

Ouachita Baptist University

Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita

Honors Theses

Carl Goodson Honors Program

1994

Japanese and American Education: A Comparative Study

Naomi R. Mercer

Ouachita Baptist University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/honors_theses



Part of the [Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons](#), and the [International and Comparative Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Mercer, Naomi R., "Japanese and American Education: A Comparative Study" (1994). *Honors Theses*. 126.
https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/honors_theses/126

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Carl Goodson Honors Program at Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita. For more information, please contact mortensona@obu.edu.

SENIOR THESIS APPROVAL SHEET

This Honor's thesis entitled

"Japanese and American Education:
A Comparative Study"

written by

Naomi Mercer

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for completion of the

Carl Goodson Honors Program

meets the criteria for acceptance

and has been approved by the undersigned readers

Thesis Director

Second Reader

Third Reader

Director of the Carl Goodson Honors Program

April 15, 1994

Japanese and American Education: A Comparative Study

by

Naomi R. Mercer

Dr. Doug Sonheim, Director

Dr. Akira Miyahara, Co-Director

Mrs. Jeanna Westmoreland, First Reader

Dr. Jeff Pounders, Second Reader

Carl Goodson Honors Program

April 15, 1994

SPEC COL
T 1994
M554j

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Japanese Education	
Overall View	2
Early Education	7
<i>Gambaru</i>	11
Exam Hell and the <i>Juku</i>	13
Violence and Discipline	18
Minorities	23
Women's Education	25
Universities	27
American Education	
Overall View	30
Teachers	35
Middle Class Ethos	38
Universities	41
Minorities	44
Violence and Discipline	46
Closing Remarks	49

Introduction

While living in Japan as an exchange student, many different aspects of Japanese culture, especially the Japanese education system, fascinated me. Their system demanded so much from children and determined the paths their lives would take based upon two or three long and complicated tests. My college friends had obviously survived the rigors of the schools system and, as I eventually realized, succeeded. All of the publicity that Japanese education received in the United States as a model system made me curious to know whether the stories in magazines and on the 6 o'clock news held any truth or if the American public saw only the good side of Japanese education.

I unwittingly began research on this project when I started asking questions of my teachers and friends in Japan and comparing their answers about Japanese education with my own experiences in the U.S. public school system and at Seinan University. This paper resulted from those questions, my own experiences, and my search at Seinan and Ouachita for the answers. My own education consists of attendance in a small rural school district with a white majority and Hispanic and Indian minorities. I received a lot of personal attention during my school career and I floated through high school rather smoothly. I did not learn to study until I started college and the work became more demanding. My education was the opposite of my Japanese friends. They had studied continuously in junior high and high school and in college they completely abandoned their former study habits. My classes at Seinan presented few challenges and opportunities other than writing letters to my friends in the United States. At the outset, I didn't think that two more different education systems could exist.

This thesis explores the general systems and methods of American and Japanese education while focusing on specific areas that plague or build up education in two extremely different cultures in two countries that have become inextricably economically dependent upon each other. Both nations hold up the other's school system as examples despite the problems inherent in both "models." Neither system has achieved perfection, but Japan and the United States can help each other to improve upon their existing education systems.

Japanese Education

Overall View

Schooling in Japan theoretically begins with first grade when a child turns six years old. Since the schools expect children to already know some of the basics—adding 2+2 and writing one of the Japanese phonetic syllabries—a child must begin learning earlier if his parents expect him to keep up. School for two thirds of Japanese children begins from as early as age three and as late as five in combination preschool/kindergarten called *yochien* (Lewis, 82). Though both private and a few public *yochien* exist, all of them cost money. From the outset of having children, parents become financially committed to their children's education.

Japanese compulsory education begins in elementary school and ends with junior high school. Non-compulsory higher education consists of high school and university. The government (from municipal to national) runs the majority of elementary and junior high schools which do not have fees. Private schools abound and offer an alternative for those families who prefer it. Many private universities administer a system that begins with *yochien*. Once a child has entered such a school system, as long as the child maintains satisfactory performance throughout their schooling, the system guarantees entrance into the next level of schooling without the pressure of taking entrance exams. For many five year olds, though they do not realize it, their *yochien* or elementary school can provide a stress-free school life—if the child shows the potential to get into an exclusive *yochien*.

Most families set their children on the public-school-system track beginning with six years of elementary school education. The classes consist of up to fifty children divided into small groups of four or five. The teachers usually teach one class of children for two years. Japanese educators believe this creates a more stable environment for the children. The teachers begin discipline early and work to help the children establish good habits in the first few months of school such as organized roll call in the morning to start the day smoothly (Finkelstein, 104).

In the spirit of egalitarian education to cultivate stability and a group identity, teachers unconditionally pass every child each year, because they feel that flunking a child would result in the devastating ostracism of the child from the group. Though the Japanese education system can culturally justify unconditionally passing each child, the fairness of this policy is doubtful. A child may not flunk a grade in school, but failing tests for high school and college may later reveal that a

student did not completely grasp the concepts taught in class. In elementary and junior high schools, teachers do not rank students, but high school and college teachers rigidly grade students according to ability.

Junior high school lasts for three years. At the end of those three years, Japanese children face the first in a series of tests for as long as they wish to continue their education. In addition to the regular school curriculum, most third-year junior high school students study for the high school entrance exams either on their own with tutors or by going to a private cram school called a *juku*. For high school entrance exams, the competition remains tough but most junior high school students gain entrance into at least one high school. A small percentage of kids do not pass the tests and have the option of ending their education at the compulsory level or studying for another year and trying again.

High school also lasts for three years, and teachers largely devote the third year to preparing their students to take college entrance examinations. Altogether, 94 percent of Japanese teenagers go to high school and 90 percent of them graduate, while about 80 percent of U.S. youth graduate from high school (Lynn, 48). In a sudden drop in educational dedication, 45 percent of Japanese students take college entrance examinations and only 36 percent (24 percent straight from high school) of Japanese people attend college. Furthermore, 12 percent of the student population pass the entrance exams for college on their second or even third try after spending an extra year or two of study after graduating from high school (Finkelstein, 179).

Once a Japanese student has entered college, a college degree primarily assures his future (*his* is assured, *hers* is a little more nebulous). Only company exams remain, and the Japanese student assumes her role for the rest of her life. While Japanese high schools' diplomas have been compared to Western universities' bachelor's degrees, a degree from a Japanese university does not stand for any real academic achievement other than passing the college entrance exam.

The main goal of Japanese education lies in providing the most fair, most equal education for everyone. The centralized curriculum reinforces this philosophy despite the decentralized administration of schools. The centralized authority of the Ministry of Education houses the compulsory grade levels and high schools and dictates the curriculum, the text books that a school can employ, and school activities. Japanese schools, in addition to the rigid curriculum, maintain rich extracurricular opportunities for the students. Most students participate in a culture club, sports club or

student government. Most students enjoy their school years because of these activities while developing their own senses of responsibility and dedication.

The Japanese educational system incorporates a unique duality between public and private education. The private sector constitutes 30 percent of the high schools, compared with 13 percent in the United States (Lynn, 30). In large cities the private sector offers 45-60 percent of the educational options. Of 996 universities (460 four-year and 536 two-year schools), private schools have an 80 percent share compared to a 20 percent public share (43).

Traditionally, the government runs the top schools. Since reforms in the 1960s that brought about a surge in private school competitive quality, public high schools do not always achieve the highest honors. However, the very top universities in Japan consist of the national universities originally established as imperial high schools. The fierce competition to get into public schools remains steady because the quality of public schools, for the most part, continues to be high. The private schools keep quality high through fears that a drop in quality will cause parents to withdraw their children and financial support from the school. If schools in the private sector suddenly surge ahead in quality, the public schools fear loss of student population and strengthen their curricula (Lynn, 31).

Public and private high schools and universities charge fees, but the fees for attending a public school amount to one third the fees of private schools. Public schools account for only 25 percent of the students (Finkelstein, 163). Though private schools cost more, and are therefore a little less desirable than public schools, the prices remain reasonable due to government subsidies of private schools. Government subsidies usually pay a large percentage of the teachers' salaries.

Parents willingly pay for high school in addition to two- and four-year university tuition, and they support their children while they attend school. The students often take part-time jobs to earn a little extra pocket money, but could not possibly earn enough to support themselves in the Japanese economy and attend school full-time. Their parents usually provide for their living and transportation expenses in addition to the students' school costs.

