ABSTRACT
In Japan, since the 1970s, women’s studies, then gender studies in the 1990s, have flourished in the realm of sociology faculties and notably, the relationship between education and gender has been extensively examined. This article aims to demonstrate how different actors within the compulsory education system are struggling to control these sensitive topics. If we were to consider school as a hierarchical organizational structure, the MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology) would be the top of the pyramid, followed by the local board of education, the school directors and principals, the various teachers, the PTA (Parent-Teacher Association), the pupils, and lastly other external actors. The Ministry of Education openly encourages, supports and promotes gender equality. However, concrete results are still missing. The Ministry, the school educators and administrators seem to contradict one another, with many double standards. Thus a gap appears between a call for gender-equal education and the concrete implementation of gender equality education measures in schools. To which extent each actor of the school system is acting for gender equality? Which factors are relevant for an implementation of gender-equal education? To answer these questions, data based on an ethnographic research conducted in some primary schools in 2013-2014 will be used to understand what is at stake at the local level. The particular case of Machida City will be analyzed. This article will pinpoint how a single classroom is the complex product of double standards which have conflicting influence between the Ministry, educators and schools administrators, and other actors related to primary schools.

KEYWORDS: education, gender equality, policy, school system
some measures against this unequal participation in the school system between girls and boys.

From the late 1980s, feminist scholars and Japanese educational scientists brought up gender discourse on education more actively (Kreitz-Sandberg 2007). Since then, the focus has slightly changed from “gender equity in education” to “gender equal education” (Kimura Ryōko 2009: 316). The mid-1990s measures for gender-equal education were not isolated reforms. They were a part of the reforms born in this decade, when gender was recognized as an analytical concept, not only by scholars, but also by the Japanese institutions (Osawa, 2011: 62). “Gender equality” was then incorporated into the national agenda (Kimura 2005: 20-22). The creation of the Council for Gender Equality (Danjō kyōdo Sankakushingikai) by a government ordinance in 1994 and the enactment in 1999 of the Basic Law for a Gender-Equal Society stands for a firm result of this trend (Osawa, 2010). From 1995, some teachers and feminist movements called for a “gender-free education”, meaning an education free of gender stereotypes (Ueno 2006: 244-254). However, at the beginning of the 2000s, political bashing against the so-called “gender-free education ideas” started. Thus, Japanese scholars analyzed why gender-equal education fuelled such an unprecedented media lynch, contrary to other gender equality reforms (Kimura 2005, Ueno 2006). This article considers two main hypotheses of this research: double standards have conflicting influence upon the Ministry, educators and schools administrators, and it shapes a gap between a National Education system that encourages gender equality, and the actual implementation of concrete measures in schools.

Considering this background, this article aims to show how the different actors of the compulsory education have been struggling since the end of the 2000s to present to control these sensitive topics. To answer partly this question, in this article we will not discuss in detail the different layers of the complex links between the Ministry of Education and State machinery for gender equality, but we will focus on the local level dedicated to the implementation of gender equality measures in education, by presenting empirical micro-level data, within the frame of a 5-month fieldwork in Japanese elementary schools in the years 2013-2014. Doing this, I will show how individual actors are evolving in the given structures, but also how they can make the structures change. State and prefectural level concerns only national public school system and compulsory education¹

¹ The distinction between compulsory education and higher education has many structural and political consequences.
and for the fieldwork based in Machida City, only the primary schools would be considered here. This analysis can contribute to the research on gender policy in order to understand which factors are relevant in the implementation of gender-equal, non-sexist education.

