountable to their own conducts. Thus, school choice policies function to realize the marketization of education.

Some studies identify the changing role and status of school principals as a consequence of the introduction of school choice policies. For example, Oplatka (2002) suggests that the high school principals in Israel were caught up in the ‘contradictory dualism’; while they conceive the notion of marketization negatively, they found it inevitable to engage in such activities for the survival of their schools. Grace (1995) notes that the extent to which primary and secondary school headteachers in England felt the pressure of marketization varied among the schools they were in (132). Especially those principals in large-scale and rural schools were much less pressured than others. Similarly, examining the case of secondary schools in South Wales, Herbert (2000) claims that the all principals were conscious of the importance of marketing their schools, but they were “on an uneven playing field inherited from the social geography of the

city” (96). According to Taylor, et al. (1997)’s review of literatures, school managers were isolated from other educators and classrooms, and this led to the widening gap between those who manage and who are managed. All in all, these changes can be understood as what Gewirtz, et al. (1995) term “values drift”, a shift from comprehensive values to market values within schools (150).

In this study, I employ the concept of neo-liberal governmentality as proposed by Larner (2000) and Brown (2003) to analyze neoliberal political rationality in the Japanese educational sphere. In particular, I focus on school principals as neoliberal subjects in managing such rationality within the public junior high school system in Japan. Through the case study of school choice programs, this study analyzes the intricate and diverse realities of a specific neo-liberal programme and avoids the fabrication of universal narratives, which tended to be the case in the governmentality literature because the focus was often placed on general governmental motifs, as opposed to a particular neoliberal project (Larner, 2000, 14).

Research Methodology and Design

Site Selection

Tokyo and Saitama prefectures were selected for this study because the implementation of school choice programs, especially free choice programs, is most prominent in these areas in Japan, besides Hiroshima. At the junior high school level, 45.6% of all municipalities in Tokyo and 36.2% of entire municipalities in Saitama have introduced one or more kinds of school choice programs at the junior high school level, while the national average was approximately 14% as of 2006 (MEXT, 2008). It should be noted that for the names of the cities and junior high schools interviewed, pseudonyms are used in order to protect their identity.

I chose Uehara City in Tokyo prefecture because it is among the earliest municipalities to have implemented the free school choice program in Japan. It has been seven years since the introduction, and thus it is useful in comprehending the effects of the program. Uehara City is also known as one of the most active municipalities in Japan in terms of reforming the public education system. This is partly because of the mayor who put strong emphasis on reforming the public education system based on the neoliberal ideologies. The reform has been realized through the leadership exhibited by the school board's superintendent whose idea resonated with the mayor's. The significance of examining an extreme case lies in the rich information they provide "because they activate more actors and more basic mechanisms in the situation studied" (Flybjerg, 2006, 229). Besides, "it is often more important to clarify the deeper causes behind a given problem and its consequences than to describe the symptoms of the problem and how frequently they occur" (Flybjerg, 2006, 229). Based on these reasons, the examination of schools in Uehara makes a good case for comprehending the influence of the school choice program on junior high school principals.

I selected Nozawa City in Saitama prefecture, which in 2004 introduced the specially approved school choice program, thereby permitting the entrance of students in other attendance areas to a particular school; Nozawa City also implemented the free choice program in 2007. It is one of my goals to see if the responses of schools are different from those of schools in Uehara City Tokyo, which practice free choice program only. At the same time, I wanted to compare a city that has had the school choice program for a while with a city that has just recently implemented the program.

School Choice Programs in Uehara City, Tokyo and Nozawa City, Saitama

Uehara City, Tokyo

Uehara City, Tokyo has over 300,000 people and sixteen junior high schools as of 2008. The city has a long history and has traditional elements. It had developed as one of the leading industrial zones in Japan up until a couple of decades ago. The school board introduced the free choice program in the early 2000s.

Background of the Implementation Processes of the Free Choice Program

The decision to put the school choice program into practice did not come out of the Uehara City School Board. Rather, the personal values of the mayor have influenced the introduction of the school choice policy in the city, besides the changing composition of the characteristics of the residents. Until the mid 1980s, Uehara City was run based on social-welfare policies, but since the new mayor, who served until 2006, was elected, the direction shifted to neoliberal ones. For instance, he embraced the view that the fundamental features of management in private companies and public administration should be the same.

The Ministry of Education's issue of the notice to increase the flexibility of the school attendance zone system in 1997 set the background for the mayor to consider the introduction of the school choice program. However, the chairman of the school board at the time was reluctant to do so. In 1999 when the same mayor was reelected, he appointed a new chairman of the school board who had a positive view toward the school choice program. The decision to introduce the program was top-down and made without much discussion among the school board members. The school choice program is a key part of the school board's broader education reform projects, which includes the promotion of unique schools, ability-based classes, school

evaluation systems, the achievement test, and the linkage between primary and junior high schools.

Purposes of the Free Choice Program

By allowing parents to choose a school that fits the need of their children, the school choice program in Uehara City aims to achieve several purposes. The first is to reform teachers' consciousness and to improve qualities and develop new skills among those who work at the management level. In particular, the role of principals is highlighted. Principals are expected to be not only an educational practitioner but also a 'school leader' who is capable of managing the organization and of being accountable for the results. Thus, the principals are expected to possess outcome-based school management skills. However, principals tend to perceive such ideas negatively and hesitate to embrace them. Hence, the school choice program was meant to give them incentives to actively cultivate such skills.

Second, the school choice program is intended to improve the quality of public compulsory education, to regain the trust of parents and the community towards public education, and to create distinctiveness in each school. The superintendent of the school board maintains that up until recently, education reforms have focused on introducing new educational contents, pedagogy and so on, but failed to have successful outcomes in terms of improving the quality of teachers and restoring the public trust. According to the superintendent, what is necessary for successful results is to create a situation where schools have no choice but to make substantial improvements, and this can be achieved through reconstructing the education system, or as he describes it "pouring new wine into a new bottle" instead of to an old bottle. School choice program is intended to serve the role of the new bottle.

Nozawa City, Saitama

The population of Nozawa City, Saitama is more than 100,000 people as of 2008, and there are five junior high schools. The city, created some forty years ago, is relatively new, compared to Uehara City. It developed as a commuter town for people who work in neighboring urban cities, including Tokyo. The school board implemented the specially approved school choice program in 2004, and the controlled free choice program in 2007.

Background of the Implementation of the Specially Approved School Choice Program

The specially approved school choice program, which enables students in any parts of the city to choose to go to Namiki Junior High School, which is the designated school for this program, was implemented by the school board in response to the declining enrolments of this particular school. New students entering Namiki Junior High School between 1993 and 2001 were eighty students on average, but the number decreased by almost half in 2003. According to the principal, the declining enrollment is attributed to two factors: natural attrition and the use of the program to change a designated school (指定校変更制度). The program, which existed even before the implementation of school choice programs, has allowed students' transfer to a non-assigned school under the following ten conditions; "moving house, having a plan to move, changing the address in the certificate of residence, having a physical reason, having a mental reason, attending school from grandparents' house, changing address due to public projects, living in the coordination area and having special reasons". The decline in the number of students "led to fewer teachers, and the number of club activities was also reduced" (Principal of Namiki Junior High School). The headteacher of Shimizu Junior High School said that "for Nozawa City, considering the balance of schools, it is better to redraw the boundary of

attendance zones, but the community members would object strongly, so the administration office cannot change them”. Therefore, the specially approved school choice program was implemented, instead. Students’ admissions are accepted throughout the year.

Purposes of the Specially Approved School Choice Program

The purpose of this specially approved school choice program is the revitalization of Namiki Junior High School (Principal of Namiki Junior High School). In order to do so, the school board takes various measures. They include the allocation of four extra teachers and the creation of programs outside the regular curricular hours to assist students academically. The Nozawa City school board explains that the specially approved school choice program allows parents to choose Namiki Junior High School “when their parents hope their children to work towards enhancing their mental and physical health, developing physical strength and forming a well-rounded character”.

Background of the Implementation of the Free Choice Program

The number of parents’ requests to go to a school that is not originally assigned to the students increased, and the reasons for their requests were not approvable by the categories set by the program to change a designated school. It has also become difficult to deal with every single case. Therefore, in order to permit students to select a school regardless of the reasons, the school board introduced the free choice program. Students and parents, however, can apply for the program only when they enter a junior high school as a first year student.

Purpose of the Free Choice Program

According to the school board, the aim of free choice program is “to promote education that develops each student’s zest for living”. At the same time, each school is expected to “improve the quality of education through aspiring for more ingenuity to create an attractive school” by closely examining parents’ opinions and choice as well as their evaluation.

School Selection

Large- and small-scale schools were the focus of this study.²¹ They are defined based solely on the total student population of each school within the city for convenience.²² Letters were sent to twelve junior high school principals (eight in Uehara City and four in Nozawa City) who worked in large- and small-scale schools to ask whether they could participate in the study, and five of them agreed to take part in it in total. In Uehara City, there are more than fifteen junior high schools. Akiyama Junior High School had the sixth largest student population in the city as of 2006, and is regarded as large-scale school. Sakurai and Yoshino junior high schools, on the other hand, held the second and the fourth smallest student population in the same city respectively, and they are defined as small-scale schools. Nozawa City has five junior high schools. Shimizu Junior High School had the second largest student body in the city in 2008, and is defined as large-scale school, whereas Namiki Junior High School had the smallest student number, and is regarded as small-scale schools.

It should be noted that the total number of students in Uehara City more or less corresponded to the number of students moved from one school to another using the school choice program,

²¹ There are other elements, such as students’ ethnicity, race, gender, and class, that could be the main basis for selecting schools to interview, but because it is more difficult to obtain such information, this study focused on the student population only.

²² See Appendix for the list of student population in Uehara City and Nozawa City.

but the opposite was the case in Nozawa City; Namiki Junior High School had the greatest number of students choosing the school, but the student population was the smallest and vice versa in Shimizu Junior High School.²³ This difference can be ascribed to a couple of factors. The first is the restricted nature of free choice program in Nozawa City: the number of students who can come from other catchment areas is restricted to thirty students in each school, except for Namiki School where the entrance of forty students is permitted (10% of all first year students all together can go to other schools). The second is the difference in the percentage of students selecting a school, which was not originally assigned to them (26% on average in Uehara City, 5% on average in Nozawa City). Finally, the original student number in a particular attendance zone varies across the locality. For example, even before the start of school choice program, Namiki Juinor High School was much smaller than others, and this was exactly the reason why the specially approved school choice program was introduced. All in all, the subscription of a certain school was not determined by the school choice program in Nozawa City.

All the principals interviewed were male. Akiyama Junior High School principal worked at the Tokyo prefectural government until ten years ago when he became the principal of the current junior high school and has been serving the same school since then. Sakurai Junior High School principal has been in the school since 2004. Prior to that, he was in another small-scale school in Uehara City for four years. Yoshino Junior high school principal has been in the school

²³To determine the student movements based on school choice program, the total number of students gained from schools in other attendance zones was subtracted from the total number of students lost to other schools between 2001 and 2007 in Uehara City, Tokyo and in 2007 and 2008 in Nozawa City, Saitama. For example, during this period, Akiyama Junior High School in Uehara City had a total of 403 students who came from other attendance zones, while 111 students who were originally assigned to Akiyama Junior High School left for other schools. Thus, the school gained 291 students overall, and this number was the third highest among the junior high schools in Uehara City, and somewhat mirrored the total student population in the city (sixth largest). As for the other two small-scale schools in Uehara City, the number of lost students and the student population ranked the same.

since 2006, and before that he worked as a primary school principal in Uehara City.²⁴ Shimizu Junior High School Principal has served the school since 2007. Namiki Junior High School Principal came to the school in 2005.

Table 3.1 *Schools Selected for this Study*

City, Prefecture	Uehara City, Tokyo			Nozawa City, Saitama	
	Large-scale	Small-scale		Large-scale	Small-scale
Junior High School	Akiyama	Sakurai	Yoshino	Shimizu	Namiki
Student population of a school	6 th highest	2 nd smallest	4 th smallest	2 nd largest	Smallest
Number of years the principal completed in the current school as of April 2008	9 years	4 years	2 years	1 year	3 years

Procedure of Interviews and Analysis

I conducted semi-structured interviews for a period of one hour to three hours with three junior high school principals in Uehara City, Tokyo and two junior high school principals in Nozawa City, Saitama, in both large-and small-scale schools between August 22 and 27, 2008. The interviews enquired into the principals' responses to school choice in relation to their opinions and actions, the changes they saw after the introduction of the program, and the effects of school choice on their schools or on education in general.