Another aspect of the private sector is the *juku* and *yobiko*. *Yobiko* schools provide services to *ronin*,¹ the students who did not pass the entrance exams for college and who want to try again. For the past thirty years, *ronin* constitute 30-40 percent of university freshmen classes. The elite national universities have higher percentages of *ronin* (Finkelstein, 156). *Juku* refers to the schools students attend outside of regular class either for extra help to keep up with the rigorous curriculum or for extra challenges for the higher-education-bound students studying for entrance exams. *Juku* and *yobiko* earn \$5 billion every year and the business keeps expanding into more specialized kinds of *juku*. *Yobiko* and *juku* cost \$2-3,000 per year and specialized *yobiko* and *juku* costs between \$9,000 and \$26,500 every year (Tsukada, 285). In the last decade, these special schools have increased their enrollment by 50 percent. While *juku* and *yobiko* used to be for high school students and high school graduates, 16 percent of elementary and 45 percent of junior high school students go to *juku*, either to get ahead or to simply keep up with a fast-paced "egalitarian" education (Finkelstein, 63).

Compared to Western nations, Japan's government spends much less on education. Public spending on education accounts for 61.7 percent, and private spending consists of 38.3 percent. The public expenditures can be broken into 47.3 percent from the national government, 28.1 percent from prefectural funds, and the municipal governments provide the remaining 24.6 percent (Kida, 10). The private sector allocates 10 percent of Japan's Gross National Product for education, equaling \$120 billion every year (Chung, 417).

Besides dedicated studying for entrance exams, educators cite the Japanese school year as one reason for the academic success of Japanese school children. The Japanese school year lasts 240 days a year as compared to 180 days in the United States. The average amount of instruction in the U.S. elementary school day lasts for five hours of classes and the Japanese elementary school day for 4.6 hours. Because of the discipline cultivated by first grade teachers in the first few months of school, studies report that throughout schooling, Japanese students spend 66 percent of class time listening to or carrying out teacher instructions while American children use 46 percent of class time in this manner. American children spend the rest of class time on free time or in apparent disorderliness (Lynn, 114, 96).

¹ *Ronin* refers to the samurai in Japanese history who did not have a master or estate to which they pledged their loyalty. *Ronin* now also refers to students without schools.

The number of hours spent in school in Japan rises to seven or eight hours a day at the high school level, not counting time spent on school-sponsored extracurricular activities.

The Japanese school year begins in April. After the first month of a new semester, schools close for a national holiday during the first week of May. The term finishes toward the end of July, and students have about a month and a half holiday before the new term begins in September. In October, the schools take another week-long break. Winter vacation usually lasts from the week before New Year's Day to the week after. The school year ends in March with two or three weeks' break before starting again in April. Rather than the three month long summer vacation of American students, Japanese students have shorter breaks and less time to forget what they have learned. Also, Japanese teachers assign homework during the breaks, and school clubs continue to function (Cummings, *Education*, 114).

Students attend classes all day Monday through Friday and half a day on Saturdays. In recent years, public schools close every second Saturday of the month. Instead of reduced time in school, public school students attend classes two hours longer on the Thursdays and Fridays before the Saturday holidays. Whenever schools cancel classes for teachers' conferences, the students go to school on Sundays to make up the time because of the demands of the curriculum. Japan's school year creates the problem of students hardly having any time off at all because the breaks, which are well-spaced, become cluttered with extracurricular activities and study sessions. Schools should allow students to spend time with their families and friends rather than going to school every day during their "vacation." Additionally, the half-day of classes on Saturday serves no purpose other than detracting from the small amount of time off that Japanese students actually receive. Attending a sixth day of classes also creates extra transportation expenses and exhausts the students. Saturday classes serve no purpose other than advancing the demanding curriculum.

From the relatively low numbers of students entering higher education in Japan in the 1960s, Japanese education has greatly improved its availability. In the 1960s, 57 percent of the population went to high school and 10 percent entered college. In the 1980s, 94 percent went to high school and approximately 37 percent went to college (Finkelstein, 31). Despite the rise in numbers of students seeking higher education, Japanese education has not undergone many significant reforms since World

War II. Japanese education attempts to provide an egalitarian education to all children, regardless of their inherited abilities.

On international tests Western and Japanese children begin at roughly the same ability level at age six. Japanese children slowly and steadily pull ahead until they have attained an academic level three years ahead of American and European students by age twelve (Lynn, 17). Because Japanese high school students consistently score higher on international tests, especially in math and science, Western nations have begun examining Japanese education to find possible solutions for the declining quality of Western education. Other nations may not find a solution, given the problems in Japanese education: authoritarian corporal punishment, juvenile delinquency, examination pressures, lack of flexibility, and a general feeling that Japan's youth lack creativity and waste their childhoods studying. According to the United Nations' Human Development Index, both the United States and Japan achieved the number one ranking with 99 percent literacy, though experts claim that American literacy has declined. Americans ranked number one with an average of 12.3 years of schooling, and Japanese came in twelfth with 10.7 years of schooling per person (Newsweek, 22). Still, a Japanese education ranks as one of the most difficult and one of the best in the world—at least through high school. The Japanese educational system offers valuable lessons for other countries that wish to improve their own educational systems.

Early Education

In most Japanese families, parents greatly spoil their small children. Most Japanese children's first experience away from constant contact with their mothers occurs when they go to *yochien* (preschool). At this stage in a child's development, *yochien* presents an environment where children must play and learn and interact with a relatively large group. Unlike their American counterparts, *yochien* teachers do not act as mothers. The teachers do not always have obvious control of their classrooms and would rather remain a benevolent figure on the sidelines than an authority figure in the middle of interactions between children.

Yochien, besides starting the machinery of at least a decade in school, acts as a transition between constant contact with a child's mother and the forty to fifty children classes in the first grade of compulsory education. While American preschools prefer small student-teacher ratios, ideally

eight students per teacher and usually eighteen students per teacher, *yochien* classes boast between thirty and forty students for one teacher (Finkelstein, 109). These odds present a cheaper alternative, but the real motive behind high student/teacher ratios, at least at the preschool level, allows the children to have many relationships and interactions with other children rather than forming close attachments to the teacher. The renowned discipline of Japanese schools begins with easing children through the chaos of *yochien* toward the more controlled region of first grade.

Yochien teachers, for the most part, delegate the authority for maintaining discipline to the children themselves because, in this way, the teachers act as friends instead of authority figures and the children learn the consequences of their actions through their peers' reactions:

[*Yochien* teachers follow] a philosophy of child development coherent with minimal use of control: if children understand what is proper behavior, compliance will naturally follow. Thus understanding, not compliance, becomes the teacher's primary goal. (Lewis, 87)

A child is much more likely to modify his behavior if the other children become angry or annoyed with her. *Yochien* teachers do not believe that a child will intentionally do something wrong. They believe that all children are basically good and that the children simply do not understand the rules when they misbehave.

Yochien teachers also believe in fostering creativity in the children by allowing them to think of their own games, pictures, stories, etc., without the teacher constantly present to guide their activities and keep them out of trouble:

Japanese teachers' opinions of American teacher methods which place the burden of creative play and authority on the teachers show that in discipline there is over-emphasis on a child's wrong-doing and constant creativity on the part of the teacher is exhausting for children and limits strictly child to child interactions and relationships. (Finkelstein, 113-4)

While this leads to rather chaotic classrooms, parents and teachers place great value in the liveliness and vigor of their children, and the uproar and seeming lack of control in a *yochien* indicates healthy, happy children.

Teachers of elementary schools and *yochien* usually divide their classes into smaller groups. Teachers place children with greater abilities into different groups rather than all of the artists together, all of the social leaders together, all of the athletically-inclined children together. When

designating group membership, teachers take into account the children's friendships because they realize that a group will not last long if the children in it do not work well together. The teachers attempt to form balanced groups for the purposes of egalitarian education. To further promote group identity, the teachers plan activities in which small groups or the class as a whole must work together in order to accomplish the task. Teachers also use the small groups as agents of authority without compromising the teachers' more distant position.

Although Japanese preschools exude a much more uncontrolled, lively atmosphere than American preschools, at this early stage the children learn the difference between right and wrong as consequences of their own acts and peer punishment, and they learn group cooperation. Elementary school further cements these early lessons in the child. During the first few months of elementary school, the teacher trains the children how to keep order in the classroom from calling roll in the morning to having the proper learning materials prepared as soon as the teacher enters the room. Theoretically, in this manner the teacher does not have to call the class to order because the students do it themselves, but as with all children, some situations require teacher-directed discipline, though Japanese students respond better and more quickly to their teachers than their American counterparts (Finkelstein, 104).

Before school starts, elementary school teachers assign summer homework to their students. First graders might write their name or the Japanese syllabry for five or ten minutes every day. "Teachers assert that once students have thoroughly understood the effectiveness of diligent practice and developed the necessary daily habits, they become much more disciplined, self-motivated learners" (Finklestein, 104). Teachers emphasize not how quickly a student can complete a task, but rather slowly and steadily perfecting one's work. During the school year, first graders receive a daily five minute homework assignment to build good study habits to call upon later when the curriculum becomes more demanding.