1. Towards Gender Equality Policy at School: from 1970s to 2010s

1970 and 1980s: the Rise of Awareness of Sexism in Education

During the 1970s and 1980s, the national agenda in Japan for men-women equality topics was defined both by international pressures and feminist ideas of national NGOS or women’s groups. Especially, the United Nations International Decade for Women (1975-85) marked the growth in reforms geared towards redressing gender inequality. For instance, in 1979, the UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). After signing the convention in 1980, Japan adjusted national laws and ratified the CEDAW in 1985. For the ratification, Japan made several main adjustments, such as the revision of the Nationality law (Fujimura Fanselow, Kameda: 356-357), the Equal Employment Opportunity Law in 1986 (revised in 1997), the Childcare Leave Law in 1992, the revision of Education and Science Ministry's teaching guidelines, in which home economics was to be learned by both boys and girls (1993 and 1994). The Japanese government promoted at that time national, municipal and local women’s centers (Dales, 2009). The influence of CEDAW speeded up national and international feminist claims. For instance, the Beijing International Women Conference, organized in 1995 by the United Nations, emphasized the role of political environment for gender equality reform (Yasuo 2006). Japanese feminist were actively involved in the Conference, and they, with female leaders in party politics, called for a better compliance with international norms in the Japanese agenda. But the recognition of gender equality went further from the mid-1990s with the implementation of typical gender equality laws: the revision of the Eugenic Protection Act in 1996, then renamed “Maternity Protection Act” (MPA), the law prohibiting sexual harassment in 1997, the authorization of pill contraception in 1999. Since the mid-1990s, there has been a clear increase in the number of gender issues in the public debate, because the head of the government and the upper level of political decision-makers decided to

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2 Private schools do not necessarily follow national guidelines defined by the MEXT.
3 The Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office provides chronologically arranged data about these achievements on http://www.gender.go.jp/about_danjo/law/kihon/index.html (last Access February 2015).
take them into account. Conservative politicians realized at that time that women issues and gender equality are precious tools to solve problems e.g. in the labor market, and the steadily declining birth rate (Osawa 2000). This idea of women’s empowerment has developed strongly since the time when in the mid-1990s the Japanese government became actively involved in the process of policy implementation for gender equality (Osawa et al. 2000).

Within this movement, Japan implemented gender equality policies for education. Teaching staff in the school took action, convincing the local board for education to support them. However, the Japanese Ministry of Education did not put much stress on such questions and did not publish any specific guidelines on this subject (Kreitz-Sandberg 2007). Japan’s ratification of the CEDAW means the government should implement the convention, for instance, Article 10, which called for the elimination of any stereotyped concept of the roles of men and women at all levels in all forms of education. This international pressure was added to internal pressure coming from activists of women’s groups, and groups including teacher activists that campaigned for one curriculum for both girls and boys. Those campaigns forced the Ministry of Education to realize a uniform curriculum for boys and girls in home economics (1993 and 1994, in junior and high schools) or in physical education (Kameda 1995: 112).

Another example of gender segregation with a gendered hierarchy is the use of separate hiragana name lists for boys and girls, which give the names of the boys first, followed by the girls’ ones (Kreitz-Sandberg 2007). Boys are called first, even for the various school ceremonies. In the 1980s, the vast majority of schools used such lists. Some initiatives of teachers, parents and women’s centers but also city councils managed to replace such lists with mixed alphabetical-order lists (Kreitz-Sandberg 2007). Textbooks, authorized only by the imprimatur of MEXT, have also been criticised. Gender bias in textbooks was analyzed as early as the mid-1970s by women’s groups or later by teachers themselves (Kameda 1995:112-113). Teachers and researchers also cooperated in research into the textbooks, practices and activities in the classroom, on student councils and in clubs (Mackie 2003:191). The Japanese Federation of Bar Associations published in 1989 a book *What we think of sex equality described as such in textbooks*. They pinpointed how sexism was ingrained in textbook images, and the Federation status gave them some audience. Thus, teachers and other liberal actors have long expressed their opinions, shaming sex segregation and sexism. In 1992, the local board of education of Yokohama City published a leaflet *Why boys and girls apart? Material for*
a gender-equal education for primary school third and fourth grade. It was distributed to the teachers working in Yokohama. In 1995, the Tokyo Women’s Foundation published, a similar leaflet for teachers, entitled Is your class gender free? A guide for young teachers. In 1997, the Tokyo Women’s Foundation published 3 other leaflets called Gender Check for teachers, parents and children. All these examples show that apart from teachers, also other local actors played a role in promoting gender equality measures.