It is important to recognize two points regarding interviewing principals. First, school choice is not an unproblematic topic. Especially given their position as the head of school, the principals might have been under pressure and concerned about the ramifications of speaking out about their thoughts and experiences. This might have had some influence on their comments. Second,

²⁴ His school was consolidated with a neighboring junior high school in April 2008, but as his responses were based on his experiences in pre-consolidation era (2006 April-2008 March). Thus, Yoshino Junior High School refers to the school he was in during that period.

the interview situation was not neutral. The identity of the interviewer as a MA student and that of the interviewees as the principals created a certain power relation between the two and shaped interviews in a particular fashion, and this impacted what principals said. The importance of clarifying the context in which interviews were conducted lies in that it “not only generates the nature of their accounts, including their mode of its expression, but also provides a basis for the evaluation of these interviews as evidence” (Fitz & Halpin, 2003, 49).

All the interviews were done face-to-face in the principals’ offices in Japanese. Notes were taken during the interviews, and the organized version of the transcripts was sent to each principal to check and confirm the content. Three of the principals replied with some suggested changes, and the transcripts were modified accordingly. The notes were divided into opinions and actions in order to see if there is a consistency between how they thought about the school choice program and what they did in response to the introduction. Then, the themes were drawn from each kind of response. It should be emphasized that I did not observe the principals’ actions at first hand, and the data is based solely on what the principals said they did. I translated the notes from Japanese to English and consulted a native English speaker to close the gap of meanings between the two languages. Yet, in the process of translation, it is possible that the nuanced meanings were lost.

Limitations of the Study

Two major limitations can be identified in this study. First, as I have selected head teachers in two cities in Kanto area (Tokyo and Saitama prefectures), the responses of principals in other parts of Japan are lacking. Also, I chose principals in large- and small-scale schools, and subsequently, those principals working in schools outside of these two extremes are not included. Additionally, as my focus was on the principals, other teachers’ reactions to school choice are

not covered. Second, a total of five principals participated in my study, and this number does not translate to statistically significant results. Especially considering the position of the principals—public servants hired by the government—some were more concerned about the implications of participating in this study than others, and as a result they declined to do so. Findings are based on the experience, perspectives, subjectivity and ideas of these specific five participants and should not necessarily be seen as generalizable to the perspectives, opinions and actions of other school principals.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter consists of the findings of the interviews and discussions and is organized according to each junior high school principal's responses in regard to their opinions and actions, after a brief description of the school and its principal. The principals' reactions in Uehara City, Tokyo are explored first, and then the responses of principals in Nozawa City, Saitama are examined. In both cities, the examination of large-scale schools is followed by that of small-scale schools.

A Small-Scale School in Uehara City, Tokyo

Akiyama Junior High School

The School and Its Principal

Akiyama Junior High School is situated in a relatively small and crowded neighborhood of commuters and local workers. The school is in close proximity to the small-scale Sakurai Junior High School. It takes less than ten minutes to get to the other school on foot. Akiyama Junior High School has constantly had a larger number of students compared to other schools. In total, the school had over three hundred students, as of 2006, which made it the sixth largest school in the city.

The principal was very passionate about the education of children and had many ambitions. For example, he wanted Japanese students to rank the first in the world in the PISA (the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment) by 2015. He also had a dream to establish a school where children from the age of zero to fifteen can be nurtured together so that the older

students can learn to take care of younger students, which helps older students to develop their interpersonal relationship.

Interview Findings and Discussion: Opinions

Responding to students' needs. For the Akiyama principal, being responsive to his students took precedence over other educational concerns he might have had, and for him, doing so was essential regardless of the introduction of the school choice program:

Just because school choice program has begun, it does not follow that it is necessary to do something special in the education of students. The program's introduction should not have any impact on daily educational activities. We should not rush things. It is meaningless to have a quick remedy, unless it continues to work in the long term. I tell teachers that they do not need to do anything extra for school choice. All that is needed is to observe our students, in order that we can dedicate all our efforts to ongoing educational activities and do a great job. I believe that we need to be responsible for the students. If the number of students decline dramatically, it is a problem, but otherwise, the numbers can fluctuate to a certain degree. We provide good education tailored to each student who enters our school.

The principal's opinion can be seen as a protest against one of the advocates' claims, which points out that teachers are not responsive, and therefore the school choice program is a useful mechanism to force them to be more responsive by putting them in a competitive environment (Nippon Keidanren, 2006, 2004; Kyoto Group, 1984). However, although the principal talked about the need "to be responsible for the students" and to offer "good education tailored to each student", it is not obvious in what sense he needed to be responsible or what sort of education he meant by "tailored to each student." One of the actions he took, namely offering ability grouping, may be an example of his approach to the individual-focused education, but this seemed to be the only response that materialized his idea, as will be examined later. If that was really the case, his definition of "good education tailored to each student" was reduced to the academic aspect of education, particularly one that neoliberalism promotes: deemphasizing egalitarianism, while valuing the separation of the able from the rest of students (Takayama, 2009). Moreover, the

absence of the strong linkage between his opinions and actions might denote that his opinion was more abstract than concrete.

It is worth noting that towards the end of the quote above, the principal suggested the importance of retaining a certain number of students. His concern might be rooted in the fact that Uehara City's school choice program does not set a limit in regard to the number of students that each school can accept, unless the number reaches its physical capacity. This implies the possibility of creating a great variation in the student population among schools, and this was the case in practice. Akiyama Junior High School was one of the large-scale schools. In other words, his confidence is at partiality derived from the population of students his school has maintained; this fact might also be an indication of the success of his hard work to him. The principal's confidence was manifested in his following statement: "I am often asked that it must be tough to work in Uehara City, but I tell them that I do not feel the effects, not unlike being in the eye of a typhoon." This comment was the only opinion that he gave in direct reference to his local school's condition based on his own experience. His comment suggests that the surrounding schools were experiencing difficulties. At the same time, this indicates that once the typhoon moves, his school could also be in chaos. This signals one of the results of market based education reform.

Respecting and nurturing students' qualities. The Akiyama principal mentioned one reason for supporting the school choice program. He said:

It is good that parents and children can choose a school together where they can develop the child's good qualities. In that sense, it is good that each school has its own color as a distinctive characteristic.

As will be shown in the rest of the chapter, neither his school nor others was really becoming distinctively diverse, and the lack of consistency between his opinions and the evidence again

suggests the abstract nature of his comment. His opaque phrase, “child’s good qualities”, reflects one of the abstract yet pervasive rationales used by various groups (Kyoto Group, 1984); FOE, 1996; MEXT, 1997) to support school choice—to nurture students’ individuality—just as his another phrase “education tailored to each student” gains immediate support due to its original association of the meaning with progressive education (Takayama, 2009).

Interview Findings and Discussion: Actions

Sending questionnaires to parents. The Akiyama principal was particularly concerned with identifying the needs of parents and responding to such demands, and was prudent and thorough in his endeavors, especially at the outset of the implementation of the school choice program. Despite his emphasis placed on responding to students, this particular action was targeted at the parents, which indicates a gap between his opinions and actions. They were done in a three-step process. First, he sought parents’ opinions about what they were interested in learning about his school in order to inform them by making a school report. This was the only response he said he took as a direct reaction to the school choice program, and this was a pivotal action for him to take. Also among the five principals, he was the only principal to have undertaken such an investigation. He stated:

In the Showa 50s [(between 1975 and 1985)], most of the junior high schools in Tokyo were in disorder. Based on that experience, it is possible for people to see modern schools in the same manner, even twenty or thirty years later. In response to the introduction of the school choice program in junior high schools in 2001, our school prepared an official PTA report to say, “Please see our school,” and distributed it to families with sixth grade primary school students for informational purposes. This Q & A report was made based on the questionnaires sent to the parents of students who were to enter a junior high school the following year. The questionnaires asked what they would like to know when sending their children to a junior high school. We selected the top thirty questions that the parents had for our school, and with the help of PTA members, we narrowed the thirty questions to twelve. The vice principal and the teacher responsible for student guidance prepared the answers to the questions, and I completed them by editing and adding to them. When doing so, we

reduce writings as much as possible and let the pictures of students' facial expressions and activities speak. The content that are only with words tended to be avoided and not read by the readers. Because the report was very well made, another school did exactly the same thing.

His beginning remark speaks to the “legitimacy crisis of Japanese schooling” and the discussions of “‘school related pathological’ problems, such as bullying and school violence, that were pervasive in Japan since the mid 1970s (Fujita, 1997, 189-208; Takayama 2009, 130). Notably, it was mainly the principal and the vice principal who took a lead in conducting the questionnaire and preparing answers, except one teacher, which corresponds to Oplatka and Hemsley-Brown (2004)’s finding that principals are made responsible for the promotion of their schools (389). This supports his earlier comment that “the teachers do not need to do anything extra for school choice.” This might suggest the separation of role between the principal and the teachers; while the principal’s managerial role has increased, the teachers have focused on daily educational activities. Such a differentiation might be also a sign that the principal could be isolated from other teachers in a long run (Taylor et al., 1997). This is plausible especially given the unsupportive attitudes of teachers towards the school choice program and the Uehara City’s education reform, which was contrasted with relatively favorable perspectives held by the principals.²⁵

Second, through the examination of questionnaires, the principal discovered that the internal environment of school was the chief concern of the parents and decided to be candid about the circumstances:

Parents are most concerned about whether they could safely leave their children in the school’s care, when choosing and deciding upon a junior high school. Therefore, our school tells the truth about issues such as “bullying”, “truancy” and “school violence”. We

²⁵ According to a research conducted in 2007, whereas the percentage of teachers who wanted to continue to work in the city because their jobs, considering the choice program and education reform, is worth doing was about thirteen percent for teachers, seventy five percent of principals thought so.

tell them what exists, and we also tell them how our school is coping with these issues. I think that many parents realize that bullying exists in all junior high schools. I understand that parents are interested in knowing how schools respond when bullying occurs, and thus I explain to them what our strategy and process is.

The need to open up his school to the public and to show how he handled school related problems were in accordance with the school choice advocates' accountability rhetoric, which has come to be prevalent in recent years (JPC-SED, 1998; Japan Business Federation, 2004, 2006). Thus, it can be speculated that the principal materialized the supporters' abstract argument, partly because he was influenced by the narratives, and partly because the parents' opinion reinforced the need to do so. His response can be also considered as his embrace of market values of being responsive to consumers, which is a characteristic of the neoliberal subject.

Checking the satisfaction level. Finally, the Akiyama principal prepared two more questionnaires—one after the first term, specifically designed for the parents of new students who entered using the school choice program for the first time in 2001, and the other for parents of all grades at the end of the academic year—in order to see if parents were content with his school. In both of the questionnaires, the results showed that the majority of parents were happy with the school. At the same time, the principal found out that parents wanted to “know about the academic and career paths taken by the students” after graduation, and he integrated the answers to this question in the subsequent year's PTA's official report, which again is a demonstration of his responsiveness. After that, however, he stopped preparing such questionnaires. He was proud of the result of preparing a report and responding to parents' demands:

Only less than 10% of students could not enter senior high schools of their first priority, and as we do not have much students' behavioral problems, parents think that our school is well-

composed. Three to four years after the beginning of the choice program, parents came to think that our school is safe enough to send their children to.

The integration of these three steps—finding out the needs of the parents, responding to their needs, and checking their levels of satisfaction— demonstrates the principal’s careful and strategic responses. The principal was the only one to have followed these organized processes, and this connotes the unsystematic and segmented nature of market strategies employed by principals in general (Oplatka & Hemsley-Brown, 2004, 377).²⁶ The Akiyama principal’s exceptional reactions, or the use of step-by-step marketing strategies, may represent the type of behaviors expected in the neoliberal governmentality and can be seen as the indicator that he was partially becoming the neoliberal subject, as will be examined in detail in the next chapter.

Tracking. As for the substantial aspect of education, the principal employed tracking – dividing students in a classroom into several groups based on their academic levels— in math and some other academic subjects to “help students acquire the basic skills”. He utilized the ability grouping as a major way to achieve this aim by teaching one of the groups himself. The principal underlined that his school’s tracking was the model case for other schools and was even featured in a TV drama about junior high school students’ life. According to him, what is unique about his school’s streaming is that it separates one classroom into four groups of students instead of three groups, which is the usual way to divide students. The four groups, which are formed based on students’ abilities and their attitudes towards studying, consist of students who: (A) want to study but require teachers’ assistance, (B) who have issues but do not want to study, (C) who learn by teaching each other among students,

²⁶ Foskett (1998) identifies three organizational approaches towards the market: the product-oriented one, “concerned primarily with supplying the product or outcome”, the sales-oriented one, which puts emphasis on promotion, and the market-oriented one, which emphasizes satisfying the consumers “by providing goods and services or experiences that they want and choose” (p.198-199). According to Oplatka and Hemsley-Brown (2004), the third orientation includes four stages for schools to follow: “(1) marketing research and analysis of the environment, formulating a marketing plan and strategy, (3) implementing the market mix, and (4) evaluating the market processes (377). The Akiyama principal’s particular responses followed these stages the closest.

and (D) who can study without the help of teachers or other students. The principal's emphasis placed on the difference may be an indication that he saw this as his school's strength and he wanted to promote these features as his school's distinctiveness. To put it another way, this can be seen as his endeavours to leverage his school's competitive advantages and signals the principal's incorporation of another facet of market rhetoric, which is a characteristic of neoliberal subjects.