Japanese elementary schools employ the *toban* system. The *toban* directs the class's activities during the day and acts as an authority figure in lieu of the teacher in the earlier years of elementary education. The children take turns acting as the *toban* for one day at a time. The students esteem and respect the *toban's* position, no matter who becomes the *toban* for that day. The underlying concept of

the *toban* system promotes a sense of leadership ability in each child and the idea that children will behave for each other because they do not want their peers to misbehave when they become the *toban*.

Besides the elementary *toban* system, the schools invest the students, from elementary school up through high school, with many varied responsibilities that keep the school running smoothly:

[Students] call roll, clear classrooms and buildings, serve their own lunches, run the intercom system, develop and enforce codes of conduct, plan and manage sportsday, and take virtually total responsibility for the diverse program of school clubs. . . . Japanese educators believe that this student participation in school constitutes important training for later citizen participation in society. (Cummings, Education, 142)

Students also clean their own classrooms, and school buildings and grounds. If the children have the responsibility of cleaning up graffiti or other acts of vandalism, they will probably not create more work for themselves by vandalizing their school.

Japanese educators, as opposed to American educators, do not believe in inherited abilities but that each child has the potential to become a motivated learner. Not all children have the same abilities and the inflexibility of the centralized curriculum does not provide remedial classes for the slower students or creative classes for the more talented students:

In the early years, when the curriculum is not demanding, these problems are not so serious. Beginning in grade four, however, they become more important. Those children who neither learn the lesson at school nor receive help at home are destined to fall behind. (Cummings, Education, 163)

This defeats the purpose of egalitarian education. In later years the rigidity of the curriculum and large class sizes change from an advantage of Japanese education to a possibly crippling disadvantage. The Japanese have a saying: 7-5-3, the punned name of a children's holiday which means 70 percent of the children understand what they are taught in elementary school, 50 percent in junior high school, and 30 percent in high school.

In the early years of education the large classes with high student/teacher ratios, mixed ability groups, the *toban* system and promotion of group life creates good study habits and classroom discipline and constitutes a solidly based advantage for the Japanese educational system. The major fault of Japanese early education lies in its lack of remedial education. Teachers and parents may not immediately recognize the slow learners, but slower students will seem glaringly obvious by the time they reach junior high school. The schools should offer some special education to ensure that the slow

learners have a fair chance rather than depending upon their parents and their parents' income to get extra help for these children.

Gambaru

Gambaru means to persist, to endure, to exceed the limits of one's capabilities. In the school system and in life, *gambaru* acts as a rallying cry and a promise that one will perform to the best of one's abilities. I experienced *gambaru* through joining a martial arts club that practiced daily and nurtured a "fighting spirit" in the club members. The examination system tests not only a student's learned knowledge but also her level of *gambaru*. Japanese society believes that if a student studies long and hard enough and shows motivation for learning, the student will reach his goals. Since the Japanese do not place much value on inherited abilities, every student has the potential to reach as high as they wish as long as they exercise *gambaru*.

This aspect of Japanese society differs greatly from the theory of inherited abilities and disabilities. Americans often categorize non-male, non-white, non-middle class, divorced parents, or English as a second language students as disadvantaged. The students themselves use these so-called disadvantages as excuses for their poor performance in school and thereby continue the cycle:

In contrast to the emphasis on socioeconomic factors within American public discourse, the Japanese, though differing among one another about the meaning of equality and democracy in education, uniformly emphasize motivation, that is, the effort and aspirations of children and parents to explain school achievement. (Finkelstein, 70)

Western society completely lacks the concept of *gambaru*; abilities and financial advantages reign supreme and the less-able become doubly disadvantaged unless their parents can buy a good education for their children.

I believe this part of Japanese culture creates the ambition in the 90 percent of the student population who attend and graduate from high school despite the difficult entrance exams. For the majority of Japanese students this ambition ends with high school, possibly because of the difficulty of college entrance exams and the high cost of a college education with little chance of financial aid. Parents pay for their children's non-compulsory education, and that price creates financial hardships

for the family as opposed to American students who receive a free public education until they reach the college level. Even then, most American students and their parents do not pay the entire cost of a college education—most students can get scholarships, financial aid, grants and/or loans. The Japanese system lacks scholarships and grants though financially needy students can obtain low-interest loans. The financially disadvantaged Japanese student can enter the ranks of the elite college graduates through her persistence in studying and performance on entrance examinations.

The entrance exams for each level of Japanese higher education have the reputation, and rightly so, for their difficulty. The term “examination hell” usually refers to a student’s teenage years. Passing the exams measures students’ level of *gambaru*, yet “It is not the content of the entrance exams but the intense experience of exam preparation that is believed to strengthen an individual’s character and moral fiber” (Finkelstein, 122). The self-discipline and dedication to studying constitutes the underlying character-building goal of Japanese culture.

Gambaru receives rewards so long as the student persists continuously. If a student drops out in Japan, he drops out for good. The only viable excuse for taking a year off of school happens when a student flunks the entrance exams and spends the next year studying even harder for the next test season because he has lost face. In the American education system a student, even a sixty-five year old student, can return to school at any time and further her education. The Japanese system does not allow for drop-outs to regain their *gambaru* at a later date and return to education.

While Japan’s education system may be regarded as a meritocracy, economic factors may also play a part. Just going to school and learning the same information like everyone else will not get a student into college. To pass the exams, students need *juku* or special tutors that add to the usual school expenses. Japan’s meritocracy may become a competition between parents to see who can buy the best education for their children rather than a competition of talent. *Gambaru* can only take a child so far; she needs money to get the full package:

While variation in family income is smaller in Japan than in the United States, Japanese from lower social classes may feel personally remote from the benefits of schooling. They may perceive it as an effective means to economic success but only for those who already belong to the middle class. Increased use of private schools and after-school tutoring by wealthier families may contribute to perceived—and actual—differences in the achievement potential of various socioeconomic groups. The conviction of lower-income parents that their children will not be able to compete may be passed on as lower expectations for achievement. (Holloway, 204)

In some ways, the two systems have the same problems, though for Japan this problem has just begun. While most Japanese regard education as important and desirable for their children, performance depends on economic factors and the level of *gambaru* encouraged through the parents and the school system. In the U.S.,

education has long been available at all social levels . . . the school may be so instantiated that parental endorsement is virtually universal across social classes. For this reason, parenting behavior may better account for differential performance of children. (Holloway, 204)

Economic factors play a significant role, but responsibility for education falls upon the parents and their views of the value of education.

Despite the disadvantages of a meritocracy, it continues to foster *gambaru* and the ambition to achieve among students who want to gain entry into the elite world of government or become salaried large-company employees. No other alternatives exist. One of the greatest advantages of the Japanese education system consists of the culturally-based, school-nurtured *gambaru* that despite the economic odds can make a bright, financially disadvantaged child into a Cinderella-style success story.

Exam Hell and the Juku

The Japanese education system run by the Ministry of Education promotes an egalitarian theory: administering the same generic education to every child. Special or gifted education does not exist in public or private elementary or junior high schools, especially not in high schools which the students had to take tests to enter in the first place. In the United States, "the concept of equal educational treatment for each child was short-lived. With the rise of industrialism and mass education, it becomes a concept of 'appropriate' education, fitting each child equally well for his or her lifework" (Finkelstein, 169). To a point, *juku* has provided special and gifted education, but only for those who can afford the added costs.

The teachers administer the Ministry of Education's curriculum as quickly as possible. Once finished, teachers devote the third year of junior high and high school to reviewing the information that the students need to pass the entrance exams for the next level of education. While Japanese

children busy themselves “eating facts” for the exams, “relentless tutoring in the answers to objective multiple-choice questions about esoteric facts is much of what goes on in the junior and senior high schools and associated tutoring” (Finkelstein, 122). International test results show that Japanese students score higher on comprehension and application tests than they score on tests requiring rote recitation of facts. All around, Japanese students score higher than most Western nations (Lynn, 11). On top of the fast-paced curriculum, Japanese teachers assign sixty hours of homework a week, that Japanese students dutifully complete, compared to the average American high school student who squeezes out five hours of homework per week (Lynn, 64).