A New National Machinery Dedicated to Gender Equality from the Mid-1990s
The State began to play an active role in the implementation of gender policy from the 1990s: in July 1994 the Headquarters for the Promotion of Gender Equality, headed by the Prime Minister, was set up within the Cabinet. At the same time, the Office for Gender Equality and the Council for the Joint Participation for Men and Women (danjokyōdōsankakukatōgi) were also established in the Prime Minister’s office. All members of the Headquarters for the Promotion of Gender Equality were Diet members (Dales 2009: 28). The Council for the Joint Participation for Men and Women, founded in 1994, was the emanation of the Cabinet. Its creation is a big step forwards women’s empowerment, because the Japanese government officially included gender equality in the national agenda (Dales 2009: 27-30). A big step was made in 1996, under the initiative of the Japanese government, when the Council submitted to Prime Minister Hashimoto’s Cabinet on 30 July a public policy paper, Vision of Gender Equality: Creating New Values for the 21st Century. It argued that only improving the status of women is not enough to ensure equality and that in order to create a gender-equal society, Japan should consider men and women as individuals, who would not be constrained by socially and culturally formed sex role stereotypes. The Council was thus defining gender as a key concept, and called for a real gender equality, with both men’s and women’s roles redefined (Osawa et al. 2000). This public policy paper was taken into consideration by the government (Yasuo 2006) and became the blueprint for a new law called the Basic Law for a Gender-equal Society (danjokyōdo sankakushakai kihonhō), (hereafter the Basic Law), enacted in June 1999 and having come into force in December 1999.

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4 In Japanese Tōkyō josei dantai, this association is now called the Tokyo Women’s Plaza, see https://www.tokyo-womens-plaza.metro.tokyo.jp/ (last access on January 2015).
5 The Office for Gender Equality, its secretariat and the Council for Gender Equality, an advisory organ to the Prime Minister, were formally set up in June 1994 by Cabinet orders.
In December 2000, the Council defined the Basic Plan for Gender Equality (danjokyōdo sankaku kihon keikaku) (Osawa 2011, Kimura 2009). The enforcement of the Basic Law and the Basic Plan for Gender Equality (hereafter the Basic Plan) can be considered as the consequence of a structural change whereby the national institutions for the promotion of gender equality in Japan has been significantly strengthened. In 2001 the Council shifted to the Cabinet Office and then named the Council for Gender Equality. So nowadays four main types of gender equality policies exist: they are directly related to the Prime Minister’s office and allow political, civil and academic people to work for the Prime Minister’s office (Gender Equality Council website). The Headquarters for the promotion of Gender Equality (Prime Minister and ministers) promote the smooth and effective implementation of measures, the Council for Gender Equality (Chief Cabinet secretary, 12 cabinet ministers, 12 scholars) study, deliberate, monitor and survey the policies, the Liaison Conference for the Promotion of Gender Equality (women’s groups, media, economic organizations, local government, scholars) exchange information and promote national measures, while the Gender Equality Bureau within the Cabinet Office (bureaucrats) assume the overall coordination and the implementation of policies by local government (prefecture and city)6.

The Basic Law provides guidelines for gender equality policy-making in all fields of society (Osawa 2011: 62-63). These guidelines have limited legal status and breaching them does not entail any penalty (Dales 2009). In order to realize the Basic Law guidelines, the Basic Plan for Gender Equality was first issued in 2000. Whereas the Basic Law is vague, the Basic Plan indicates practical measures for several arenas, including education. The Basic Plan is renewed every five years: the first version in 2000, the second in 2005, the third in 2010, and the fourth one in 2015. There is a dedicated part for education in the The Basic Plan that indicates the following responsible bodies: the Ministry of Education, the General Affairs Ministry (sōmushō) but also the “whole school system, also school administration, Parents-Teachers Association (PTA) and also surrounding local organizations”. (Basic Plan, various versions). That means that all levels of the MEXT administration (state, prefectural, local) for policy-making are concerned. The State policies are designed to be implemented at both regional and local level. Consequently, considering gender equality

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6 A diagram standing for the national machinery for the promotion of gender equality is available on the Council website: http://www.gender.go.jp/english_contents/about_danjo/prom/national_machinery.html (last access February 2015).
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at school consists in examining the regional and local scale of the school system’s meanderings (Kimura, 2005). Gender equality measures for school also consist of questioning the efficiency of the recent coordination between the Council machinery and the MEXT (Kawana Sanae, 2010).