One way to understand the principal's emphasis on improving students' scholastic abilities is that he was trying to respond to the local parents' interest in the school's academic performance, which was apparent in the questionnaire prepared by the principal, as examined above. The reason for the principal's emphasis on academic aspects may also be the result of the pressure that he got from the public criticism about the perceived decline in students' academic level, which might have also made parents worry about their children's academic performance. The combination of the press's exaggeration of a slight decline in Japan's performance in the PISA 2003 and the Ministry of Education's outright affirmation of such drop for the purpose of achieving its own political agenda, namely to pursue a "shift towards a market-based output-management mode of educational administration", have contributed to further shaping the academic crisis phenomenon among the public, even though the decline was not grounded in valid evidence (Takayama, 2008b, 400). Hence, it is possible to assume that the parents in Uehara City were worried about the students' declining academic ability, and the principal's response might be partly understood as a reaction to such criticism and anxieties.

The principal's use of tracking in particular might be explained by the existence of ready-to-use school distinctiveness. The school choice program in this city is just a part of larger education reform projects that the school board pursues. The school board simultaneously has

other projects such as the promotion of the linkages between primary and junior high schools and the creation of unique schools. As some scholars have pointed out, although the Uehara City School Board promotes each school to establish their own unique characteristics to attract students through school choice, schools are expected to choose one or more of the preset categories of uniqueness, rather than coming up with their own. Though the Akiyama principal stressed that the specific style applied was unique to his school, ability grouping was one of the distinctiveness suggested by the school board.

Preparing for English Test. The principal also mentioned that he offered extra academic support for students by holding lessons for those who were preparing to take an English Proficiency Test, with the help of assistant teachers sent by the Uehara City School Board. He was proud of the effects of these lessons because his students passed the levels of test that are not normally easy for junior high school students to pass: "...they have proven to have positive results. Last year, for the first time, we had some students who passed pre-2nd test. Many students have passed 3rd level test before graduation". These lessons were not a part of the unique features recommended by the school board, unlike tracking, and they might have been the principal's own idea.

In summary, while the Akiyama principal thought it unnecessary for teachers to do something special for school choice, the principal himself was quite vigorous in responding to the recipients of education. He took a lead in opening up his school to the parents and in improving students' scholastic ability. While he also claimed the importance of being responsible to his students and offering individual-based education, there was not much evidence supporting his claim, except the use of tracking. He seemed to have been more responsive to parents, rather than to his students.

A Small-Scale Schools in Uehara City, Tokyo

Sakurai Junior High School

The School and Its Principal

Sakurai Junior High School is located within the same neighborhood as Akiyama Junior High School. The school has always had a greater number of students leaving for other schools than the number of students coming in. In total, the school had over 110 students, as of 2006.

The principal appeared to have been a little reserved at first, but it turned out that he enthusiastically shared his thoughts and experiences for the longest duration of time. He seemed to have been really caring for the wellbeing of his students.

Interview Findings and Discussion: Opinions

Creating a gap. Regarding opinions about school choice, the Sakurai principal appeared to have had the most critical view as well as the most developed and extensive thoughts among the five principals. Although I was unable to determine the specific reason for his deep thinking, one possible reason might be his long years of work experience in small-scale schools for at least eight years. Out of all the concerns he had about school choice, the principal mostly agonized over the gap created among schools in respect of the number of students. This was because the population of a school tended to be interpreted as an indicator of the school's quality. In the case of his school, the small population was a mark of the low evaluation of his school's standard. In particular, he was concerned about the impact on the students in his school:

School choice program creates a difference naturally [in terms of the number of students]... and the impact on the schools with a small number of students is really huge. Even if these schools did not do anything wrong, just because the number is small, people have a negative image towards these schools. It is fine for me to be seen in a negative fashion, but I don't want people to have a negative image of students in our school. It is fine if a negative image comes to be associated with our schoolhouse, but children and parents

should not be given a negative image instantaneously. It is disappointing for both teachers and students to be held in a negative image; they should be free of blame. Our school is different from a branch school that has few students from the start.²⁷

The principal's comment consists of two points, and they are in line with the concerns held by educational scholars and teachers unions. First, the principal was critical about the hierarchism of schools brought forth by school choice, and this reflects the scholars' point of possible stratification of schools (Sanuki, 2003; Oshio, 2003; Saito, 2004; Fujita, 2005). Second, the principal was worried about the effects on students, and this mirrors one of the arguments held by some opponents of school choice (JTU, 2006; Fujita 2005). The second facet is especially important because in practice, the situation is not as simple as how the supporters of school choice may conceive. This signals that competition affects not only teachers but also students. What is also striking about his comments is that the Sakurai principal's major views were rooted in his own experiences and the local context, unlike the Akiyama principal's abstract opinions for supporting school choice. This might speak to the reason why the Sakurai principal was able to stick to abstract opinions: the lack of hardship that the principals of small-scale schools faced.

Besides his criticism about the effect of school choice in polarizing schools, the Sakurai principal also blamed the media for playing a role in feeding into the creation of this negative image of his school. He said, "Due to the bad media representation of schools with small student populations etc, which creates false and negative images, it is very hard for people to overcome these biases and see our school for what it is." This underscores the involvement of third parties in molding a specific picture of schools and the formation of views of parents and students toward these schools. The existence of outside factor indicates extra challenges faced by the

²⁷ A branch school refers to a school that is built in remote areas or places that are inconvenient for transport. In the Order for Enforcement of the School Education Law, it is stipulated that the school can have up to two classrooms.

principals of small-scale schools. Various concerns he had as a principal of a small-scale school led him to say:

There is a difference in the consciousness of those schools that are not losing students and those that are losing students. Some schools have full classrooms while others may have some empty seats. Those schools at full capacity find a lot more freedom that comes from their confidence in their numbers.

The principal's remark captures the possible influence of the population of one school on the principal's response both in their views and behaviors, and substantiates the comment made by the Akiyama principal who said that he was "in the eye of a typhoon".

Freedom of choice vs changing teachers' consciousness. The Sakurai principal was against the goal of the school choice program set by the school board:

It is natural for people to want the freedom of choice whether it is compulsory education or not...However, the school board does not say that school choice assures for the right of people to live freely. The purpose [of school choice policies] is to revitalize teachers because it is hard to change teachers' consciousness in public schools...And ultimately each school is expected to live and survive independently.

The principal's mixed opinion points to the numerous rationales existing for school choice narratives, ranging from abstract to concrete ones. On the one hand, he was supportive of school choice as an abstract concept of 'freedom of choice'. On the other hand, however, he resented the program in practice, because the school board expects him and other teachers to think about providing positive outcomes and to act in such ways that lead to achievements. This point becomes more explicit in his next comment under 'satisfying students'. Furthermore, the last line of his remark can be understood as his criticism towards the school board's non-interventionist approach in respects of the consequences of school choice, and thereby ducking its responsibility, which is how neoliberalism operates, as will be seen in the next chapter.

Satisfying students. The principal emphasized the importance of ensuring that he fulfilled his students' requests, just like the Akiyama principal, but his rationale partly stemmed from

the specific conditions of his school—small-scale and perceived negatively. Hence, his opinion was framed in relation to the given context, rather than an abstract concept, which seemed to have been the case in the Akiyama principal's comments:

I want to work hard so that the children who come to this school would not feel that they are inferior and that they would be satisfied with our school. Uehara City pursues the creation of result-seeking schools, which is about numbers, but in reality, it is not about numbers. I can provide numbers if asked, but it is not about them. I try my best so that the students coming to this school can obtain a sense of satisfaction. I want to bring students to a successful place by the end of their time here.

The principal seemed to have had an unfavorable attitude towards the two school evaluation systems that the Uehara City School Board has introduced alongside the choice program to measure the success of schools in a particular manner. He was the only principal who commented on the evaluation systems and who utterly challenged these audits. One consists of locally selected members and began in 2002, and the other is evaluated by professionals who come from outside of school and the community, which was added in 2006. As evaluation criteria, the school board has laid out six goals for principals to achieve: to promote schools to form distinctiveness, to improve the quality of school education, to transform schools to be outcome-based ones judged by the school evaluation systems, to increase the cooperation of school, parents and community, to revitalize school, and to improve the quality of teachers. The underlying key values of such aims are 'efficiency' and 'effectiveness' of the market ideology, which "has little to do with values as ends of education" (Elliott, 1993, 53-54). One of the goals, 'to increase the cooperation of school, parents and community', might not appear to fit these values at a glance, but this can be still thought within the framework of neoliberalism. This is because by underlying the cooperation of these three groups and making them in charge of the education of the children, the school board itself can avoid the responsibility.

Taken the Sakurai principal's previous two comments together, they can be seen as his resistance to the neoliberal governmentality, which is a type of governance that "steers [principals] at a distance" through the use of technologies in the given educational market setting, though he conformed to evaluation systems (Ball, 1998, 123). Furthermore, the principal's juxtaposition of "the numbers" required by the school board with the importance of contenting his students is symbolic of his care for his pupils based on educational values, not the market value of 'satisfying clients', at least at an abstract sense. But this seems to hold true in practice, as will be seen in his actions.

Consolidation of schools. In spite of his antagonistic standpoint to the school choice program, the Sakurai principal gave the impression that he was sympathetic to the school board regarding one of the outcomes of the program. This is the consolidation of schools, which his school may also experience in a couple of years. Having referred to the choice program in other cities whose intention was the streamlining of schools from the outset, he commented that "The tendency in the society is rationalization. Uehara City is trying as hard as it can". His opinion seemed to have been affected by this official excuse, even though such line of explanation was often used by the school boards to seek a more efficient resource management by keeping 'effective' schools, while closing down 'ineffective' schools, which is one of the central value of market rationale and neoliberalism. This shows the principal's intricate views about the program, which were shaped in relation to both the local context and the broader political settings; while he was hostile to the goals of school choice and the gap created by it, he accepted the consequence that small-scale schools had to face, which are assumed to be the failures in the market.

Interview Findings and Discussion: Actions

Finding positive sides. In response to the media's representation of his school in an unpleasant manner, the Sakurai principal said, "If people and the media leave us alone, people in our school would want to work hard. Children cannot fight back, so I want them to leave us alone." Moreover, he was determined to seek positive features of his school: "I try hard to find good aspects about our school that would translate into society. Even if we do not say anything, people would have a negative image about our school, so I try to find positive aspects." This response is unique to the principal and is worth noting because this suggests that principals do not necessarily make myriads of attempts to increase the number of students, as was expected by the proponents, but they try to manage their situation by shifting how they think about the conditions of their schools. This can be also regarded as one of the changes in principals' roles due to school choice: to pay more attention to the situation and characteristics of their schools. For instance, he commented on the values attached to each and every student and saw this as his school's strength:

As it is a big deal to lose even one student, our students appreciate each others' existence. Everyone has his or her time to express him or herself. Everyone recognizes those students who are not good at expressing themselves and appreciates them just the same.

Another example of a good point of his school was that students can fully participate in school events:

...we hold sports day for one whole day. Each student attends three times more activities than students in other schools, and they are all exhausted by 2pm. No one in other schools can experience this. Students are either performing or being assigned a role to facilitate the event. So, there are only a few students watching the event. Out of fifteen kinds of activities, some students take part in thirteen kinds. Otherwise, the field day cannot be held.

In terms of academic lessons, the principal said that teachers can respond to each student owing to the small class size:

For example, one teacher can teach a class of 36 students in English...but we divide the class into two...We have extra budget from Tokyo to have two extra teachers for small group classes, so we make use of them in English and Science.

Other bright sides that the principal highlighted include the fact that students are kind to each other, that the boys and girls are closer to each other, and that it is easy to form a group—all of these were portrayed in contrast to the features of larger scale schools, as these qualities might be more difficult for them to achieve due to their size. What is remarkable about these good points he illustrated is that most of them are in line with the holistic educational values, or what Gewirtz et al. (1995) call “comprehensive values”, which entail the idea that education is “led by agenda of social and educational concerns”, “integrationist”, “caring ethos”, and “emphasis on good relationship as basis of school discipline”, instead of market values, which include the opposite values to comprehensive values (150). Therefore, the principal’s observations substantiate his earlier comment, education “is not about numbers.”

Simultaneously, these examples of positive aspects were marked as the uniqueness of his school. He stated that “In order to make our school distinctive, we take advantage of our small size to engage in a broader range of activities.” In this way, the principal translated these positive features into his school’s uniqueness. The idea of distinctiveness can be interpreted as his way of creating a competitive advantage in his school. In this sense, a slight and the only sign of the principal’s incorporation of the market rationality prevails, which is one of the features of neoliberal subject.