The competition for placement in the prestigious schools, and even schools with less golden reputations, reaches dizzying heights of fierceness and would presumably lead to jealousy and hatred among students in the same schools. Yet Japan’s group-oriented society circumvents this “exam hell” obstacle because “school children and their teacher are to a considerable degree engaged in a co-operative enterprise, working together to ensure that everyone does as well as possible” (Lynn, 78). This peer pressure leads some students to study because they want to fit in or because they feel forced to study. The classroom does not always foster a sense of everyone working together, especially at the more academic high schools:

Students at high schools that send many graduates to prestigious colleges find it very difficult even to make friends among other students because they constantly perceive each other as rivals in a pitched battle for the few seats in those colleges. (Schoolland, 114)

The teachers in the regular school system and in the alternative schools help the students determine the schools to which they should apply based on the desired school’s and the current school’s reputations, the difficulty of the desired school’s academic program, and the student’s ability to pass the desired school’s entrance exam. In this way, teachers can match almost every student with a school that he has a good chance of entering, thus avoiding failure. However, fear of failure does not stop the students from attempting to enter the more prestigious schools (Finkelstein, 132).

If a student enters a prestigious high school, then a prestigious university, the student guarantees her own future because of the selective hiring processes of Japanese companies. Twenty-eight percent of Japan’s companies require a student to have a degree from one of the top universities--

just to take the companies' entrance exams. Another 36 percent of Japanese companies accept applications from students who attended universities ranked lower on the list (Finkelstein, 131):

[Japan] is a credentialling society not only because educational credentials differentiate the economic returns of individuals, but also because the hierarchy of higher educational institutions makes an important difference in prestige and employment opportunities for graduates. Such credentials also become an important aspect of self-identity because of the social prestige given to those who pass the college entrance competition for placement in highly-regarded universities. Over and above their economic value, the credentials are status symbols for individuals in Japanese society. (Tsukada, 286)

Since employment in Japanese corporations lasts from an employee's first year on the job until retirement, the entire education process and the exams inherent in it produce a domino effect: a good high school, a good university, a good company and the social status that comes with it, follow a student for the rest of his life.

In 1968, the Ministry of Education increased the difficulty of the curriculum due to parental pressure. According to William Cummings in Education and Equality in Japan, "Although this accelerated curriculum was designed to accommodate the brighter youths, it has proved too challenging for the slow learners" but has remained generally the same since 1968 to the present decade (212). With the absence of special education in the general curriculum, the need for *juku* arose to give students the extra help they need to compete successfully in "exam hell." The amazing amount of business that *juku* and *yobiko* generates proves that the Japanese view the entrance exams as a fair way of determining society's elite through a student's abilities to take tests.

In general, the students like going to *juku*. *Juku* after school provides another, more relaxed environment in which to make and perpetuate friendships. The problem of corporal punishment that plagues the regular school system does not exist at the *juku* because the students do not have to come if they do not like the teachers or the rules. The teachers do not exercise corporal punishment because the students cannot break rules that do not exist. Regular school teachers write their student references for entrance applications in the second years of junior high and high school, so the third-year students do not feel compelled to attend school. Many of them go to *juku* full-time and do even better than their classmates attending regular school.

The abilities and qualities of teachers in *juku* and *yobiko* don't greatly differ from teachers in the regular school system. Often, *juku* and *yobiko* teaching staffs consist of moonlighting teachers (17.2 percent), retired teachers (27.3 percent), and university students, (32.9 percent) (Tsukada, 287). Outstanding teachers do not constitute the success of the *juku* and *yobiko*. Personal attention does. I taught English in a *yobiko* to junior high school graduates who had flunked the exams for high school--mostly because they were "lazy." Like all of my other English students, these kids showed a willingness and desire to learn from me so that they would pass the entrance exams for high school the next time. The students seemed fairly content at the *yobiko*, and during testing season all of them passed the exams for at least one high school.

In comparison to U.S. education, Japan's schools offer more "exposure to learning," but in a study of American schools by Japanese educators, they concluded that the U.S. stresses "effective learning." The Japanese educators "considered 'a relaxed attitude toward study, built upon an attitude of independence' at a lower level [than college] to be 'a coiled spring' which enables the students to perform so well at a higher level" (Bereday, 96). In Japan, the students do not actually have to learn anything--just so long as they pass the tests. With the continuing hiring practices of Japanese companies, no other incentives exist so "the commitment to the entrance examination system and to achievement has resulted in a failure to provide the kind of vision and hope regarding occupational and career possibilities that would sustain its legitimacy" (Finkelstein, 158). Japanese students use their education to get jobs, not as the building blocks of lifelong learning.

Japanese students, in particular those with high goals, do not want to waste their time on information that their teachers consider essential to learning but the students will not use to pass exams:

A majority of students in the academic high schools tend to view schooling as truly relevant when it promotes preparation for the CEE [College Entrance Examination] and as only marginally useful when it does not contribute directly to university admission. Adolescents undergo a great deal of personal sacrifice and have little intrinsic motivation for learning because of the extrinsic pressures imposed upon them. It is within this framework that most academic high schools prepare students for the CEE. (Finkelstein, 127)

While the idea of life-long learning has become popular among Japanese educators, they have not instilled this concept in the students because the students view learning as a means to pass tests and

secure their status in society rather than as an enjoyable process. My Japanese friends related some of the endless facts that they crammed in preparation for college entrance exams, but also confessed that they had forgotten most of the information that they had learned.

Japanese schools have small enrollments, but classes consist of forty to fifty students. America's state legislation limits class size because educators and parents recognize that students need personal attention from their teachers and that performance levels of the students rise in proportion to the small number of students in their classes. Dr. Akira Okada, one of my English students, expressed envy because my high school classes had as many as thirty students and as few as five while his classes had boasted fifty or more students. Despite the large class sizes, Japanese student performance levels remain high, but Japanese students deserve more than an automaton at the front of the classroom spitting out facts for them to memorize and regurgitate. Other than saving some yen, Japanese schools cannot justify fifty students per classroom because the students resent such large classes and the forced, impersonal distance from their teachers. The *juku* and *yobiko* have achieved success because students get the personal attention they need to keep up with the curriculum and to pass entrance exams.

Though *juku* and *yobiko* provide good environments for Japanese students, the education system should eliminate the need for *juku* and *yobiko* by relaxing the exams and the curriculum and meeting the educational needs of students within the regular school system. The Japanese education system should first make high school compulsory, since 90 percent of Japanese youth attend anyway, which would eliminate the need for high school entrance exams and leave only the college entrance exams. Secondly, college entrance exams should not be so stringent that the average student cannot pass. Japanese students have proven how much adolescents are capable of, but they should no longer sacrifice their youth for the sake of hitting the books sixty hours every week. Learning a bunch of facts for an exam which students will later forget serves no purpose in education.

Juku and *yobiko* form a necessary part of Japanese education because they fill the gap between the rigidity of the curriculum and the difficulty of the entrance exams. Most students do not develop any adverse side effects from *juku* attendance. As long as a need exists for them, *juku* and *yobiko* add a definite advantage to the Japanese education system which has the disadvantages of robbing the nation's children of their free time and ignoring children whose needs are not met by an "egalitarian" education.

Violence and Discipline

In 1984 police reports showed 531 cases of violence and blackmail who victimized teachers. The children taken into custody by the police numbered 1,120, one third of which were girls. Seven elementary and junior high school students committed suicide. Teachers or fellow students murdered four children (Finkelstein, 185). Between 1978 and 1982 student assaults aimed at their teachers increased five times (198). In a survey of 1,789 schools in the Tokyo area in 1985, researchers discovered 5,450 cases of students bullying other students in elementary school, 3,519 in junior high, and 515 in high school (Picken, 62). From April to October, 155,066 bullying incidents reached police reports, 30 percent of the cases involved physical bullying. Early 1986 reports show 5,825 police consultations—three times the number of consultations than the year before. The consultations resulted in 638 official investigations of assault, blackmail, and other means of bullying. Extortion cases of bullying increased 65 percent from the previous year. In 1985, 43.4 percent of all criminal offenders, including adults, came from the fourteen to nineteen year old age group. By 1988, this figure had risen to 48 percent. In 1987, 54 percent of all murders and 40 percent of all robberies involved jobless minors (Schoolland, 119).

In the 1960's most Westerner believed that Japan's high suicide rates among teenagers resulted from the pressures of "exam hell" and failure to pass exams. On the contrary, as the number of *ronin* rose, the number of suicides among Japanese students decreased and continued to decline until the mid-1980's. In 1986, suicide among teenagers jumped 44 percent while the national average only increased 8 percent. Teenaged girls' suicides increased 77 percent (Schoolland, 108).

Violence in Japanese schools presents a problem for educators. Children from middle-class homes commit 90 percent of the acts of juvenile delinquency. Despite the facade that Japanese schools present to the West and to themselves, Japanese schools are not meccas of well-mannered, perfectly disciplined, uniformed, self-motivated children:

Apparently [Japanese students] are reflecting a general dissatisfaction with life and with the qualities of the Japanese school system that have produced the so-called miracle—its competitive, hierarchal, bureaucratically controlled, centrally-planned national development and allocation of human resource policies.
(Finkelstein, 198)

And where does this dissatisfaction come from? As with all social problems, it begins at home.