2. Case Study at the City Level: Machida City Primary School

A City Strongly Committed to Gender Equality

In order to understand how municipal, local and state actors and institutions are constantly adjusting because of their different orientations, I would here highlight the particular situation of one City Hall: that of the city of Machida, located south-west of the Prefecture of Tokyo. I present the Machida case because I spent the most time there doing my fieldwork in a primary school\(^7\), during January and February 2014, so my observation data are more complete. The length of the observation allowed me to meet teachers of others schools in Machida, but also to attend Machida City’s gender equality festival, and go to the monthly meeting of one teachers’ research group on gender and education between the autumn of 2013 and the spring of 2014. In that way, I managed to get not only information relative to the City but also anthropological data relative to one school’s commitment towards gender equality. Machida City should be considered as one particular case for two reasons: first, implementation of gender equality policy definitely depends on the prefecture (Holdgrün 2013) and second, the local board of education plays an active role, as few other local boards of education scattered over the national territory do (Kreitz-Sandberg 2007: 148). The case study of Machida City is not representative at all of Japan gender equal policy implementation. Machida City actually committed itself to gender equality before the enactment of the \textit{Basic Law} and \textit{Basic Plan}\(^8\).

The commitment of Machida City leads to concrete results in the field of education. The City supported female employees in their administrative and leading functions (such as participation in the Local Board of Education). As the ratio of full-time working women/men would then tend to become 50/50 (and not 30/70), discrimination of women at work would decrease and these structures would be likely to become more sensitive to

\(^7\) The real school’s name would not be revealed to protect the anonymity of the school, its teachers and pupils.

\(^8\) It can be traced to the \textit{Machida Third Plan for Gender Equality Implementation Development} (Daisanji machidashi danjobyōdō suishin keika)? conferences organized during the Gender Equality 14th Festival in Machida Gender Equality Center, on 2014 February 1\(^{st}\) and 2\(^{nd}\).
gender equality issues. Another activity is the organization of the yearly Festival of Gender Equality. Organized in the City Association Forum Hall, this event, open to everyone, presents some local actors involved in gender equality, and shows the city politics and measures for gender equality. Concerning gender-equal education, these measures lead to the generalization of alphabetic order enrollment list at school in Machida, which took place very early in comparison with other schools. Machida schools also managed during 1990s and 2000s to change the binary blue (boys) and pink (girls) code (for suits, stationery, school colors, and various other objects belonging to the pupils) to a more relaxed color-gendered code. The best way to emphasize Machida City’s distinctive role is to compare it with other cities during the 2000s, when the bashing against gender sensitive education and sex education became known as the so-called gender-free bashing (jendā furī basshingu) or more generally, gender backlash (jendā bakkurasshu). Japanese scholars clearly analyzed the political entanglement of school system education (Kimura 2005, Wakakuwa 2006, Ueno 2006). They showed that gender sensitive issues contributed to political or ideological conflicts among the prefecture and city school actors, because the heads of schools were working in cooperation with local boards of education, themselves linked with the city hall, the prefecture, and the State. In particular, the board of education is not supposed to have a political color or any specific orientation regarding gender issues. Still it can be the case when its principal bureau for education (kyōiku chō) is ruled by a politician and administrator clearly showing reluctance for gender equality or women’s empowerment. Many teachers and scholars were aware that these political factors, together with the socioeconomic situation, had direct impact on school reforms and programs. The neoliberal orientation and composition of Koizumi and Abe government (2000-2007) were decisive factors during the revision of the Fundamental Law of Education (Kyōiku kihon hō) enacted in 2006. The strengthening of old and new conservative and nationalist forces within the LDP (and also in the DPJ) is one explanation of the gender-free bashing. Scholars show that this reactionary mixture is stressing the old gendered family model: a male warrior and a dedicated mother (Sekiguchi 2004: 69-70). Tokyo, with a rather extreme-right wing governor Ishihara Shintatō (1999-2012), was in the heart of the bashing for these political considerations. However, teachers strongly reacted against the suppression of article 5 (enforcing boys’ and girls’ equality) or against “patriotic” teaching⁹. On the contrary, Machida City administration and schools were