The principal, however, saw a dilemma in emphasizing bright characteristics of his school to the interviewer because he or she would have a wrong impression of the school choice program:

When I do so [emphasize good aspects of his school], interviewers tend to think that even a small school is full of energy, and they see our school positively, but I wonder if it transfers to the reality of the situation. For example, I do not say that school choice is necessary because we have a positive result where students are good to each other, even if the number

is small. It is possible to realize this goal in another way. When schools, which are given a negative image by the society, sell their positive aspects, school choice program is regarded as a best possible policy.

No matter how positive the results of the school choice program could have been, the principal was opposed to it because of other unwanted outcomes he identified previously. This statement confirms another challenge that he experienced as the principal of small-scale school and his skeptical perspective toward school choice.

Relying on word of mouth. As opposed to other principals, the Sakurai principal relied on the parents' and students' word of mouth, rather than the direct provision of information. The principal's negative view towards advertising and the rejection of the idea can be construed as his resistance to the market rationality and hence his refusal to become the subject of neoliberal governmentality; this point will be explained in the following chapter. He claimed that:

Even if we advertise our school, it is pointless unless we have excellent results. So instead, we wait for the reputation to be spread by students' and parents' word of mouth. As each year successively graduates, they will share their good experiences they had with others, leading to new students coming into our school. School image renews itself with ever passing graduating class. Bare explanations are ineffectual... It takes three years to gain understanding of the local people. I do not want to do any false advertising.

It can be also speculated that his decision to devote himself to make students feel happy about their school might have sprang from his experience in serving small-scale schools for a relatively long period of time, for at least eight years. He knew how arduous it was to bring the number of students up, especially given that his school "is not known to be what others may define as 'good schools' or 'prestigious schools' existing in our city.", which reflects Herbert (2000)'s claim that schools have to compete on an unfair ground (96).

To synthesize the Sakurai principal's responses, he was in disagreement with the city school board's main aim of school choice, to make educators think and act to produce outcomes. He was also agonized over the creation of a difference in student populations among schools. In a

way, his actions were compatible with his belief. Instead of working hard for the results, he kept his mind on the well-being of his students and positive sides of his school. All in all, the principal held on to the professional values, whilst resisting the market values the most, among the five principals.

Yoshino Junior High School

The School and Its Principal

Yoshino Junior High School is located not too far away from the other two schools examined above. This was the only school where the school gate was locked, and visitors had to talk to the staff through the entry phone to get into school. The school has always had a greater number of students leaving for other schools than the number of students coming in. The school is close to the two most popular schools in Uehara City. The schoolhouse of one school was turned into a modern building and was integrated with a nursing home, while the other school had a huge field where students can play sports. According to the principal, they were the central reason why his school has lost students. In total, the school had a bit over 150 students, as of 2006.

The principal appeared to have been a little more laid back and did not seem to have been too nervous. He also appeared quite confident about the actions he took in response to school choice.

Interview Findings and Discussion: Opinions

Unstable management of school. It was unclear whether the Yoshino principal was in favor of school choice. However, he commented on one challenge that his school as a small-scale school faced; the turbulent management of school due to the large number of part-time teachers who can engage in the education of students only partially:

We need to have four to five classes. When we have two classes, we have more part-time teachers than full-time teachers. We had twelve to thirteen full-time teachers and fifteen to sixteen part-time teachers. Part-time teachers are hourly instructors. Therefore, they tend not to know the content of the integrated education of primary and junior high schools, and because they stay in school only during the classes, they are often unaware of the schools' principles. They seem to understand the principles, but in fact they do not. This is not good. They are not able to attend meetings. We want to communicate with them, but they do not have time. As they are in charge of classes in more than one school, they go to other schools after class. This situation makes it hard for us to maintain an adequate school operation and management.

His remark is linked to the variable amount of resources allocated to each school as a consequence of schools' uneven size of student bodies, which resulted from the students' selection of their own schools. This is important because this illustrates one reason why it is important to keep a certain number of students, which was not clear from the words of the Akiyama principal, who briefly mentioned that it is problematic to lose students dramatically. As the prefectural school board assigns full-time teachers based on the number of classrooms (each class has up to forty students) that each school has, having a small student population automatically meant the assignment of a fewer number of full-time teachers who can be fully committed to the education of students.

To provide the context, two measures taken by the Ministry of Education in the mid 2000s, which have allowed some flexibility to reduce the number of students per class and to hire more part-time teachers, will be examined here. First, it is stipulated that each class holds forty students as a basic rule, but the 7th Plan to Revise the Number of Compulsory Education Teachers has permitted schools to conduct lessons in a smaller classroom with twenty students or so (MEXT, 2005a, 3). Second, the Ministry of Education introduced the Discretion of Gross Amount Use System in 2004, and this eliminated the provisions setting the maximum amount of teachers' salary and the maximum number of teachers, and instead the prefectural school boards can decide their own standards for teachers' salary and the number of teachers within the given

state liability, which is set by the Ministry of Education (MEXT, 2005a, 8). This was meant to allow them to hire two part-time teachers, rather than one full-time teacher, which enables schools to offer small size classes and classes based on students' academic abilities (MEXT, 2005a, 9-10). These changes in the policies seem to have set the background for the increased reliance on part-time teachers. The percentage of part-time teachers in public primary and junior high schools in Japan increased from 2.6% in 1980, 5.8% in 2000, to 8.9% in 2007 (Osaka Kyoshokuin Kumiai, 2008, 1). It can be suspected that based on the changes, the Tokyo School Board uses part-time teachers actively, and as a result, this might have created a situation where small schools have more part-time teachers than full-time teachers in Uehara City.

Role of principal. The Yoshino principal commented on the new role of a principal added after the introduction of the school choice program:

Parents seek information about schools more than before. It is only recently that more and more educational magazines have become available for them. I think about how to meet parents' expectations and how they can feel reassured when sending their children to our school, and my role as a principal has increased.

It cannot be identified whether the shift in parents' attitudes toward education came before the implementation of school choice, and thus school choice was a response to such a change (Plank and Sykes, 2003, xii-xvi). Alternatively, it is also unknown if the introduction of school choice has stimulated parents to demand information about schools more, or the combination of the two. However, what is clear is that such a change and the introduction of school choice has made the principal more responsive to the parents. His comment signals his internalization of market rationality, 'responding to consumer needs', which is a characteristic of the subject of neoliberal governmentality, and this was clear from his actions.

Interview Findings and Discussion: Actions

Responding to the decline in student numbers. At the outset, it is worth highlighting that all the actions that the Yoshino principal took were his immediate reaction to the abrupt decline in the number of newly enrolled students, which resulted from school choice.

Before the introduction of school choice program, there were about 120 to 130 students living in the attendance area constantly, but the situation where only sixty to seventy of these students entered the school continued even after the choice program began. Our school had two classrooms every year. Only about ten percent of all the students in the attendance zone went to private junior high schools, so I guess some students went to other schools using the system to change the designated school even before the implementation of school choice program. When the number of classrooms was reduced down to just one three years ago, I was determined to bring the number back up to two.

According to the principal, the previous principals did not actively provide the information about the school: “they probably did not feel the need to take some measures because the school’s situation, namely having two classrooms in every grade and maintaining a well-composed atmosphere of school, did not change until three years ago” when he became the principal. This point is noteworthy because it denotes that being a principal of a small-scale school does not automatically translate into a sense of urgency to take additional measures. This in a way echoes the response of the principal of another small-scale school, Sakurai Junior High School, who was committed to satisfying his students while downplaying promotional activities. What seemed to have motivated the Yoshino principal was the *sudden* and *dramatic* drop in the school population, which was already quite small before the decline.

It should be also noted, however, that the Yoshino principal worked as a principal of a neighboring primary school before having been transferred to the current junior high school three years ago. As a primary school principal, he was already concerned about the small number of sixth grade students in his primary school entering this junior high school, as evident in his statement, “Since that time, I was aware that the number of graduates going to Yoshino Junior

High School was not large, and I felt that I had to do something about it". Thus, it is possible to think that he might have taken some measures even there was no sudden decline in Yoshino Junior High School.

Inviting prospective students to school. The Yoshino principal seemed to have attached equal importance to each of the action he took. One of his responses was to actively promote his school to attain more students, as opposed to the Sakurai principal who hesitated to engage in such activities. In addition to distributing written information for parents, the principal invited primary school students over to his school:

We invited grade six students from three primary schools in the attendance area to come to our junior high school...and they studied in the classroom, like junior high school students. After school, our student council spoke about our school to the visiting primary school students. They were well-received by our students.

This kind of activity was identified only in the Yoshino principal's responses. However, it is not an uncommon practice overall. The principal's action corresponds to Oplatka and Hemsely-Brown (2004)'s remark that "principals of small-scale schools were found to establish a relationship with their feeder elementary schools for the sake of marketing their schools" (387). Due to the absence of former principals' efforts, he said that "A little promotion went a long way". As a result, these primary school students:

...enhanced their understandings about our junior high school through their own experience, and as a result, they could feel at ease coming to our school. Because they were able to see our junior high school with their own eyes, it was more direct than just hearing stories.

It is not obvious as to how he came to this conclusion, unlike the case of the Akiyama principal whose conclusions were based on the questionnaires he sent to parents. It can be surmised, however, that the Yoshino principal relied on 'hot knowledge', or "informal, interpersonal information that circulates through social networks around them", whereas the latter principal

was using ‘cold knowledge’, which is official information provided directly by the parents through the questionnaire (Ball, 2003, 100). The difference underlines the more planned and prudent nature of the response of Akiyama principal, which constitutes a more ideal type of reaction within the framework of neoliberal governmentality, as will be discussed more in the following chapter.

The Yoshino principal’s action to open up his school to possible prospective students can be seen as his attempt to respond to one of the parents’ concerns about schools, which was evident in the Uehara City School Board’s questionnaire; ‘no bullying, no disorder, and well-composed students’ were the tenth most popular reason for parents to choose a school, as was also alluded to by the Akiyama principal and was found in his own questionnaire. The Yoshino principal’s action can be also interpreted as his effort to eradicate any possible negative images of schools held by the relatives’ experiences in his school, if there was any, because the school board’s questionnaire also showed that some parents selected the same school as attended by their relatives or their children’s siblings. This connotes that if they did not have positive experiences in his school in the past, then parents would avoid sending their children to the school no matter how it has improved after their relatives’ graduation. Therefore, the invitation of primary school students may be an effective way to imprint a fresh impression of his school in their minds.

Encouraging students’ engagement with the community. The principal urged students to participate in community events and volunteering so that the community can enhance their understanding of his students:

The community members served lunches for schools, so our students joined them as volunteers. As a consequence, the community members told others how hardworking our students were by word of mouth. Also as part of regional volunteer activities, they volunteered at a nursing home and cleaned the neighborhood with primary school students. In this way, by showing what our students could do, we wanted to gain public understanding. These were the actions we took to demonstrate moral education.

Besides targeting prospective students specifically, the principal broadened the scope of the target group to include the community members in order to “gain public understanding.” Like the Sakurai principal, the Yoshino principal depended on “the word of mouth”, but what distinguished them was that the Yoshino principal sent his students out to the community to instill positive images of his students among its members, while in the case of Sakurai principal, he relied on his students to spread good rumors about his school based on their own experiences. The latter requires more efforts as the dissemination of positive rumors requires the satisfaction of his students, unlike simply displaying students to the community. On the other hand, in the process, the students of Yoshino Junior High school became a living advertisement in this process, and consequently in this context they were turned into a part of school’s commodity to be marketed.

The incorporation of volunteer work also mirrors one of the schools’ unique qualities that the school board encourages schools to integrate, and hence this might explain the origin of his idea. However, it is unknown to what extent the school board delineated the details of what constituted volunteer work. Such documents were not found, and thus the principals might have had some authority to decide the components of volunteer work.

It should be pointed out, however, according to the principal, the student council also felt a sense of crisis and played an important role in making themselves known to the primary school students by tutoring them during summer and winter vacations and by assisting them to hold some school events, such as sports day and cultural festival. This indicates that it is not just the providers of education, namely teachers, but also students whose thoughts have come to be molded to act in such a way to increase the student number, signaling the influence of neoliberal governmentality on both educators and students.

Improving students' scholastic performance. What was vital for the Yoshino principal was to make certain that those students who were not interested in studying to get back on track so that the students' academic level can improve as a whole:

What is key is the students' attitudes in the class. It is best for them to be able to study in a well-composed environment. Most of the students had good attitudes, but there were few who did not want to study. So we talked to them and listened to them. They had hard time catching up with the class, and that was why they could not concentrate on the class. What is important for teachers here is to make sure that they understand, say one or two questions out of ten questions, through employing the ability grouping, for instance. We also gave private lessons during recess and after class. After students enter junior high school, parents leave responsibility to the students themselves, so those students who are not interested in studying do not study at all if we do not pay close attention to them. This is the difference between primary school students and junior high school students. I do not know why, but students in this area tend not to study until they reach the third year when they face high school entrance examinations. Thus, it is necessary for them to make studying a habit. That is why we work hard in order for them to acquire the basics. By doing so, we try to improve the overall academic level of our students.