Japanese families traditionally spoil their children as part of a cultural concept called *amae*² which means to love and be loved in a protective and sweet manner. With the increase of the standard of living of Japanese families, modern conveniences, and mothers who do not work outside the home, Japanese youths do not have demands or responsibilities placed upon them by their families other than to study. Japanese parents do not discipline their children because of the need for *amae*, so the parents leave discipline to the schools, beginning in *yochien*:

Americans expect consistency in approaches to child care and in children's behavior at home and at school . . . Japanese parents, teachers, and administrators suggest, in contrast, that the world of preschool and home, of teacher and mother, are viewed as largely discontinuous. (Finkelstein, 111)

The usual form of discipline in the home consists of mothers' silent suffering to produce guilt in the child to make her study so as not to disgrace the family. The student feels pressured into studying and expresses her anger at school or in the streets where she spends her time. As Teruhisa Horio suggested in his article, "A Japanese Critique of Japanese Education,"

. . . Behind these socially unacceptable forms of behavior is the desperate desire of lonely young people, pushed into cutthroat competition with one another through the intensification of examination pressures, to have friends and form groups they can identify with. (Finkelstein, 212)

A Japan Youth Institute poll reports that in the United States, 29.9 percent of parents approve of corporal punishment while 55.7 percent of Japanese parents approve of corporal punishment. Japanese parents rarely exercise corporal punishment at home but rather view it as an instrument of discipline for school use (Schoolland, 56). Because schools serve as moral educators, providing a moral education curriculum, elementary and junior high schools in particular exercise moral control over their students:

. . . Almost all elementary and secondary schools prescribe the details of permissible behavior both in and out of school including the clothes students should wear and places they might go on their own or with their parents or other adults. (Finkelstein, 157)

Japanese parents tacitly accept corporal punishment and allow the school to regulate their children's entire lives because of the strong desire in Japanese people for *amae*. "Ultimately what makes [corporal punishment] possible is the irresponsible attitude of parents who expect teachers to provide

² *Amae* is a vital and complex part of Japanese culture. I have simplified the concept of *amae* for this paper.

the discipline which they themselves fail to impart to their children" (Finkelstein, 214). Through this tacit approval, teachers exercise corporal punishment in their classes, despite Article 11 of the School Education Law. This law prohibits corporal punishment "defined as violent assault, such as hitting or kicking, and nonviolent punishment, such as forcing children to sit or stand in one position for long periods of time" (Schoolland, 56). Corporal punishment becomes possible because of parental approval, and because of the numerous rules that govern Japanese schools.

Americans usually envision corporal punishment as spanking a child on his bottom. Japanese teachers most commonly employ corporal punishment by slapping a child's face or hitting a child on the head, though they also target the back, legs, shoulders, and stomach. Corporal punishment aimed at the head places very young children in danger because, if hit hard enough, brain damage can result. Besides their hands and feet, Japanese teachers may employ practically any item in their administration of corporal punishment--bamboo sticks, bats, wooden paddles, books, even desks.

Most Japanese schools have long lists of rules covering: hair cuts and hair styles (crew cuts for the boys, short or pulled back hair for the girls with brown or black colored bands, and no perms or coloring); how much money a student can bring to school (five thousand yen or about \$45); the color of students' underwear and socks (white); variations in the school uniform (including book bags); carrying ID cards at all times; times students must come to school and when they can or must leave (sometimes not until 7:30 p.m.); talking in class or during lunch; incorrect answers; not finishing homework; where students cannot go after school hours (game centers, cafes, certain shopping centers); associations with other students (boy/girl relationships and friendships with "bad" students); etc. Students cannot make many personal decisions regarding their appearance or their activities. One of my English students, Aki Ishibashi, attends the top high school in Fukuoka, Japan. She said that her school "was not as strict as other schools," even though her high school administered many of the rules listed above. She claimed that students at her school could wear accessories, like hair ribbons and barrettes, with their uniforms as long as they "didn't stand out."

Japanese schools have many rules but not a system of protest when someone accuses a child of breaking a rule. "Youths . . . cannot expect any sort of hearing before they are punished. Guilt is established solely by the teacher's judgment or whim" (Schoolland, 55). Besides possessing ultimate authority at school, the principal and teaching staffs send the teachers into the community to spy on

students and to check that students from their school do not frequent places of business banned by school rules.

Not only do Japanese parents allow the schools to discipline their children by proxy, the teachers approve of corporal punishment and the strict rules that facilitate punishment:

According to a 1987 national survey of 2,698 junior high school teachers, the rigidly enforced rules in Japanese schools are supported by 86 percent of teachers. Ninety-five percent of these teachers believed that disorderly attire was akin to mental disorder and the same number concluded that "non-allowed hairstyles and delinquency are interrelated." Another 68 percent thought that the schools should control the kind of socks that students wore, and 38 percent felt that the gloves allowed should also be controlled. Two thirds of the teachers believed that going to "amusement centers" should be prohibited and that school should still enforce bans on students going to coffee shops. (Schoolland, 38)

In another survey 70 percent of the teachers surveyed agreed with parents and students that their schools had overly rigid rules and regulations governing student life. They also felt that they could not do anything to change the rules (Schoolland, 38). The teachers continue to enforce the rules whether they think the schools need the rules. As long as the rules remain, so will corporal punishment.

In a limited survey of 272 students Ibaraki University in northern Japan, the students—all in the education department training to be teachers—reported being subjected to corporal punishment an average of 23.5 times from elementary school through high school. In addition, they "witnessed twenty-seven cases where victims were so severely beaten that they had to be treated at the school clinic or nearby hospitals . . ." (Schoolland, 50). Male teachers seemed more likely to use corporal punishment than female teachers, but the sex of the student made no difference. In addition to this limited survey, more stories of teacher violence directed at students have surfaced in the last decade. In some cases the teachers beat the students so badly that the students died. In other cases, the students hated going to school and facing the corporal punishment meted out by their teachers and/or bullying from their peers so much that they committed suicide.

My Japanese friends corroborated these statistics of bullying, corporal punishment, and suicide with stories of their own. Teachers had hit all of them throughout elementary school and junior high school. They recalled that elementary school had the most instances of corporal punishment and bullying. Some of them had passed through high school without corporal punishment or being bullied.

They believe that the problem exists more in the rural schools than in the cities, but I could not find figures that supported or contradicted their assumption.

In Japan, 80 percent of the teachers believe that the curriculum demands too much from students, while only 13 percent of American teachers hold the same view of American education. Japanese students asked 13 percent of their teachers for advice while American students asked 42 percent of their teachers (Schoolland, 130). In addition, 30 percent of Japanese teachers believe in the necessity of corporal punishment for "student guidance" (103). The most disturbing aspect of corporal punishment rests in the fact that other teachers, parents, and students act as though it does not exist. The parents fear accusing teachers of abusing their children because the teachers write the student conduct reports and recommendations. A bad recommendation could keep a child from being accepted into a desired high school or university. The students fear bringing punishment upon themselves and do nothing when the teachers target other children. The teachers form a peer pressure group to control each other and to keep up the rules and standing of the school at any cost. In this manner corporal punishment goes beyond a useful purpose and becomes a powerful weapon for coercing children into prescribed behavior patterns.

Because students do not want to be the target themselves, the teachers use the students to uphold the rules, knowing that the students will effectively "get even" with a student who has brought punishment upon the group:

The intention of the teachers [is] to enlist the assistance of all the other punished students in the task of enforcing the rules. Since everyone can be made to suffer for the actions of a few, it is everyone's immediate concern that nonconformity is quashed. (Schoolland, 154)

Peer consequences and teacher delegated authority in preschool and the early years of elementary take on an ugly twist as elementary school progresses. Leaving students to face peer consequences results in students bullying other students.

Because of teachers singling out students for punishment or administering group punishment, the students learn to stay inconspicuous and turn upon someone who stands out: children from minority ethnic groups in Japan or other Japanese children who have lived abroad, the weak or the especially bright students, or new students. (For this reason Japanese families rarely move their children to a different school except between elementary and junior high, or junior high and high school.)

Bullying has two faces: physical and psychological. Physical bullying accounts for 30 percent and psychological bullying makes up the remaining 70 percent. Psychological bullying takes the forms of verbal attack, forcing other students out of the group, and leaves no identifiable marks (Finkelstein, 195). Boys often employ physical bullying tactics while the girls prefer the psychological:

Boys are usually quite physical with their targets . . . but it is the girls who really are the clever ones. They work their tricks on the psyche like humming a lullaby while kicking their victim. (Schoolland, 125)

Bullying becomes less frequent as the children grow older though the experts do not know why.