⁹ See for example the debates around the term “patriotism” (aikokushin). After the revision of the
aware of the feminist scholars’ call for a gender-free education (jendā furī kyōiku). They were not reluctant to get information about the women’s associations leaflets, pedagogical brochures and scholarly books on gender-free education, which flourished at that time (Kimura 2005: 75-94). Thus, Machida City was hardly playing a role in spreading gender-free education bashing information. The progressive initiatives of the local administration of Machida help the entire school community to promote gender-equal education. However, it should be remembered that this is not the case of all prefectures and cities.

Micro-Level Analysis: What’s Happening in a Classroom?
As fieldwork analysis turns out to be necessary for an understanding of the micro-level situation, I present here the results of a 2-month fieldwork in Machida. The fieldwork I lead in Machida is part of the work I conducted during a research year in Japan, when I spent altogether 5 months in four Japanese primary schools. The participant observation was conducted between October 2013 and June 2014, I joined every class and recess 4 days a week (apart from Tuesday). The choice of the schools is random: I was introduced thanks to different Japanese friends and teachers/professors. Still, I had more difficulty in some places to get the authorization of the local board of education. In one case, in a school located in a ward of Tokyo, the director agreed but the local board of education did not, which I suppose was not accidental. Even if the head of school was clearly hesitating personally, the final decision was made by the local board of education. As gender-free education and sex education bashing was the most aggressive in Tokyo, the local board of education was probably reluctant to host me when looking at my six pages project presentation, in which I clearly mentioned the terms “gender” (jendā) and “gender socialisation” (jendā no keisei katei). If my hypothesis is true, these two elements show how local actors can influence and control school policies. This random sample allowed me to see some differences between schools. Apart from the interviews and questionnaires I did with the

10 Fundamental Law, several junior high schools and high school teachers who did not want to sing the national anthem or display the national flag were dismissed.
10 I spent one month with the first-grade class of Mrs. Sato (28 pupils), in H. school in Tokyo south suburban area, Yokohama, one month with the fifth-grade class of Mr. Kobayashi (36 pupils), in S. school in a middle size town of Saitama prefecture, one month with the second-grade class of Mrs. Kono (31 pupils), and another month in the fourth-grade class of Mr. Maruyama (32 pupils), in T. school, in Machida, and one month in K. school with sixth and third grade of Mr. Sakata (21 pupils) and Mr. Sakamoto (35 pupils), in a middle sized town of Yamagata prefecture.
children, I also conducted interviews with Mrs Sato, Mr Kobayashi, and Mrs Kono, and some informal interviews with Mr Sakata and Mr Sakamoto, the teachers who welcomed me in their class. In this article, I am relying on a qualitative approach by using fieldwork negotiation data, data from participant observation and from interviews with the teachers. During my fieldwork in various primary schools in different municipalities and prefectures, I observed severe differences regarding gender sensitive issues. Indeed, teacher behavior is quite important, even after considering the context of the city and the school. The teachers’ awareness of gender issues makes a great difference when they are teaching (Naoi 2009: 89-91). To understand this, we have to look both at the professional training and at the personal interests of each teacher (Kimura Ikue 2014: 125-164). Since the 1990s, courses on gender equality have been taught to trainee teachers (Kimura Ikue 2009b: 227-246), but pedagogical materials, guidelines and hours are different, depending both on the university and also on the teacher in charge of the training (Kimura Ikue 2010). Once recruited in a school, teachers are working in a designated area shaped by the local board of education. It means they are working within a particular local frame which has political issues I want here to describe. First, they can obtain some pedagogical resources/ supervision from directors/board of education/PTAS, as well as training, such as regularly held meetings (Kimura Ikue 2009a: 425-435): this training can incite interest and lead to better comprehension of gender issues (Kimura Ikue 2010). It is also important to treat teachers as individuals who can have political views, and be engaged in a feminist network: so they can join an NPO or cooperate with it, as well as join associations and research groups working for gender equality in a school. Of course, this personal background changes in the life of a teacher. So for instance, during my fieldwork, I realized how deep was the gap between teachers aware of sex discrimination and those who were not, strongly believing that school functions as a gender-equal environment. Ironically, the director of H school suggested that I might be in Mrs Satō class, because she was aware of “the gender” (jendā no koto), or in a more derogatory way, she was “noisy about gender” (jendā niitsuie urusai). Teachers and school board teachers spend a long time doing school work, so they well know who is interested in sport, specialized education, foreign languages, or gender equality… Moreover, once