The principal also incorporated tracking, along side with small class and team-teaching in order to instruct students based on their academic abilities and to be thorough with the basics, but this point was not as strongly emphasized as the Akiyama principal did. It appears that the Yoshino principal's focus was placed on creating a setting where everyone can concentrate on studying by providing extra help for those who were not interested in studying.

What is notable about his comment is that it was precisely because of the parents' lack of interest in making sure that their children study hard that the principal emphasized academic skills. In other words, the chance for the principal to emphasize academic aspect because of parents' demands does not appear to be very high, and this suggests the existence of other factors influencing his action. The Uehara City School Board's school evaluation systems and standardized test system might be an important part of the explanation. The evaluation systems have six goals, and two of which are relevant to the academic aspect of education: to improve the quality of school education and to transform schools to be outcome-based ones

judged by the school evaluation system. As for the testing system, the school board does not publish a league table in order to avoid ranking schools based on the results. It also prohibits schools from releasing their overall average test scores, but the mean score of each question is published, which enables parents to compare and contrast the scores across schools. In other words, the testing program is an essential part of school choice as it “provides the mechanisms for comparative data that ‘consumers’ need to make markets work as markets” (Apple, 2004, 31). Moreover, schools are responsible for evaluating their students’ performance by referring to the city’s set standard and for showing exactly how they are going to improve their students’ performance if they do not meet the benchmark—such information is made available on each school’s website. Therefore, the principal was accountable to both the school board and to the parents for students’ scholastic achievements, and this in turn might have made the Yoshino principal dedicate himself to boost his students’ overall academic level. This is an important part of how neoliberal governmentality works, as will be discussed further in the next chapter.

In conclusion, the Yoshino principal’s stance towards school choice was obscure. However, the abrupt and radical decline in the student number prompted him to make various efforts to regain students. He actively engaged in various promotional and liaison-making actions by increasing the interactions between his students on the one hand, and the prospective students and the community on the other hand. He was also committed to improve students’ overall academic ability by helping the disinterested students to focus on study.

A Large-Scale School in Nozawa City, Saitama

Shimizu Junior High School

The School and Its Principal

Shimizu Junior High School stands by the river. The neighborhood is more spacious, compared to Uehara City. The school housed close to eight hundred students as of 2008, and the size of schoolhouse was larger than that of schools in Uehara City.

The principal seemed confident and relaxed. He enjoyed making colorful school pamphlets on his own by adding the pictures he took. His office also had many pictures of his students on the wall.

Interview Findings and Discussion: Opinions

Developing distinctive schools and nurturing students' individuality. Just like the Akiyama principal, the Shimizu principal supported school choice because it allows students to select a school that meets their expectations, while schools strive to develop unique features, which resonates with the proponents' narratives (JBF, 2004; 2006):

I think it is good for students to be able to choose a school freely. Due to an aging society, declining birth rates and fewer numbers of teachers, the number of teachers who are capable of coaching professionally and supporting after-school extracurricular activities is also in decline. As for the academic aspect, students can choose a school based on factors like "I want to take that particular teacher's class" or "that school is doing a certain research I am interested in". There are fewer character teachers who could attract students. Opponents of choice tend to see school choice only in relation to the idea of competition and point out some of the negative effects that the competition could create. However, school choice has a positive side; it allows students to try doing things that they like in order to grow their individualities. It is natural for schools to have distinctive qualities, although some say that choice leads to rank schools. School choice provides an opportunity to select schools based on their substance, rather than just narrowing it down to the students' academic ability or facility.

Compared to the Akiyama principal's opinion, the explanation of the Shimizu principal was more detailed. First, the principal tied the idea of student's individuality to the sports and academic subjects that students prefer, although these criteria suggest a narrow definition of individuality. Second, the reason for promoting school choice was partially legitimized by his reference to the changing social demographic configuration in Japan. However, the overall decline in birthrate did not seem to have affected Nozawa City, because the junior high school-age population has been actually growing in the city. Therefore, the decline in the number of youth was not an issue in the city where he worked, but he still used such rationale to support the school choice program. This connotes the influence of abstract school choice narratives on the principal, which was also found in the case of Akiyama principal.

Concomitantly, the Shimizu principal did not mention the possible consequences of competition on students and schools, unlike the Sakurai principal whose comments were made in reference to the situation of his school, and he simply stressed the importance of allowing students to choose a school suitable for them. The Shimizu principal's non-problematization of school choice and reliance on abstract and positive arguments might have derived from the limited and minor impact that the result of choice could bring into his school, due to the restricted number of students' entrance, who come from other catchment areas. In Nozawa City, unlike in Uehara City, the school board controls the number of students that a school can accept (forty students for Namiki Junior High school, thirty students for others). This might elucidate the positive attitude held by the Shimizu principal, despite the fact that his school lost the greatest number of students (fifty) to other schools in the city in 2007 and 2008 combined. Even in the worst case scenario, the maximum number of students that his junior high school could lose in one year is 130, as each school is allowed to take up to thirty students. In 2008, for

example, his school had approximately 250 students in each grade (750 in sum), and the overall number of students in the city is also on the rise, despite the declining birth rate in Japan. This implies that even if 130 students were to leave his school every year in the period of three years, his school would still have 360 students in total. This is large enough to hold three classrooms in every grade, and even exceeds the student population of Akiyama Junior High School in Uehara City, which is one of the large-scale schools. This may account for the positive attitude of the Shimizu principal towards school choice, for his dependence on abstract arguments, and for his other rationale for advocating school choice, examined next.

Creation of incentives. The Shimizu principal was the only one who put forward school choice as a way to create an incentive for schools. He said “I welcome the challenges that come with the school choice program. It is not exactly like corporate efforts, but school choice is good as it adds impetus for schools [to work hard]”. This bold comment, too, can be attributed partly to the limited consequences of school choice that his school could experience. This response is in opposition to the Akiyama principal’s opinion who said that teachers should be responsive to students regardless of school choice. Here, the Shimizu principal’s comment also mirrors the ways in which one of the abstract arguments for choice was framed—that competition forces teachers to be responsive to the receivers of education (Chubb & Moe, 1990, 32). Therefore, the principal’s statement denotes his outright support for the market rationality, which is an aspect of neoliberal governmentality. This was also evident in his actions. His view on school choice was consistent with his actions, like the Sakurai principal’s.

Role of principal. He mentioned that the principals are busier than before, but unlike the Yoshino principal, he did not think this was caused by school choice:

I have more jobs as a principal than in the past. I get about five calls every hour. Whenever there is a school related accident happening somewhere in Japan, we have to have

investigations. Teachers also stay at school until 2am to prepare examinations. We are busy, but this is not so much because of school choice, but because of the changes in the society.

The difference in these two principals' comments can be ascribed to the dissimilar situations which they faced. While the Yoshino principal was in a small-scale school, the Shimizu principal was in a large-scale school. As examined, the Yoshino principal took various measures to recruit more students, but the Shimizu principal probably did not experience such pressures. Thus, this implies that school choice did not affect the principals' jobs or their psychological conditions in the same manner, mirroring the Sakurai principal's point that "the impact [of school choice] on the school with the negative number of students is really huge."

Interview Findings and Discussion: Actions

Promotion and monitoring. The Shimizu principal put emphasis on developing a good relationship between the community and his school so that they can nurture students together. He claimed that "What is important is the combination of promotion and monitoring. By listening to the voices of the community, the connection with the neighbor has been strengthened, and it is good for student guidance." The changing nature of the community appeared to have been part of the main reasons why he came to think this way:

It used to be the case that when community members saw students misbehaving, they would warn students directly. However, now they do not do so, and complain to school instead. We show our community that our school is trying hard, and at the same time, we ask the community to support our students. We want to nurture students together with the community. I also want our students to work for the community even after their graduation. As a part of his efforts, he attended summer festivals and talked to the community's representatives. The intention behind his action seemed to have been multiple: to create a better

relationship with the community, to acquire the help of the community to take part in the education of the students, and finally, to provide better education for the students.

The principal also made attempts to engage his students with the community directly:

The city promotes activities that establish a good rapport between schools and communities. As a part of such activities, there was an event to encourage students and community members to greet each other. Primary school students participated in it by making signboards, while community members prepared some curry for students. However, some people pointed out that a few junior high school students were taking a part in the event, although this was partly because our students were busy with their after-school extra-curricular activities. In response, we encouraged our students in the Art club to get involved in the event by drawing pictures on large signboards...In another event, some students in the music club played some music for the community members and primary school students...Through these engagements, the number of students entering these club activities have increased.

These responses are somewhat in parallel with the actions taken by the Yoshino principal.

However, there is a difference in these principals' motivations for taking these measures. While the Yoshino principal's prime purpose was to upgrade the school's image by making his students more visible to the community, the Shimizu principal seemed to have been trying to increase the assistance of the community in educating students, besides having the promotional objective.

The principal's responses are in compliance with one of the four policy directions regarding school education set by the Nozawa City School Board. The school board states that the school management should be rooted in the community. Under this policy, schools are expected to open up themselves to the community and to actively provide information about the school. Beside that, schools are encouraged to cooperate with the community members in managing their schools. These themes may be a reflection of the article newly added in the Fundamental Law of Education revised in 2006, which states that "other related people as well as schools, households and communities should recognize their own roles and responsibilities in educating children and cooperate with one another" (Article 13). The promotion of cooperation among these groups can

be construed as the Ministry of Education's way of dodging responsibility. These measures might have contributed to the principal's particular responses.

Maintaining club activities. The Shimizu principal wanted to offer club activities as fully as possible for students:

When I attend graduation ceremonies in primary schools, I hear students' speeches and I have noticed that they have serious interests in club activities. For example, they are influenced by professional baseball and soccer players, and they wish to play these sports in junior high school. After-school extracurricular activities are of large concern to students. If the number of students and teachers were to fall, our distinctiveness [the number of clubs and fullness] would also be lessened. Due to declining birth rates, it might become more challenging, but it is important to guarantee the number of clubs and to keep the instructors to support them.

The principal's emphasis on extra-curricular activities was grounded in the primary school students' voices, unlike the issue of maintaining class hours, as examined below. This demonstrates that the principal was conscious about finding out the students' priorities and he wanted to meet their desires as much as possible. Although it is plausible that the principal had concerns for club activities even before the implementation of the school choice program, the motivation for keeping a wide range of clubs might have become the combination of pure concerns for students and the need to maintain school's distinctions as well as the desire to obtain a large number of new students ultimately. In this sense, it is the central aspect of the market rationality, to be responsive to the clients' needs, and this is an indication of him as being a neoliberal subject.

Keeping class hours. Securing a sufficient amount of class hours was a way for the Shimizu principal to be responsive to the parents:

While club activities are of high interest to students, parents are primarily concerned about students' academic achievement. As we now have a five-day school week, we do not have time to prepare for cultural festivals etc. We need to retain classroom hours and students' academic level. Starting last year, we combined our school festival...with our cultural festival.... The first two hours were assigned for classroom visits by the parents, and this was

followed by the dance performance by our students. In the afternoon, each club had its own demonstration, and because this was hosted by the PTA, students did not need to prepare beforehand.

Even though it is uncertain whether the principal relied on hot knowledge or cold knowledge, it is at least clear that he was trying to meet the parents' demands (Ball, 2003, 100).

To sum up the Shimizu principal's responses, he was supportive of school choice as an incentive mechanism for teachers and as a tool to diversify schools, although the latter reason did not seem to have materialized in his actions. Yet, his actions were in congruent with his opinion in relation to the motivation-making purpose of school choice. He was responsive to the demands of the community, the parents, and the prospective students.

A Small-Scale School in Nozawa City, Saitama

Namiki Junior High School

The School and Its Principal

Namiki Junior High School is located at the outskirts of Nozawa City. Only one primary school is the source of its students. The school had close to three hundred students, as of 2008. Even though the school was smallest of all in the city, compared with schools in Uehara City, the number was still quite high.

The principal came across as the most serious headteacher of all and showed little emotion. He was particularly careful about what he said.

Interview Findings and Discussion: Opinions

Trend. The opinion of the Namiki principal in Nozawa City was dissimilar to any of the other principals' comments. For him, school choice meant "the trend of our country, our prefecture, and our time". His remark is critical as his reference to the nation and the prefecture speaks to

the peculiar position that the principals are situated in. That is to say, they are not simply spokespersons of their local school, but they are also mediators of various layers of narratives and policies. The principal's unique position given in relation to the specially approved choice program might account for his impersonal statement and his objective view of the larger context in which school choice has been practiced. In his school, the student population had been dropping even before the introduction of the choice program, although the city's population was growing overall. Demographic pressure has led the Nozawa City School Board to launch a school choice program where anyone in the city can choose to come to the school, three years before allowing students to choose any schools within the city. In this case, the school choice policy direction is laid down by the school board and the degree of its intervention in deciding the measures to attract students seemed to have been high. Given this context, the principal might not have believed that he had much room for decision-making, unlike other principals, or he might not have felt the need to take a lead in responding to school choice.