Corporal punishment also becomes less frequent, possibly because teachers might fear the students will begin fighting back. As I mentioned before, *jukus* enjoy the pleasant absence of bullying because of the lack of rules that make corporal punishment unnecessary (Schoolland, 185).

Because Japanese students become so dependent upon the education system, they view it as the real world and learn from the examples of their teachers that they can achieve the desired results through violence:

Students are told that school prepares the young for a role of self-determination in a democratic society. Yet the pattern of governance they have to follow in the classroom is strictly autocratic. The young do not get practice in questioning authority, which is the very essence of democracy. Instead, they are expected to practice taking orders from an indisputable master. (Schoolland, 58)

They learn to keep quiet when a teacher punishes another student for something that they may not believe is fair. They learn to run with the group because being alone is not a choice but an imprisonment. At the heart of the matter lie their parents who spoil them and their teachers who bully them. Thus, Japanese students also learn to vent their frustration on other students and society through acts of juvenile delinquency. Though the solution seems simplistic, relaxing the rules, exam pressures, and enforcing laws against corporal punishment can eliminate much of the violence from Japanese education.

Minorities

The homogeneous nature of Japanese culture presents problems for minority cultures living within Japan and for Japanese who leave and come back. Because of the pressures placed upon Japanese

children to take part in group life, anyone who shows differences becomes an outcast in school.

Separation from the group can cause psychological trauma for minority children who cannot help their differentness.

As Japanese companies expand into global markets, they establish overseas branches and transfer employees to staff them. With increasing frequency, these employees bring their families with them. An estimated forty thousand Japanese children live outside of Japan, sixteen thousand in the United States. Every year ten thousand children leave Japan with their parents for overseas posts and about the same number return (Finkelstein, 2005). The adjustments to going overseas do not seem to cause many problems for Japanese children, coming back does.

The plight of returning Japanese children grows worse every year. Of course, the Japanese school system does not offer special or gifted education for these children, especially advanced language classes. Japanese schools do offer "re-adjustment" classes for returning children—classes in which teachers tell the returnees to forget everything they may have learned by living in a foreign country and to embrace Japanese values. These children also face ostracism and bullying from their peers because of their differentness. Aki Ishibashi lived in the United States for two years. She told me that, even though she speaks English fluently, she goes to the same class as the rest of the students in her grade, and she never speaks up in class. She also fears upstaging the teacher because her pronunciation is more accurate than her teacher's. Aki's situation exists throughout Japan: "English classes at a junior high school with many students who had lived abroad were no more advanced than at ordinary schools . . . The returnees did not dare speak English well for fear of being bullied" (Finkelstein, 2006). When problems in the school do arise, usually bullying, parents feel that they must enroll their child in an international school, removing their child from the system and the road to success.

Koreans make up a large ethnic group in Japan. Due to discrimination in the regular school system and to preserve their own cultural heritage, most Korean children attend Korean schools. Japanese universities do not accept students from Korean high schools. Until recently, the Ministry of Education prevented Koreans qualified to teach from working in Japanese schools.

The low-class *burakumin* historically took on the unclean, menial jobs of Japanese society. For hundreds of years society categorized the *burakumin* as genetically stupid based upon social prejudices,

and denied them their rights to education. In the last century, *burakumin* have gained the right to an education, but society continues to discriminate against them through the schools, company hiring practices, and arranged marriages.

All of these people have the right to an education. For Koreans and the *burakumin*, the government should, by law, open schools to them on a fair basis and monitor company hiring practices to prevent discrimination. In recent years, minority groups have made some progress toward these goals but discrimination still exists. The dominant homogeneous culture easily ignores the collective voices of minorities. As children continue to leave and return to Japan, the schools should sustain and develop the returning children's knowledge of a different culture instead of suppressing it.

The problems of these minority groups yet again emphasize the fundamental flaw in the Japanese education system: groups have individuals who have needs that cannot be met by an egalitarian education. Due to the overwhelming cultural homogeneity and the racist tendencies of Japanese culture, progress moves at a slow pace. Change in Japan must begin with companies and universities that revise their exclusionary admissions policies. A general internationalization of Japanese society will allow differences in culture to prevent the abuse of school children who do not fit into the prescribed mold of Japanese education.

Women's Education

In the last century, and especially since the educational reforms wrought by the MacArthur government after World War II, women and girls can equally participate in education. The government guarantees women's compulsory education and most girls go on to high school. The reason girls join the ranks of boys taking college entrance exams lies not in wanting a good job but in wanting a good husband. Men dominate Japan's companies and government, and women dominate the household.

Girls have fewer incentives for getting a four-year college degree. First, their parents do not want to "waste" their money on girls who will simply get married and quit working after a few years. Most companies hire women with four-year college degrees as receptionists or OLs (office ladies) to serve tea and deal with filing and typing. Companies believe that women with four-year degrees will soon marry and quit working while the men last until retirement age. Women with four-year college

degrees become dissatisfied with the low pay and low status of their jobs compared to the men that they graduated with and thus quit after two to five years of working as an OL and thereby reinforce employers' beliefs that female college graduates will not last long in the company.

Many female high school graduates decide to attend two-year junior colleges instead. Most of the two-year colleges in Japan cater to young women, offering traditional "women's" subjects like home economics and literature. These schools do not offer the more "manly" math, science, and business subjects, and women take these subjects at a four-year universities less frequently than men:

The tendency for women students to be over-represented in the humanities, home economics, and education and under-represented in fields such as science, engineering, law and economics is also attributable to the educational system. The fact is that the range of study options offered at most private junior colleges and women's universities, where so many women are enrolled, is extremely limited. What is offered reflects sex stereotypes about what constitutes appropriate areas of study for women. Women are not given the opportunity to choose nontraditional study options. In this way, instead of preparing women to assume the same roles as men, the institutions serving women tend to reinforce differential expectations concerning the uses of education. (Fujimura, 480)

Women who choose two-year colleges spare their parents half the expense. Two-year colleges cost as much as private four-year colleges per year but take half the time. Employers also hire more women from two-year colleges than from four-year colleges because these women last longer on the job and have a two year headstart on the marriage race.

While boys usually score higher than girls on tests, researchers believe this condition results because boys have more incentives to enter prestigious schools for career prospects than girls who get married and possibly work outside the home part-time when their children enter school. From the results of a 1981 math test,

boys score substantially higher than girls in Japan, while there is virtually no sex difference in the United States. The most probable explanation is that in Japan there is greater pressure on boys to achieve. There is little public expectation that Japanese girls will pursue high level professional careers, but rather [that] they will become wives and mothers or work in low status occupations. Nevertheless, Japanese girls score on average considerably higher than Americans of either sex. (Lynn, 15)

By 1980, men made up the majority of 78 percent of Japan's four-year colleges and 87.1 percent of all Japanese graduate school students. Women attending junior colleges accounted for 70 percent of all

female college students, and women's subjects dominate 90 percent of all junior colleges. The United States has equal numbers of men and women in four-year and two-year institutions (Kinmouth, 397).

The respectable companies who hire women without college educations do not pay their college graduates well, much less a mere high school graduate. Usually, the socially acceptable young woman works and still meets her expenses (no matter if she's had a high school, four-year or two-year college education) by living at home, thereby limiting her freedom to come and go as she pleases, dress how she wants to, etc.

The Japanese education system that attempts to fulfill its goal of an egalitarian education for all sadly lacks egalitarian education for women at the higher levels. The blame for such failure of Japanese education lies with a culture that still places women in the home and keeps them there through company hiring and pay practices, and education for women that offers "softer" subjects. Japanese society bases these policies on low confidence in women's intelligence even though Japanese women can outscore both men and women from countries where women form a large part of the work force, especially in white collar jobs. Japan continues to ignore one of its few natural resources by not educating women and employing them on equal footing with men.

Universities

Though Japanese students face exam hell to get to the top, once a student has passed the entrance exam for college and entered a university, the constant studying ceases. A college student has survived the intense competition and entered the elite corps that companies will draft upon graduation. With their future assured and since Japanese colleges do not demand much from their students, the students regard college as a four-year holiday. Often club activities take precedence over going to classes that the students will pass anyway. From my own observations, the Japanese students most prepared to leave college as mature adults consisted of those students in clubs that demanded daily attendance and dedication outside of practice as well as students who went abroad on exchange programs.

During the fourth year of college, most students find a job depending upon their performance on company entrance exams. College grades and achievements mean nothing to companies who value only

their own tests and the prestige of the university a student attended. Companies rarely pay attention to students' majors in college, especially since students begin choosing their majors in high school. In the second year of high school the students must choose whether they will follow a science/math track or humanities/business track. The students choose a specific major when they take college entrance examinations. They take specialized tests to enter the university under one department like law or literature. Students cannot change their major unless they take the exam for another major and start college over from the beginning. Because of this, students rarely transfer or change their majors.

