

## VUCA and the Era of 100-Year Lifespans

### ~ School Education in the DX Era – A Broad View of a Transforming Society, Schools, and Learning~

Naoya Miyata

Representative Director, Future Teachers Forum

Project Associate Professor, Yokohama City University

31 January 2025

This 12-part series aims to provide a comprehensive overview of how shifts in today's social structures are transforming school education and learning, with a focus on the theme "School Education in the DX Era – A Broad View of a Transforming Society, Schools, and Learning." The titles of all 12 installments are as follows:

1. VUCA and the Era of 100-Year Lifespans
2. VUCA, the Era of 100-Year Lifespans, and School Education
3. Competencies and Qualities Required in the Era of 100-Year Lifespans
4. The Current Course of Study
5. Understanding Inquiry-Based Learning
6. The Impact of COVID-19 on Education – Japanese Education in the Reiwa Era
7. International Trends in Educational Reform from the OECD Learning Compass 2030 and Japan's Position
8. The 4th Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education: Toward Builders of a Sustainable Society
9. Digital Transformation in School Education: From Industrial to Information-Based Models
10. The Shape of Education in the AI Era
11. Rethinking the Role of Teachers in the Future
12. The SHIFT in Education Pursued by the Future Teachers Forum

Let us now delve into the content of Part 1. Contemporary society can be characterized by the following four features:

### **1. An Advanced Information Society**

The advancement of information and communication technologies has led to an

explosive increase in the volume of information. Information now flows globally in real-time, unhindered by geographical constraints. This acceleration of information exchange speeds up societal processes and thus contributes to more rapid societal changes.

Moreover, unlike in the past when information sources were limited to mass media, individuals now act as information broadcasters through SNS and other platforms. This has given rise to new professions such as “influencers.” With the rise of generative AI, it is anticipated that information will begin to generate other information, further amplifying the volume and complexity of data in society.

## **2. A Knowledge-Based and Multicultural Society**

In addition to the explosion of information, human mobility and interaction are also becoming more active, resulting in multilayered cultural exchanges. These interactions drive the emergence of new ideas and innovations. As society becomes increasingly complex, the value of readily accessible information and even knowledge itself is decreasing. In a truly knowledge-based society, what matters more than knowledge is *wisdom*—the ability to apply knowledge creatively and effectively. This signals a societal shift toward requiring more advanced intellectual engagement and action.

## **3. The Era of 100-Year Lifespans**

According to “*LIFE SHIFT*”, it is predicted that half of those born in Japan in 2007 will live to be 107 years old. This longevity will lead to more life events and greater societal changes over an individual’s lifetime.

Consequently, life will transition from a uniform, three-stage model (school, work, retirement) to a multi-stage one involving numerous transitions between various phases and stages.

## **4. A Globalized Society**

In discussing globalization, it is said to have started with the Age of Exploration in 1492, and can be divided into three distinct phases. The first phase was the globalization of nations, spanning from 1492 to around 1800. The second phase was the globalization of corporations, lasting until around 2000. The third and current phase is the globalization of individuals, which continues today.

The current phase—globalization of individuals—has been driven largely by the rise of the advanced information society. In tandem with industrial advances and the proliferation of low-cost carriers (LCCs), physical movement has become much

more accessible, further accelerating globalization. This, in turn, has led to the emergence of issues such as multicultural coexistence in countries around the world, including Japan.

These changes are collectively referred to today as the "VUCA era."

The term VUCA is an acronym for:

- Volatility
- Uncertainty
- Complexity
- Ambiguity

This term refers to a world marked by rapid and unpredictable change, and is widely used to describe today's society.

In Japan, it is said that the so-called "Information Revolution" of the 1990s sparked the transition into the VUCA era.

The emergence of ICT and other game-changing technologies transformed our society, giving rise to the four characteristics discussed above.

This is an era in which individuals are increasingly expected to utilize "knowledge" to create "wisdom," and to act as active participants in global information exchange. From a historical perspective, we are arguably living in a time when the power of each individual has reached its highest point.

As lifespans grow longer, traditional systems—such as those based on economic growth and population increases—must be re-evaluated. Even the average lifespan of companies has become shorter than that of humans. This means that individual career paths and life designs will grow more complex and multifaceted. Without a "model path" to follow, each person must navigate life independently, adapting continuously to a changing environment. This situation is likely to increase the number of people feeling as though they are walking without a clear light.

In such times, the definition of "a good life" becomes increasingly subjective and multifaceted. No longer can one simply pursue the traditional path of a "good school" followed by a "good job." As philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard stated in *"The Postmodern Condition"* (1989), the "grand narratives" that once sustained society and culture are fading.

In this age, the concept of “independence of mind and body” advocated by Yukichi Fukuzawa in “*An Encouragement of Learning*” becomes more relevant than ever. The independence of mind can be interpreted as mental independence—namely, the establishment of one's own identity—while the independence of body refers to economic independence, meaning becoming self-reliant as a working professional.

If one of the purposes of education is to support self-actualization, then in today's rapidly evolving world, the challenges to achieving self-actualization are greater than ever. Consequently, the societal expectations placed on education—and its role—are also increasing significantly.

In the next chapter, we will turn our attention to modern school education, examine its origins and social functions, and identify key issues to consider as we envision the future of schooling.

## References

- Miyata, N. (Ed.). (2023). SCHOOL SHIFT. Meiji Tosho.
- Miyata, N. (Ed.). (2024). SCHOOL SHIFT 2. Meiji Tosho.
- Lyotard, J.-F. (1989). *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Y. Kobayashi, Trans.). Suiseisha.
- Gratton, L., & Scott, A. (2023). LIFE SHIFT (N. Miyata, Supervisor). Toyo Keizai Inc.