Interview Findings and Discussion: Actions

Taking advantage of the small-scale. The Namiki principal saw the small size of his school as its strength:

I want to take a full advantage of the small size of our school and use this as our attraction. The merit is that we can provide careful and meticulous in-class support for students and pay close attention to every student's behaviors and conducts. All of our teachers have a good understanding of every student in our school... Also, students can take an active part in club activities and achieve self-actualization. The chance of students becoming a regular player in sports clubs is high, and they can also actively engage in the student council.

His claim echoed the Sakurai principal's, although the latter principal's comments were made in reference to many more aspects of his school and were more stressed. Rather than trying to take various actions in order to gain the trust of the public towards the school and to be

responsive to parents, students or communities, which was the case in the Sakurai, Yoshino, and Shimizu principals, the Namiki principal put more emphasis on finding his school's uniqueness within the given conditions. Among the small-scale schools, the exception was the Yoshino principal, who did not mention his school's small size. The Namiki principal also downplayed activities to spread the information about his school. He said that the school sent out information even before the implementation of the school choice program, which creates some ambiguity around the strength of this response.

It should be noted that Namiki Junior High School also offered some extra-curricular lessons after-class every second Saturday morning and during long vacations. However, it was the Nozawa City School Board's initiative to offer these lessons to attract students as part of the specially approved school choice program, rather than the principal's individual decision. Developing students' solid academic prowess was the city's other policy direction, and this might help explain the additional courses offered by the school. According to the measure set by the city, schools are supposed to make sure that the students acquire the basic academic skills and to provide lessons based on students' academic levels.

To recap, the Namiki principal appeared to have been most indifferent to school choice both in his opinions about school choice. As for his actions, his emphasis was placed on highlighting aspects that are distinctive to his school, rather than taking various actions to attract students.

Conclusion

Principals' Opinions

Among the five principals, three principals (the large-scale Akiyama and Shimizu and the small-scale Sakurai) articulated their opinions clearly regarding school choice, but the

standpoints of the other two principals (the small-scale Yoshino and Namiki) were not very clear. In understanding their perspectives, it is crucial to recognize that the principals' views were not just influenced by the local contexts in which the principal resided, but they were also formulated within a larger political context, and they mediate myriads of themes and policies emerging from the political discussions. In short, they are not only the advocates of their local schools, but also the agents of diverse policy discourses. In the light of this, among the three principals of the former group, the Sakurai and Akiyama principals held more ambivalent perspectives, although the former principal showed more positive attitudes, whilst the latter principal was more critical of school choice. While they were either sympathetic to or in favor of some of the *abstract* rationales behind school choice, they were against some of the rhetoric used to advocate school choice in a more *practical* sense. On the contrary, the Shimizu principal was quite supportive of school choice frankly, and his opinions were given at the *abstract* level. In other words, these principals tended to support school choice at an abstract sense, but they were opposed to school choice when their opinions were given in relation to their local contexts. In comparing their opinions and actions, while the Sakurai and Shimizu principals' opinions were consistent with their actions, there were some contradictions in the case of the Akiyama principal. As we have seen, the presence or the lack of the demographic pressure (size of school population), the controlled or uncontrolled nature of school choice program in terms of the maximum number of acceptable students in a school, and policy imposition from the school board (the specially approved school choice program of Nozawa City) represent some of the possible local factors shaping the principals' views towards school choice. Table 4.1 summarizes the principals' opinions.

Table 4.1 *Principals' Opinions Regarding School Choice Programs*

Layers of Opinions	Opinions	Large-scale Schools		Small-scale Schools		
		Akiyama	Shimizu	Sakurai	Yoshino	Namiki
Abstract	Freedom of Choice			For		
	Students' Individuality	For	For			
	Distinctive Schools	For	For			
	Incentives for Teachers		For			
	Consolidation of Schools			For		
Concrete	Stratification of Schools			Against		
	Incentives for Teachers	Against		Against		
	Deteriorating Working Conditions				Against	
Other	Trend					?

Principals' Actions

In regard to the principals' actions, they can be categorized into two groups: active and passive. The former type includes the Akiyama, Yoshino and Shimizu principals, and they all incorporated endeavours to open up their schools to the community and primary school students and to improve students' academic performance, although the motivations behind their actions and the degree to which they emphasized them were dissimilar. The latter type entails the Sakurai and Namiki principals, and they did not put immense efforts into the activities undertaken by the former group. Instead, they thought of ways to make the most of their given situation, that is their small school size. What is striking about this dichotomy is that the principals of large-scale schools, who were also supportive of school choice in an abstract sense, tended to be more responsive, whereas the principals of small-scale schools were not very active, except for the Yoshino principal who responded to the sudden and significant drop in student

numbers. This suggests that the smallness of student population was not a major factor for principals to be responsive, connoting the existence of other factors influencing their actions, and one of this will be examined in detail in the next chapter, in relation to neoliberalism.

Particularly within the active group, actions taken by the three principals concerning school choice did not diverge significantly from one another. Factors that may have hampered the development of more diverse responses include the lack of authority to make decisions; school choice as part of larger educational reforms; school evaluation systems; perceived declining student academic ability; and response to parental concerns. Besides these rather locally oriented factors, there are also overarching features impacting and restricting all the principals' actions, as will be discussed below. The examination of these components is useful for comprehending the fact that the principals' actions were shaped by multiple stratum of influences, just as their opinions were framed in relation to different layers of abstractness.

Table 4.2 summarizes the principals' actions.

Table 4.2 *Principals' Actions Concerning School Choice Programs*

Type of Actions	Actions	Large-scale Schools		Small-scale Schools		
		Akiyama	Shimizu	Sakurai	Yoshino	Namiki
Active	Sending Questionnaires to Parents	√				
	Engaging with Community (Students/Principal)		√		√	
	Engaging with Prospective Students				√	
	Ability Grouping	√			√	
	Extra-Curricular Academic Lessons	√			√	√
	Securing Class Hours		√			
	Small Class Size			√		√
Passive	Highlighting Existing Positive/Unique Features of School			√		√
	Relying on Word of Mouth			√	√	
	Keeping Club Activities		√			

Overarching Factors Limiting the Principals' Actions

Lack of Authority to Make Decisions

One way to understand the situation where the principals responses were not inimitable is that they were not given much power to make decisions about various school related issues because it is still either the municipal school boards, the prefectural school boards, or the Ministry of Education that control some essential aspects of public education. A high degree of government intervention, coupled with parental choice, as well as state subsidies constitute a 'quasi-market' in the educational setting, as opposed to the free market, which is free of government regulations and financial backing (Levacic, 1995, 167, cited in Whitty et al., 1998, 1). As Okato (2001) argues, at a glance it seems as though the school choice program allows

increased power to be devolved to individual schools, but in reality, the authority to make decisions on curriculum, budget, and selection and allocation of teachers are not in the hands of the principals (118).

First, the curriculum is standardized. The Ministry of Education prepares the Course of Study, and teachers conduct lessons following the guideline. The Course of Study is detailed and there is little room for the principals to maneuver and be creative. The exception is the ‘integrated learning period’ where the schools’ creativity is permitted in regard to the content of the class. But in the case of Uehara City, the school board seems to have control over what to do during that time. The school board has come up with a new subject called civic education, and each school is supposed to teach the subject. Another curricular flexibility given by the Ministry of Education to the schools is on the difficulty of the lessons. The Ministry articulates that what is included in the Course of Study is the bare minimum to be taught, and allows each school to teach more advanced content if necessary. These two points appear to be the only freedom given to principals in terms of the school curriculum.

As for the budget, it is distributed based on the number of classrooms that each school has, which is a factor constituting the “quasi-market”. The basic rule is that each classroom holds forty students. That said, there was an attempt where a municipal school board in Tokyo, which also uses a school choice program, distributed extra budgets to be used for the creation of distinctiveness in schools by ranking schools into four groups (the budget varied from two to five million dollars), according to each school’s growth rate of students’ achievement test results prepared by the municipal and prefectural school boards. However, this was abolished because of strong opposition from the public and because teachers in some of the schools behaved dishonestly in order to raise test scores by making students correct their mistakes during the test

(Nihon Kyoiku Shimbun, 2007; Yomiuri 2007). Even though differentiated distribution of budgets might help principals develop distinctive features to attract students, it seems unrealistic especially given the fact that public schools are run on the tax payers' money, and they would expect schools to be treated equally regarding the budget.

Finally, principals do not have the right to select teachers that they would like to work in their schools, which might help develop a certain tone in the school. This is also a characteristic of quasi-market due to the government control of the allocation of teachers. The movement and relocation of teachers is up to the prefectural school board's decisions.²⁸ In other words, as long as these restrictions prevail, there are only a few limited ways for principals to respond to the school choice program for their competitive advantage. This might have led to the similar nature of the responses. Consequently, Okato (2001) claims that the principals are made accountable to the results of school choice without being given more control over the principals' management of school. This is what Nitta (2008) calls "the tight-tight" management of educators (190).

Rotation of Principals

Another possible explanation about the lack of extensive divergence in principals' actions is the restricted length of time that the principals can serve in one school, set by the prefectural government. This is noteworthy because the lack of divergence in their reposes implies that the principals do not create unique characteristics, although this was part of the reasons why the Uehara City School Board implemented the school choice program. On average, principals move to another school after three years in Japan (in Tokyo, the average is 3.9 years and in Saitama, it is 3.2 years) (MEXT, 2008c). This suggests that the principals usually have a limited time to

²⁸ In Tokyo, however, since 2003, the school board has permitted principals to keep some teachers in their schools longer than six years or remove them from their schools even before their stay reaches three years, if they think such decisions are necessary in order to realize their school management plans (Tokyo Educational Bureau, 2003).

come up with their unique responses that are unlikely to be imitated by others, as it takes a lot of time to think and plan their response before putting them into practice. At the same time, they are responsible for producing some positive results in a relatively short period of time. This pressure is also coupled with the possibility that their school could be consolidated if they were incapable of attracting more students in a swift manner, in Uehara City. The combination of the limited time that principals can stay in a school and the pressures to have some quick improvements might mean that they try to avoid doing things that takes too long, particularly when their success is not guaranteed even if they try to take a risk.

It should be noted, however, that in Tokyo the government could permit the principals' extended stay upon their request, although it is not clear how easy it is for such an appeal to be accepted. The Akiyama principal, however, certainly fits this exception. According to him, he was able to serve the same school for over nine years because the head of school board recognized his hard work. The reason why he wanted to stay in the school was because he needed at least three years to change a school, but he had only two more years left before his retirement. On the other hand, Sakurai Junior High School principal mentioned that he could not stay in one school longer than he wanted. He might not have appealed to the Tokyo government, but this at least indicates that the extension of their stay might not be so common. The comment made by the Akiyama principal on the significance of time somewhat resonates with what the Sakurai principal said. For him, three years also seemed to be a key interval because it takes three years for one group of students to fully experience school life and to graduate from junior high school. All in all, the constant movement of principals among schools can be one way to understand the absence of extremely different responses taken by the principals. This is one factor that impedes schools from becoming more diverse, which contradicts to one of the Uehara

City School Board's expected consequences of school choice: to create distinct school profiles among schools.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: NEOLIBERALISM AND SCHOOL CHOICE IN JAPAN

A neoliberal political rationality is primarily about market responses and economic incentives. According to Brown (2003), a neoliberal governmentality includes several key tenets. First, the state devotes itself to establish policies and laws based on market values in spheres where the suffusion of market discourse was not seen formerly. Second, success for state and other institutions, based on their ability to sustain and advance the market, is the yardstick of justification. Finally, the state produces subjects who assess their actions in terms of the market rationale of maximizing benefits and minimizing costs.

In examining these three tenets of a neoliberal governmentality in the case of school choice programs in Japan, the principals' responses in this study can be also understood as part of an emergent neoliberal rationality in the sphere of public education. First, in terms of state policies, a wide variety of measures are set by the Ministry of Education, prefectural school boards, or local school boards. For example, along with school choice policies, various measures have been generated in order to evaluate the performance of public junior high schools, according to the market rationale. In regards to the cases studied here, both prefectural (Tokyo and Saitama) and local (Uehara City) school boards took the initiative in forming such various systems of surveillance, namely the achievement tests for students and the school evaluation systems, before the Ministry of Education laid out its audits. The Tokyo school board introduced achievement tests (in math and Japanese) among the first and second year junior high school students as early as in 2001. The Saitama school board implemented tests in three areas of education, created in accordance with the National Course of Study in 2005: academic (math and Japanese), physical and behavioral. All junior high school students in the prefecture are expected to participate in

these examinations. The Uehara School Board has also employed its own achievement test since 2006. As for the school evaluation system, the Uehara School Board began utilizing them in 2002, as discussed earlier. It was not until 2007 that the Ministry of Education launched the national standardized test system and made the school evaluation systems mandatory for schools, through the revision of School Education Law. As a consequence, along with the implementation of school choice program, public schools in Uehara and Nozawa Cities have come to be governed “not directly from above, but through technologies”, or the achievement tests and the school evaluation systems (Larner, 2000, 13).