While American university classes meet two or three times a week, on the average, most Japanese university classes meet once a week. Homework is minimal—usually a little reading and a worksheet. Teachers determine grades, not that it makes a lot of difference, by tests at the end of the semester. Because classes only meet once a week, the average student takes between thirteen and sixteen classes a semester and crams for thirteen to sixteen finals over a two week period at the semester's end.

Since college students do not have to study every night, they have a lot of free time. Club activities fill the time vacuum. The sports clubs meet five or six times a week, two hours each day, or for four hours when preparing for sports competitions. The club also fills the vacuum created in the student's identity—the need to belong to a group. The club replaces their classes in importance.

Teachers who have tenure as soon as they get a job at a university make no effort to stimulate learning among their students. The hour and a half long classes and dry material bore the students. When they do come to class, the students sit as far back as possible, talk with their friends, sleep and do all the juvenile things for which their teachers hit them in the compulsory education system. Courses of study, like medicine or engineering, require more effort from the students since they will graduate as qualified doctors and engineers, but these are the exceptions.

In the article, "Knowledge and Attitudes toward Global Issues: Students in Japan and the United States," John Cogan explored whether Japanese and American students gain knowledge that will allow them to digest political and financial events and their consequences, the kind of knowledge needed to lead a country. This article pointed out the small value of a Japanese university degree:

Although the Japanese students enter the university with a relatively high level of knowledge about the world, this knowledge is enhanced only modestly by their collegiate experience. In contrast, U.S. students seem to acquire considerable

knowledge from their university classes (and other experiences during the college years). (289)

Besides not improving their knowledge of their world while in college, Japanese students do not value the study of foreign languages as much as American students. Japanese students study English in school for a minimum of six years, usually eight. They do not study to learn to communicate with native English speakers, especially since the learned Japanese pronunciation of English words does not sound like English. Instead, Japanese students learn as many vocabulary words and as much grammar as they can to pass entrance exams for colleges and companies:

The Japanese view the study of foreign language as an academic pursuit, to be mastered for the university entrance exam but not to be valued for other utilitarian reasons or for personal enhancement. Still others note that the Japanese are quite insular in their views and remain in need of an internationalization effort that makes foreign language study valued and valuable. (Cogan, 296)

While American students often become more internationalized as a result of going to college, Japanese students do not progress very far from their attitudes in high school.

Japanese universities do not offer the variety of majors available in the U.S., nor do they offer a liberal arts core curriculum—a curriculum that allows Americans a broad base from which to explore a major field of study. Unlike American universities, Japanese universities do not possess the same diversity of departments. Most Japanese colleges specialize in humanities areas or science areas but not both. Seinan University, which I attended, focuses on humanities and business and completely lacks a science department. Seinan recently opened their boys only high school to female students because an in-house study showed that more girls chose Seinan University than boys.

The importance of attending a Japanese university lies not in what a student learns because the status of the university determines the status of a student's occupation and his status in society for the rest of his life. Japanese students deserve a holiday after the pressures of exams, but students should use their university career to learn and understand sophisticated concepts from an adult viewpoint. Japanese students fail to take advantage of a college education and the universities fail to offer diverse learning environments to their students.

American Education

Overall View

[Public school system motto]:

Give me your gifted, your regular, your behaviorally disordered, your emotionally disturbed, your slow learners, your severely retarded, your orthopedically handicapped, your mild-moderates, your learning disabled, your gregarious, your shy, your blind, your deaf, your speech impaired, your beautiful, your ugly, your wealthy, your poor, your Asian, your black, your white,

Send these, the seekers of knowledge to me

I spread my arms and open up my doors of opportunity. (Mangieri, 39)

American children traditionally begin compulsory schooling when they enter kindergarten at the age of five. Due to single-parent and two-income families, more and more children begin school by attending a preschool as a day-care arrangement since their parent(s) cannot remain at home full-time. Though children may learn their ABC's at preschool and other rudimentary skills, preschool does not take the place of regular schooling or, for the most part, act as an academic institution, though some elite preschools do have purely academic purposes. As a general rule, institutionalized education begins with kindergarten.

From kindergarten, the American student moves into primary school that consists of grades one through six. Junior high or middle schools lasts two or three years. High school lasts from ninth or tenth grade through twelfth grade. While the divisions of school systems into elementary, junior and senior high schools vary from state to state and district to district, compulsory education consists of thirteen years: kindergarten through twelfth grade. Because of differences in state laws, compulsory education ends not with a grade level achieved but with the age of the child. Some states require children to attend school until graduation from twelfth grade or until age eighteen. Other states will allow children to drop out of school as early as sixteen, no matter what grade level the student has completed. After a student graduates from high school, the next, and completely optional step, consists of college. Colleges range from vocational/technical programs to two-year community colleges that award associate degrees to the four-year colleges that awards bachelors degrees.

State governments mandate a minimum compulsory school year of 180 days. School begins in early September or late August. The students have at least a two-day holiday for Thanksgiving, and up to a week in some districts. Christmas vacation signals the close of school for approximately two weeks. School resumes in January and lets out for a week in March or April for Spring Break or Easter vacation. Most school years end in late May or early June, sometimes later in northern states to make up for snow days taken during the winter months. Summer vacation lasts about three months, traditionally due to the agrarian economy that dictated the school year around the planting of, tending to, and harvesting of crops. However, the industrialized society of the United States can no longer justify an agriculturally based school year. Not only should the school year be lengthened from 180 days to 220 days per year, educators should divide the year more equally so that students do not have the chance to forget everything they have learned during a three-month summer vacation.

The private sector comprises only 13 percent of American elementary and secondary schools, including parochial and other religiously affiliated schools. For better or worse, a large majority of American school-age children attend school through the vast public education system. Because the Constitution does not specifically mention education, the individual states, by implication, administer the public school system. Fifty states have fifty different curricula, fifty different means of educating the children entrusted to them:

[There are] a numbing hodgepodge of rules and regulations. In the state of California, the education code is four volumes and thirty-seven hundred pages long, and in New York, it takes five volumes and four thousand pages to print the education law. More troublesome are the vague and wide-ranging mandates the states have imposed on public education. Many of these requirements are pushed by special-interest groups. Frequently, they trivialize the mission of public education, and, therefore, are rarely taken seriously by the schools. (Mangieri, 16)

Instead of being a liability, the decentralized method of education in the United States can be one of its strengths. Decentralized education can work for the United States though it means, in many cases, starting over. In the 1980s, the state of Kentucky threw out their existing education code and began anew. Decentralized education can be highly effective despite its diversity and adaptable when an incentive for change exists. On the whole, schools have become so bound by mandates and codes that they fail in their mission though the current wave of reform may completely restructure American education.

In the past two decades, experts and the public recognized that the quality of American education declined more with each passing year. A report entitled A Nation at Risk, released in 1983, deplored the eroded condition of American schools, especially in comparison with other nations. The report found that on international academic tests, "American students were never first or second and, in comparison with other industrialized nations, were last seven times." Twenty-three million adults living in the United States are illiterate. The College Board tests for entrance into higher education shows "consistently declining scores." Among seventeen-year-olds, "40 percent can't draw inferences from written material; one-fifth can't write a persuasive essay; two-thirds can't solve a multiple-step math problem;" and 13 percent are functionally illiterate. The illiteracy rate among minority youths ranges around 40 percent (National, 19).

Children who attend inner-city schools had the worst results. The quality of education seems to be declining in non-urban schools as well. No one really knows the cause of this general decline in quality, and the rhetoric of reform willingly offers up a smorgasbord of solutions, mostly "spend more money":

Though impoverished schools can be found here and there, and although occasionally a school levy is rejected, the average per-pupil expenditure in American public education this year [1991] is about \$4,800, some \$1,500 higher than when A Nation at Risk was released. (Long, 45)

Despite more spending, despite the flurry of reform sparked by A Nation at Risk, the quality of education in the United States continues to decline and many believe that society declines along with it:

Public education must be funded at realistic levels, and the source of that funding must be predictable, so that school systems can depend on it and plan with it. Education is costly, and good education costs even more . . . Yet, education is much cheaper and cost effective than the alternatives. Welfare programs and unemployment compensation to offset illiteracy cost taxpayers over \$6 billion annually. (Johnston, 47)

The United States has reached the realistic level of funding for education. At this point, taxpayers pour their money down a black hole.

