“INDUCED” VOLUNTARISM: A NEW ROLE FOR SCHOOLS?

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1. Hōshi [service] in the School Curriculum

In November 2004, the Japanese media reported that the Tokyo Metropolitan Government had decided to introduce a new course from the 2007–08 academic year as part of the core curriculum at all public high schools supervised by the government (see, for example, Asahi Shinbun 11 November 2004). The course is titled hōshi, which literally translates as “service” in English. It targets some 45,000 students in 207 high schools in the Tokyo metropolitan area. According to the interim report produced in March 2006 by the curriculum development committee of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Board of Education (TMG 2006a), the course is to be taught over at least 35 hours (1 credit unit) as a graduation requirement. During the course, it is expected that students will spend ten hours hearing from their teachers what hōshi is, and then, for the remaining 25 hours, they will “experience” (taiken suru) various kinds of volunteering opportunities beyond the conventional classroom, arranged by their schools in the area of social welfare, environmental protection, and so on. In the last phase of the course, the students are expected to have some reflective sessions on their hōshi activities. Furthermore, this policy implementation addresses a key problem faced by contemporary Japanese society: the increase of young people known as “NEET” (Not in Education, Employment or Training) and “Freeters” (temporary or part-time workers) (Honda 2004; Genda 2005; Kosugi 2006). By giving wider opportunities to know and experience the real world, policy makers and educators expect that students will think realistically about their job possibilities after graduating from school. This is the first kind of policy attempt in the country to introduce such a course requirement at school.

The interim report construes the purpose of this policy development as outlined below:
In life, it is extremely important to do something for others, not for oneself, and to feel happiness through those experiences. “Thank you.” This single phrase means we are acknowledged by other people and makes us feel we have been useful to them; this contributes greatly to developing mature adults. Through hōshi activities, we can nurture a sense of independence and spontaneity among students [...]. We believe that it is particularly important to use this opportunity for students to start participating in these activities, so that through these activities they can realize the significance of doing something for others and continue them. Above all, we believe that it is important for schools to provide students with various kinds of opportunities and settings for the hōshi activities, and then, as a result of this education, we hope that students will display this voluntarism fully in the future (TMG 2006a: 1).

The interim report goes on to say why they call the course hōshi, instead of borantia, which can be roughly translated as “volunteering” in English—a more popular word among Japanese people.

Hōshi is an activity responding to the actual needs of society. We believe that it goes beyond conventional borantia activities generated through individual spontaneous will. We locate such hōshi activities in the regular school curriculum, and then expect that, through the activities, students will come to feel that they are members of society. The new course aims for students to feel happiness through the actual activities and being useful to society (TMG 2006a: 3–4).

This curriculum is based on a pilot programme that the Tokyo Metropolitan Government had previously implemented. Since the 2004–05 school year, all Tokyo public high schools set one day in November as Volunteering Day (borantia no hi), and since 2005, the Tokyo government tentatively introduced a course titled borantia in 21 high schools (TMG 2006a: 36). However, this one-day activity was not successful, because most of the schools just spent the day on cleaning activities around the schools, according to a newspaper report (Yomiuri Shinbun 11 November 2004).

In this policy implementation—introducing hōshi as a core requirement—however, the Tokyo government seems to have become more strategic. First, by changing the course name from borantia to hōshi, they bestow the nuance that the activities are more or less to be forced on students, and are made to sound mandatory. Furthermore, they prepared a pamphlet for local people and communities in order to ask for their cooperation (TMG 2006b). In the strong linkage of schools and communities, students are placed to work as interns with local social welfare facilities and non-profit social service providers. The pamphlet