Second, these policies provide a reference point for principals’ attitudes and actions towards school choice, as was alluded to in the previous chapter. Principals’ responses were framed not only in relation to their local circumstances, but also in relation to the domestic as well as the broader international policy trend of neoliberalism (Plank & Sykes, 2003; Forsey et al., 2008). In other words, the success and legitimacy of a principal’s action might have been measured in terms of market competitiveness at partial. There is not enough evidence to claim that the principals have completely become the subjects of neoliberal governmentality throughout the process. Nonetheless, it might be still possible to suggest that there have been some changes in the principals’ actions and especially their motivations for taking a certain kinds of actions. The principals have come to see the need to acquire more students because of the implementation of the school choice program, and as a result, their drive for taking specific actions—some of which were not seen prior to the launch of the program—might have come to derive not only from their pure educational concerns for students, but also from their desire to maintain or increase the size of student body, or in other words, to sustain their market competitiveness. Thus, the point that I am trying to make is that the introduction of the school choice program that is based on the

market principle has the potential for changing the meaning of public education that puts emphasis on holistic education into the one that is centered around market values. The rest of the chapter focuses on the latter two tenets of neoliberal governmentality.

Outcome-Based Thinking

Success and legitimacy of a principal's action is often measured in respect of market competitiveness. This is particularly poignant in the case of Uehara City because of the radical nature of education reform that it precedes, of which school choice program is positioned as a crucial component. This program is combined with the city's school evaluation systems and the standardized test system, in addition to the national and prefectural achievement tests, and they function as the audits of principals' actions. It is interesting to note that none of the principals explicitly stated that they were constantly checking to see if their actions addressed parts of the measures to determine their success in the market. Nevertheless, as we have seen, the fact that most examples of the principals' responses (particularly those in the active group) corresponded to the specific contents of the school evaluation system or the educational guideline can be thought of as an illustration of their efforts to comply with the measures. Furthermore, there were some signs that the result-seeking thinking was occurring in the minds of some of the principals in relation to the categories of goals that they were supposed to meet, and this in turn served to legitimize the principals' actions.

The result-seeking thinking was discernible in the ways in which the Akiyama and Yoshino principals depicted some of their responses. The Akiyama principal, with the aim of finding out what kind of information was being sought, prepared questionnaires for the parents of prospective students prior to their entrance, and answered their most-frequently asked questions. What is most relevant here is that the next action he took. He checked whether parents and

students were satisfied with their schools by conducting other questionnaires. This is an indication that he actively sought the outcomes of his previous actions. Such an action was precisely one of the criteria included in the Uehara City School Board's evaluations systems, to transform schools into the outcome based ones.

As for the Yoshino principal, two types of his responses, which were very similar to the ones explained by the Akiyama principal, uncovered his attention to outcomes in relation to increasing students' and community's understanding towards his school and academic improvements, and his confidence emerged as a result. He invited neighboring primary school students to his school and he concluded that the students came to feel at ease coming to his school. Similarly, he claimed that his students' volunteer work done in the community led its members to perceive the students as hardworking. In terms of the academic aspect, after making various efforts, the principal concluded that his school's academic ranking improved from the middle to the upper level in the city. The parallel between the principals' actions and the measures set by the local and municipal school boards and his awareness of the improvements made in the situations points to their embracement of outcome-based thinking.

Principals as the Subjects of Neoliberal Governmentality

Possible Reliance on Economic/Market Rationality

Neoliberalism governs people by making the economic and market rationality "a norm rather than an ontology" in their minds (Brown, 2003, para 16). The prevalence of such rationality was made possible by embedding it in various audits set by the school boards and the Ministry of Education. The following section demonstrates particular ways in which the principals have become the subject of neoliberal governmentality through internalizing some of the characteristics of such rationales.

Cost-benefit Rationale

There is one possible hint of the principal's internalization of economic rationality of cost and benefit in the actions reported by the Yoshino principal. The principal invited prospective students to his school. He said that "Because they were able to see our junior high school with their own eyes, it was more direct than just hearing stories". This indicates his conscious evaluation of what works better. Thus, the principal's choice of the face-to-face interaction of prospective students with his students over giving a speech about his school can be regarded as the principal's reliance on the fastest and simplest solution, and therefore a more effective way to improve their public image. Although the application of such rationality was not found in the substantial aspects of school education, it is not guaranteed that the same rhetoric might be applied in these areas one day. If that was to happen, it is problematic because there is a chance of fundamentally altering the meaning of public education, as was found in the study of the English case; schools were coming to embrace more market values than comprehensive values (Gewirtz et al., 1995, 149-150).

Creating a Certain Image

Another sign of the incorporation of market rational is found in some of the principals' emphasis placed on pictures. When preparing a school report, the Akiyama principal said he used pictures of lively students because the parents do not read a report with full of writings. Similarly, the Shimizu principal stated that "the photos give a strong visual appeal". Their comments seem to show their concerns about the effectiveness of their school pamphlets, which is a key idea in neoliberalism. Thus, they relied on pictures in order to give a positive impression about their

schools, echoing Lubienski (2005)'s point, "marketing necessarily emphasizes symbolic representations" (479). At the same time, this resonates the idea held by marketing experts:

The value of good design lies in its ability to convey a message succinctly and clearly to the reader; one image can be worth pages of copy...The copy should be written to reinforce images...Fewer words are always better; shorter sentences rather than long; and simple language rather than obscure terminology and complexity (Pardey 1991, quoted in Gewirtz et al., 1997, 133).

The excessive reliance on symbolic images might run the risk of creating a false image of their schools. However, in the case of the Shimizu principal, the provision of brochures was combined with his and his students' direct engagement with the community and the prospective students. Based on this, it is safe to say that the principal did not put too much emphasis on managing the school's impression through photos. Depending on creating school's images might also lead educators to make light of actual educational activities, and this could ruin the public education. None the less, the Akiyama principal did not mobilize his teachers to prepare the pamphlet, reflecting his comment that teachers "do not need to do anything extra for school choice." Therefore, while the principal's managerial roles might have increased, it seems that teachers could still focus on pursuing professional values.

Competitive Advantage & Distinctiveness

There are also indications where some of the principals were embracing another facet of market rhetoric, namely their endeavours to leverage their schools' competitive advantages. For instance, although ability grouping itself is not uncommon, the Akiyama principal distinguished his school from others by emphasizing that his school's ability-grouping was different from others. He also underlined the superiority of this kind by saying that it was used as the model type for other schools. On the contrary, the Sakurai and Namiki principals both explained how

they were different from other large schools and capitalized on the smallness of their schools. What distinguished the responses of these principals from that of the Akiyama principal is that they tried to find differences within the existing conditions of their schools, while the Akiyama principal introduced tracking. What is problematic about stressing the implementation of new programs for the sake of creating uniqueness is that this might result in the blind acceptance and celebration of programs that may have harmful agendas and effects behind them. For example, according to Takayama (2009), the ability grouping is in line with the neoliberal ideology and is meant to put greater importance on educating the privileged elites, while deemphasizing the idea of “education for all”, which in turn devastates the egalitarianism of public education (133-134). In this sense, the Akiyama principal’s embracement of tracking can be also seen as the very evident that he was becoming the subject of neoliberal governmentality. Therefore, the idea of creating competitive advantages in schools needed to be approached with caution.

Tactic Management

Another aspect is that the ideal type of principals under the neoliberal governmentality is characterized by their tactic management within the given neoliberal framework (Brown, 2003, para 15). That is to say, a neoliberal subject is expected to maneuver oneself to find ways to survive within the given situation in the neoliberal order, instead of cooperating with others to directly challenge the order downrightly or to find alternatives other than neoliberalism. This also illustrates how one’s practices can be “contradictory and discursive” (Larner, 2000, 12). This is most apparent in the case of Sakurai principal. On the one hand, the principal was critical of the outcome-based management of schools in Uehara City, as was reflected in his comment “education is not about numbers”. In his every-day practices, his focus was on finding positive aspects of his school, apart from satisfying his students, which is based on holistic educational

values. Also, he did not believe in the importance of promoting his school, which originates in the market rationale, and relied on good rumors to be spread by the graduates of his school. On the other hand, the principal said “I can provide numbers if asked”, while attacking the idea of measuring the quality of education through numbers. Thus, he conformed to the evaluation systems and the achievement tests by reporting the outcomes to the school board as well as to the public, rather than directly confronting these systems. Therefore, his responses can be understood as a strategic balancing of his personal beliefs as an educator and meeting the requirements set within the framework of neoliberal governmentality.

Degree of Economic Rationality

As the discussions have revealed, all of the five principals had some characteristics of the subject of neoliberal governmentality in one way or another. However, it is crucial to realize that the extent to which economic and market rationality has prevailed in the individual principal’s decision makings and actions was diverse. Thus, the purpose of this section is to demonstrate these variations; the embrace of such rationality was most evident in the responses of the Shimizu and Yoshino principals. In contrast, this was least shown in the Sakurai principal’s response.

High

The Shimizu principal’s views towards school choice and actions were most consistent with the market and economic rational central to the neoliberalism. In his opinion, he was positive about the competitive nature of school choice on the basis that teachers will be motivated to work hard, and he was even willing to confront with difficulties. This suggests his affirmation of market rationality of competition. In his actions, moreover, he tied most of the action that he

took to the needs of various stake holders in education: students, parents, and community. First, he thought it important to keep a wide-variety of club activities because they were *students' concern*. Similarly, he explained the importance of maintaining hours of instruction because they were *parents' concern*, given that many of the parents in the school neighborhood were highly educated and enthusiastic about their children's education. Lastly, he saw the need to encourage students to get involved in community activities because *the community members thought* that students did not fully participate in them. All in all, his responses were always in line with the market rationale of responding to 'consumer needs'. Taken his opinions and actions together, the principal of Shimizu Junior High School represents the most successful case of the construction of a neoliberal subject among the five principals.

High

The actions taken by the Yoshino Junior High School principal probably constitutes the second best case of neoliberal rational subject. This is palpable in his employment of a wide range of advertising activities done in order to regain students. Not only did he provide brochures, but he also invited prospective students to his school. Also, he urged his students to participate in volunteer activities in the community. He did not seem to have questioned these promotional activities, unlike the Sakurai principal. Thus, based on the variety of actions, the Yohino principal's promotional efforts were done most extensively, besides the Akiyama principal. Therefore, this indicates that the market values have become the norm in his mind.

Low

The Sakurai principal was the least closest to the expected neoliberal subject. On the contrary to the two principals examined above, he was against the norm based on the neoliberal rationality. He did not incorporate any promotional activities because he held a negative perspective towards them. He even believes that such actions are deceiving, and decided to rely on people's word of mouth instead. Furthermore, he was the only one who challenged the accountability systems set by the Uehara City School Board outright by asserting that education "is not about numbers." Although the principal still complied with the measures, and in this sense, he was acting in the 'right' way, he "remain[ed] subject to, rather than a subject of, the (neoliberal, new-managerial) practice" (Petersen, 2009, 416). Petersen (2009) argues that one can resist a certain policy by accessing alternative "discourses that make the policy, and its accompanying micro-practices, appear ludicrous and unacceptable" (420). In the Sakurai principal's case, by emphasizing the importance of holistic education, as opposed to the one that is reduced to outcomes, he was able to oppose to the economic and market rationality.

Possible Responsibility that a School Faces

The closure and consolidation of small-scale schools in Uehara is one responsibility that the principals, who are incapable of maintaining competitiveness in the market, have to bear, and this is an indication of the school board's shirking its own responsibilities. According to the Sakurai principal, the Uehara City School Board has decided to consolidate his small-scale school in 2010. This suggests that the school board does not assist schools until they gain enough students to go back to a reasonable school size, and is hands-off in its approach. The lack of assistance is despite the school board's claim to provide extra help to those schools requiring extra assistance; shutting down the school seems to go against the claim. At the same time, the

school board's decision reflects another characteristic of neoliberal governmentality. This is the ignorance of constraints on what principals can do in order to obtain more students, regardless of the seriousness (Brown, 2003, para 15). While principals are cast as entrepreneurial actors who make rational decisions, they are completely made responsible for the outcomes of their own choice of actions. Neoliberal governmentality ignores the fact that even if one strives to make the best possible decision for oneself, the environment in which the individual is situated or the conditions one face are not the same for everyone. At the same time, it does not consider that because of the situations can have some impacts on the consequences, depending on them, the outcome can be beneficial or harmful. As the Sakurai principal indicated, some of the predicaments he confronted were the fact that his school was not known to be one of the prestigious or traditional schools originally and the harmful role of the media in painting his school in a negative light once the number of students declined. He also commented on how difficult it was to remove that negative image. If the Uehara City School Board was willing to take on some responsibilities, then it could have taken a more interventionist approach of the Nozawa City School Board, as was seen in the case of the Namiki principal in relation to the specially approved school choice program.