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11 I also spent time for the morning formal meetings of the school, and also some informal meetings.

12 The teacher who introduced me spoke in those terms during my first interview with the director, in February 2013.
engaged in some educational activity, teachers can be actively involved in providing their pupils a non-sexist education. They get involved in those activities at some point of their personal and professional life. Mrs Satō and Mrs Kono, working and living in two different prefectures, did tell me that it was almost by chance that they got interested in gender issues (interviews with Mrs Satō and Mrs Kono \(^ {13} \)). For instance, Mr Kobayashi became aware of the female/male name-ending particle (kun for boys/chan for girls) when being told to use “kun” for male pupils in a vocational school (interview with Mr Kobayashi \(^ {14} \)). Thus, those teachers became aware of the sexist education during their training for specialized education. They can also, through continuing education, learn more about gender equality (by encountering some teachers involved in that topic or working in a sex education research group, by learning through their union, or by coming across a specific issue with some pupils. The tiny window of opportunity that Japanese teachers get can be highly relevant. So the decisive argument for non-sexist education will be the teachers themselves. Consequently, there is no absolutely certain way to know if a school, or a particular teacher, is involved in non-sexist education. The Basic Plan and one single classroom with one teacher in front of thirty people constitute the first and the last link of this giant chain that is gender equal education.

**Conclusion**

To conclude, there is no way to evaluate gender equality policy only by looking at national and regional structures such as MEXT, Gender Equality Council and prefecture or local governance. These institutions play a dual role: they define the rules and the actors’ constellation, but they also shape the normative orientations of those actors. However, the great number and heterogeneity of actors involve individual actions of their part, difficulty to cooperate, and sometimes an adjustment to the structures that are changed. In that frame, MEXT orientations and the Basic Plan do not consist of a whole set of definite measures uniformly applied in each school. Looking at the same time at the very structure and at the various actors is one way to grasp the complexity of gender equal education policy implementation. Indirect, horizontal and vertical hierarchical entanglement, combined with political and economic factors, shape a complex multi-level decision-making process. Inside those structures the role of the actors, who can be international, national, governmental, local and non-governmental actors,

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\(^ {13} \) Interviews conducted in October 2013 and January 2014 with Mrs Satō and Mrs Kono.

\(^ {14} \) Interview conducted in December 2013 with Mr Kobayashi.
is also decisive. Within a prefecture, the prefecture’s governor and administration would give a specific gendered color orientations as they will support strongly or not local and national gender equity policies. As we saw in the case of Machida City, the commitment of a mayor and the city administration to gender equality could also allow for variation in the degree of implementation of the legislation. Individual actors, in particular teachers and school boards, are also influencing a lot the structure itself. Each teacher still has some freedom in her/his own classroom to raise pupils’ awareness of gender sensitive issues. Examining further all these relations seems the key to understanding why the Japanese school system as a whole is not acting for gender-equal education. This also explains why, among other national policies for equal participation by women and men, gender-equal education caused so much resistance. Consequently, this delicate situation, in which measures towards gender equality are difficult to implement at the (primary) school level, still obtains.

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