Editor's Introduction

OMOMO, Toshiyuki*
Editor-in-chief

This is the third issue of our English language journal, *Educational Studies in Japan: International Yearbook*. Unlike the previous issues, this third issue focuses on a special theme: International Perspectives and Policies on Academic Achievement. We have included five articles for this special theme. We would like to thank Professor Hyun-Jeong Park, Seoul National University, and Kenneth K. Wong, Brown University, who kindly contributed papers to this issue. The other three articles were contributed by the members of this Association.

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) in Japan has outlined its policies on academic abilities as follows: "Although the latest international assessments of academic ability show that Japan ranks high internationally, there remain issues of lower reading comprehension ability, inadequate learning motivation and study habits. Therefore MEXT is taking such steps as (1) revising its overall Course of Study at the Central Council for Education, (2) conducting the National Assessment of Academic Ability, and (3) creating an action plan for improving academic abilities." [http://www.mext.go.jp/english/mext_2007_e.pdf]. Indeed, the National Course of Study was revised this year, and the National Assessment of Academic Ability began in 2007. The Assessment is given to all children in their sixth year of elementary school and in their third year of lower secondary school. In order to improve educational standards, MEXT has addressed the importance of examining educational outcomes, and has urged the evaluations of schools.

The first article by Kanae Nishioka examines the revisions of the National Course of Study, and discusses issues surrounding academic achievement in Japan. The second article by Professor Park examines Korean perspectives on the assessment of student achievement, and the third article by Kenichiro Miyamoto discusses the issue by tracing the history of written examinations and the changes in the meaning of "standards" in the United States of America. As suggested by the MEXT

*Tohoku University
e-mail: omomo@mail.tains.tohoku.ac.jp

mention of the importance of outcomes or evaluations, the current educational reforms are influenced by governance reform which emphasizes outcome-based accountability. The fourth article by Professor Wong discusses the political context of educational finance, including outcome-based accountability, in the United States. According to the article, current reform initiatives consider student achievement as the key measure of accountability. The fifth article by Yuki Amaki examines the views of Foreign Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) on English education in Japanese public schools. The improvement of English proficiencies is one of the important issues concerning academic achievement of Japanese students.

In addition to these articles, we have also included in this issue an English translation and a review article. "Historical Aspects of the Concept of 'Compulsory Education': Rethinking the Rhetoric of Debates in Current Reform" by Manabu Sato was originally published in Japanese in the *Japanese Journal of Educational Research* (our Association's journal in Japanese) in 2005. Similar to the issue of academic achievement, reform of compulsory education is also a timely and important issue. We have further plans to include more translated articles in future volumes of this journal. The review article is of the book *Primary School in Japan: Self, Individuality and Learning in Elementary Education*, by Peter Cave. This book was developed from the doctoral dissertation that the author had submitted to Oxford University, and was reviewed by Masataka Kizuka, a member of our Association.

The special theme for the next issue of this journal is Educational Studies in Japan: Present State and its Challenges. We welcome articles on this special topic as well as on general topics of education. Review articles and current topics are also welcomed. Please see Call for Papers on page 89–90.

The publication of this journal is supported in part by a Grant-in-Aid for Publication of Scientific Research Results from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science. The Association would like to express our gratitude to the Society.