According to one source, when another school in Uehara city was consolidated, the school board tried to legitimize its action on the basis that the declining birth rate makes the streamlining of schools inevitable. This rhetoric, in and of itself, underscores the economic rationality of efficiency and effectiveness that underlying in the school board's rhetoric. Furthermore, the demography does not seem to be a real issue here. Yamamoto (2005) points out that the number of students in Tokyo was anticipated to grow from 2004 to 2009, except for two cities in Tokyo, and Uehara City was not one of them (18). At the same time, referring to the

study done by Shindo (2004), Yamamoto (2005) highlights that whereas the national population growth rate was 1% every year from 1995 and 2000, the rate was 2.5% in Tokyo (19). The rise of population, which directly contradicts the explanation used by the school board, demonstrates the unwillingness of the school board to be responsible for those schools that are losing students. More importantly, the Sakurai principal showed some understanding towards the school board regarding its decision to consolidate his school, making references to other cities where streamlining of schools were also taken place, and this demonstrates his internalization of economic rationality.

It is important to bear in mind, however, that this sanction might not be so severe for the principal as an individual since he could still be placed to another school, even though the psychological and social pressure that he receives might be great. This is one of the questions that this study could not find an answer to.

Final Remark

This study examined five junior high school principals' responses to the school choice programs implemented in Uehara City, Tokyo and Nozawa City, Saitama, Japan. Although there is not sufficient evidence to make a claim that the principals have fully turned into the subjects of neoliberal governmentality, they have come to be concerned about obtaining students, or their market competitiveness, to some degree as a consequence of the implementation of the school choice programs. Some of them took various actions based on market rationality in order to either keep or gain more students, and this might suggest the possibility of altering the school culture in a long run. This substantiates Takayama (2009)'s claim that Japan is not an exception to the influence of neoliberalism and the economic rationalism in restructuring public education

system undertaken in a number of other countries, despite the Anglo-American scholars' observations.

It is necessary to keep in mind that the school choice programs and the associated audits examined in this study are just some of the examples of measures that may prompt changes in the culture of public schools. Some of the prefectural and municipal school boards have made attempts to adopt the efficient and effective management and teaching techniques used in the business domain through recruiting principals from the corporate sector (Yomiuri Shimbun, 2009) and turning to private supplementary educational institutions, *juku*, to provide extra academic lessons in public schools in Tokyo and Osaka (Mainichi Shimbun, 2007, Asahi Shimbun, 2009). Under such circumstances, how would it be possible for principals to maintain public education that encompasses broader purposes? Petersen (2009) contends:

...acts of resistance cannot be successfully done, however, if we are not at the same time critically attentive to the ways in which neoliberal discourse is normalized in everyday practices, and the ways in which we are and become vulnerable to its seduction (420).

Therefore, what is crucial for principals is to realize the presence and the nature of neoliberal governance and to be constantly cautious of such influences on their practices in schools.

Principals might not be able to resist neoliberal governmentality formally, given that they do not have much autonomy in areas other than conducting basic educational activities and that they are public servants who are embedded in the educational system. However, they could still fight against it in an informal manner. For example, the professional organization for junior high school principals (*zennihon chugaku kochokai*) can be one of the places where informal resistance can be made. Nevertheless, it is important to note that not all principals may want to resist neoliberal governmentality, particularly those who are in popular schools because they might enjoy their prestigious position as being the principals of popular schools.

Directions for Future Research

This study centered on examining the responses of one group of actors affected by the school choice program, namely junior high school principals in a particular kind of school, over- and under-populated schools in two cities in Japan only. What is left out are the experiences of principals who are in other cities as well as those who do not fit in these two extreme ends. Longitudinal studies will help understand if and how their responses change overtime. How other stake holders such as regular teachers, students and parents have reacted to the school choice programs also need to be explored to provide a holistic understanding of the ramifications of such programs on public education. For example, one study conducted in 2007 has found that whereas the principals supported the Uehara City's education reform and school choice program, teachers did not. Thus, educators are not one united group, but instead, there is a gap between teachers and principals in respect to their attitudes towards education reform partly because of their uneven power relation; while the principals are expected to take a leadership in proceeding education reform at least in theory, teachers have to follow them. At the same time, there are separate organizations for teachers and principals; besides the teachers' unions, the principals' professional organization exists. Neither the principals themselves are on the same side all together. The supportive attitudes of principals in Uehara City can also be contrasted with the research done by Kaneko (2007) on the attitudes of junior high school principals in Japan (one third of all principals in the nation were targeted for this study) in 2006. According to the study, 84 percent of principals felt that the education reform is taking place so fast that the schools cannot catch up with it, and 58 percent thought that the school choice program is useful for the revitalization of schools (Kaneko, 2007, 3-4). This might suggest that the principals in Uehara

City are more positive about the market-based education reform than the principals in other places in Japan, and this is an indication of the need to study other cases further.

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APPENDIX A: STUDENT POPULATION OF PUBLIC JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS IN UEHARA CITY, TOKYO AND NOZAWA CITY, SAITAMA

Larger Schools in Uehara City, Tokyo

Larger schools	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Junior High School	A	B	C	D*	E*	Akiyama	F	G	H
Total # of Students (# of classrooms)	434 (13)	424(12)	414 (12)	318 (10)	317 (10)	316 (9)	301 (9)	299 (9)	254 (8)
Total # of Students Gained from Other Areas between 2001 and 2007	271-198 =+73	451-96 =+355	227-93 =+134	182-260 =-78	404-211 =+193	403-111 =+292	230-83 =+147	530-75= +455	149- 147=+2

*E Junior High School was found by integrating with a primary school in 2006, and D was found by integrating with a primary school in 2007. These integrated schools have become very popular.

Smaller Schools in Uehara City, Tokyo

Smaller schools	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Junior High School	I	J	K	L	Yoshino	M	Sakurai	Yoshino
Total # of Students (# of classrooms)	205 (6)	190 (6)	179 (6)	159 (6)	156 (5)	154 (5)	113 (5)	94 (3)
Total # of Students Gained from Other Areas between 2001 and 2007	146-197 =-51	149-136 =+13	90-403 =-313	110-281 =-171	139-339 =-200	65-101 =-36	53-371 =-318	72-447 =-375

Largest to Smallest Schools in Nozawa City, Saitama

Largest to Smallest schools	1	2	3	4	5
Junior High School	X	Shimizu	Y	Z	Namiki
Total # of students (# of classrooms)	924 (27)	774 (21)	661 (19)	549 (15)	291(9)
# of students from other areas (in 2007 and 2008)	25+23=48	0+4=4	4+10=14	3+1=3	28+22=50

APPENDIX B: CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

The University of British Columbia
Office of Research Services
Behavioural Research Ethics Board
Suite 102, 6190 Agronomy Road, Vancouver, B.C. V6T
1Z3

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL - MINIMAL RISK AMENDMENT

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Jennifer Chan	DEPARTMENT: UBC/Education/Educational Studies	UBC BREB NUMBER: H07-02253
INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT:		
Institution	Site	
N/A		
Other locations where the research will be conducted: Interviews will be conducted in junior high school principal's offices or in a room that is convenient for the interviewee (principals).		
CO-INVESTIGATOR(S): Michiyo Hayase		
SPONSORING AGENCIES: N/A		
PROJECT TITLE: School Choice in Japan		

Expiry Date - Approval of an amendment does not change the expiry date on the current UBC BREB approval of this study. An application for renewal is required on or before: July 21, 2009

AMENDMENT(S):	AMENDMENT APPROVAL DATE: August 12, 2008
Document Name	Version Date
The amendment(s) and the document(s) listed above have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.	
<i>Approval is issued on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board and signed electronically by one of the following:</i>	

Dr. M. Judith Lynam, Chair
Dr. Ken Craig, Chair
Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair
Dr. Laurie Ford, Associate Chair
Dr. Daniel Salhani, Associate Chair
Dr. Anita Ho, Associate Chair

APPENDIX C: CONTACT LETTER**Department of Educational Studies**

Mailing address:
2125 Main Mall
Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z4

Tel: 604-822-5374

Fax: 604-822-4244

<http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca>

July 3, 2008

Re : Request for a brief interview

Dear Madam/Sir:

I am a second year M.A. student in the Department of Educational Studies at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada. I graduated from high school in Mie, Japan and received my undergraduate diploma in Asian Studies at the University of British Columbia. I am currently working on my M.A. thesis, titled School Choice in Japan. The purpose of this project is to better understand the ways in which the principals in large- and small-scale junior high schools have responded to the introduction of the school choice program.

Since the 1980s, education reforms based on the idea of school choice has begun in the U.S. and in the U.K., and a great number of research has been conducted in these nations in relation to the school choice program. However, in Japan, the school choice program is relatively new particularly at the compulsory education level, and few studies exist examining the effects of the programs on schools both in Japanese and in English. Therefore, I believe that it is essential to find out what is happening in the case of Japan.

Given your expertise in this area, I would like to meet with you for a discussion on this topic. The discussion will be kept strictly confidential and will only be used for the purpose of this research.

I am appending to this letter a list of interview questions.

If you agree to meet with me for the purpose of this research, please send me a short email at mhayase@gmail.com I can also be reached by phone at 059-225-4675. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours Sincerely,
Michiyo Hayase

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM**Department of Educational Studies**

Mailing address:
2125 Main Mall
Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z4

Tel: 604-822-5374
Fax: 604-822-4244
<http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca>

July 17, 2008

CONSENT FORM

Project: School Choice in Japan

Principal investigator:

Dr. Jennifer Chan, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia, 2125 Main Mall, Vancouver, BC, V6T 1Z4, Canada. Tel: 1-800-(604)731-8822, Email: Jennifer.chan@ubc.ca.

Co-investigator:

Michiyo Hayase, 2nd year M.A. student in the Department of Educational Studies, Society, Culture and Politics in Education program. Tel: 1-800-(604)715-4719, Email: mhayase@gmail.com. This research is part of her graduate degree and is also part of her thesis (public document). Thus, the interview data will be used for her thesis, and anyone who would like to read the thesis will have access. In addition, based on her thesis, she wishes to contribute some articles to academic journals.

Purpose:

The purpose of this project is to better understand the ways in which the principals in large-scale and small-scale junior high schools have responded to the introduction of the school choice program. You are being invited to take part in this project because of your expertise in this topic.

Study procedure:

You will be asked to participate in an oral interview for about a period of one hour in a mutually agreeable place for both you and the interviewee. The interview will not be recorded, but notes will be taken during the interview. Once the interview is complete, you will be asked to check my notes for accuracy in a few weeks time.

Potential risks:

There is a possibility where your name, the name of your junior high school and your municipality are identified by the readers. In order to minimize the risks, your

name, the name of your junior high school and your city/municipality will be given pseudonyms to protect your identity, and the interview will be anonymous.

Potential benefits:

If you are interested in the research results, I will send you my final thesis. If you would like a copy, please put your email/mailling address below.

Email/Mailing address (Optional):

Confidentiality:

Your identity will be kept strictly confidential, and this will be accomplished by using pseudonyms for your name, the name of your junior high school and your city/municipality. All the interview data will be kept anonymous and kept in a locked filing cabinet for a period of five years after the study. After five years, all data will be destroyed.

Contact for information about the study:

If you have any questions concerning the procedures and the study, contact Principal Investigator: Dr. Jennifer Chan, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia, 2125 Main Mall, Vancouver, BC, V6T 1Z4, Canada, Tel: 1-800-(604)731-8822 or Email: Jennifer.chan@ubc.ca.

Contact for concerns about the rights of research subjects:

If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 1-800-(604)822-8598 or email to RSIL@ors.ubc.ca.

Consent:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without jeopardy. You may also refuse to answer particular questions without penalty.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

Subject Signature _____ Date _____

Printed Name of the Subject _____

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

On the Responses to the School Choice Program

1. How have you responded to the school choice program?
2. Why did you respond in the way you did?
3. Have there been any changes in terms of how you have responses? If so, what are the factors that have led you to change your responses?

On the Opinions about School Choice

1. What do you think about school choice?
2. Have you seen any changes in how you think about school choice?
3. What do you think are the reasons for students to choose your school?
4. What do you think are the reasons for students to choose other schools?

On the Effects of the School Choice Program

1. Have you seen any changes in your school after the introduction of school choice program? If so, what are the major changes you have found?
2. Are there any changes in your jobs as a principal?