Other than student apathy, the main reason for the decline in education seems to be the across the board lowering of standards so that the minimum of twenty years ago approaches the maximum

that most students now achieve. Because of pressure to fill their enrollment capacity, universities developed remedial programs and lowered their admission standards—not to mention the 20 percent of public universities that must unconditionally accept any high school graduate of that particular state. Because college entrance standards fell, high schools quit offering classes that colleges no longer required or recommended for entrance: “Thirty-five states require only one year of math [in high school]. Thirty-six states require only one year of science. [In] thirteen states 50 percent credit for graduation can be electives” (National, 20). With requirements like these, adolescents choose not to take the academic track in high school simply because it wastes their time: they can get into college without taking hard classes or doing well in any classes. The kids may not be able to read but they have the intellect to get through the system with the least amount of effort.

Most states require that students pass the state competency exam. Instead of a minimum, this test has become the norm. Even then, not everyone can pass it:

Basic literacy has become the goal rather than the starting point. In some colleges, maintaining enrollments is of greater day-to-day concern than maintaining rigorous academic standards. And the ideal of academic excellence as the primary goal of schooling seems to be fading across the board in American education. (National, 14)

Furthermore, elementary schools augment the problem by passing students between grades based upon the school year and not the child’s readiness for the next grade level. This method works, for the most part, in Japan because the need of the individual child to keep their bonds with the group takes precedence over whether or not the child is academically ready to move on. Yet, Japan’s method that ignores individual ability still produces students well-grounded in literacy and numeracy. American schools do not, nor should consideration for the class-as-a-group have any merit in the U.S.’s individual-oriented society when teachers consider passing a child that has flunked. Not flunking students in the early grades produces a greater detriment to that child’s education because the child will probably fall behind later on.

The critics, the educators, and the public lament the deplorable condition of American education and subscribe to the break down of the nuclear family as one of the largest problems. The school must take responsibility for the children within its halls for five or six hours everyday. Despite research that has been available for decades, the way in which teachers teach has not changed significantly in the last thirty years:

The legislated-excellence movement is, as is to be expected, silent about changing the context of classroom instruction. In fact, preoccupied with content, the advocates of excellence will only further flatten classroom life with their demands for more coverage. Teachers will be pushed into a corner by mandates that specify precisely the amount of time to be spent in each subject area, increased objectives to cover, and more standardized tests. (Wood, 127)

Standardized tests only seem to disfavor minorities and produce results that allow for the ability-tracking of students. Once labeled a slow learner, a child often becomes a slow learner and fall into the bottom of the class for her entire school career. Labeling based upon tests that measure how well students take tests does not treat students fairly, American or Japanese.

Americans generally accept the idea that they have a right to an education. This education is largely a passive process instead of citizens exercising an active right:

Study after study of American classrooms reveals a disappointing sameness in the way children are taught. Nearly 60 percent of a student's time is spent listening to a teacher, doing a written exercise, or preparing for an assignment. Virtually all the talk in the classroom is dominated by teachers, as they out-talk students by a three-to-one ratio. Less than one percent of classroom time is given over to questions that require complex student thought or responses. And the vast majority of classes are organized along the lines of large-group instruction, with students spending less than one-third of their time engaged in individual work and less than one-tenth of their time in cooperative work. (Wood, 121)

The present system of education in the United States smothers independent thought by employing boring, outdated methods that offer no incentives for students to exercise their right to an education. At some American schools, group values are emphasized over individual ability in, for example, reading groups:

These however, are not reading groups in the traditional sense, with children grouped by perceived reading ability, each group using a different reader. Instead, children read the same books in mixed-ability groups, with the groups changing in make up all the time. This simple difference strikes right at the heart of one of the most important antidemocratic aspects of American public education: in most schools children are segregated by ability, either within a classroom or in academic tracks. Once children are placed in these tracks or ability groups, they are labeled for life, and those who are labeled as slow or deficient fall further and further behind. (Wood, 17)

American schools should promote cooperativeness among students, especially in early education, with the added idea that group members can change without causing ill effects for the children. Ability tracking within classrooms instead of grade levels also prevents developing a cooperative quality

among students because ability tracks are based upon individual achievement and have nothing to do with how well a student interacts with other students. The system works well enough for the intellectual elite but not well enough for the general population and the below average. In the midst of all the rhetoric of reform, one thing has become clear: the U.S. will eventually lose its ability to compete with other nations economically, technologically, and artistically unless the American education systems changes radically and begins to educate.

Teachers

Again and again, in all of the literature about education currently circulating, critics lay much of the blame for the state of American education on teachers. American teachers receive a yearly income not far above the poverty level. Starting teachers in many states earn a salary of \$17,000 their first year. Because of the low income bracket, teaching, as a profession, does not attract the same number of high caliber college graduates as other occupations. Good teachers find themselves lured into other fields because of the demands of their teaching jobs and the small compensation that they receive for it. In 1983,

the average salary after 12 years of teaching is only \$17,000 per year, and many teachers are required to supplement their income with part-time and summer employment. In addition, individual teachers have little influence in such critical professional decisions as, for example, text book selection. (National, 22-3)

Since the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, teacher salaries have increased to a national average of \$30,000 per year in 1993, but this number varies according to teaching experience and from state to state.

Between 1973 and 1983, the number of undergraduate students admitted to teacher-education programs in colleges declined 44 percent. Not only did the numbers of students in the education departments of universities decline, so did those students' SAT scores, averaging around seventy-four points below the national average which also declined (Mangieri, 97-8). To their credit, education majors maintain a cumulative grade point average above the national average. Yet society does not treat teaching, as reflected by teacher salaries, as a respected profession:

We entrust these precious resources [children] for this amount of time to people called teachers. In many parts of the nation we pay these adults salaries of less than \$20,000 a year. Often, a beginning teacher earns less than the bus driver who

brings the children to school. The clash between the rhetoric of reform and the values and priorities reflected in these wages is deafening. In Japan, the average teacher's salary translates to roughly \$50,000 a year, and high school teachers spend only 15 hours per week in total class instruction, leaving the balance for tutoring, correcting papers, preparing lessons, evaluating old ones—in short, engaging in professional development and planning activities. (Long, 289)

While Japanese education binds its teachers to a rigid curriculum, the teachers' guides supplied by the curriculum help even mediocre teachers perform well enough to educate the students under their tutelage. While their pay remains at middle- and lower middle-class levels, Japanese teachers enjoy the respect of their students and the rest of society. For American teachers,

the social value of their work, which has fueled them through past difficulties, is no longer able to provide sufficient compensation and professional invigoration. One question facing many school people is, "Will there be a job for me next year?" But an even more compelling question has become, "Will I want it if there is one for me?" (Barth, 13)

The drop in enrollment of education majors, experienced teachers leaving schools for more fulfilling and better paying jobs, and the criticism leveled at the teaching profession has added to the shortages of qualified, competent teachers. The areas of science and math suffer the most and unqualified teachers find themselves "filling in" and teaching classes for which they have no specialized education and no desire to teach. The committee who wrote *A Nation at Risk* found that, "A 1981 survey of forty-five states revealed shortages of mathematics teachers in forty-three states, critical shortages of earth science teachers in thirty-three states, and of physics teachers everywhere" (23).

Though teachers may go into college with lower test scores, colleges continue to award them with education degrees because they adequately met the requirements of their major, like every other field of study. Then, teachers take certification exams in the state(s) where they intend to teach and must renew this certification after several years. Most of the people in the classroom, despite statistics of poor student performance, have the qualifications to teach within their area. These qualified teachers must bend to thousands of rules on how their classroom should be run and what material they should cover:

Establishing standards and guidelines for the basics does not mean curtailing teachers' creativity and freedom. The guidelines should not be so stringent as to forbid teacher flexibility or to force all teachers into some particular mold. A recommended pattern should be offered for teachers who need one, but teachers should be free to use their creative abilities as long as students meet the acceptable standards. It is a system that combines discipline and freedom. (Sommers, 19)

Some solutions propose enacting more strict guidelines governing the classroom—guidelines that dictate the time spent on every subject each day and the material covered in this time span that further compartmentalizes the school day. This leaves little room for teachers to exercise control or implement their own ideas to fit the needs of their students.

Educators should encourage other teachers and each other to exchange professional information with their colleagues to broaden their base of knowledge and their creativity. Children tend to learn and remember better when teachers present the material in a creative manner that stimulates the children to ask questions and to think up solutions for themselves. The lecture-style that the majority of teachers use does not require much of the students in the way of independent thought and analysis. Not only do the students not learn, school bores the students and the teachers:

Recent surveys of how students are learning science are discouraging. The National Research Council (NRC) has found that curriculums using inquiry methods which were developed with federal funds in the 1950's and 1960's are little used; students learning science now listen, read, and memorize. NRC has also found that many new teachers do not know that the inquiry-based materials exist, even though the "concept" courses are now available in textbooks. Even if teachers are trained to use the inquiry approach, the current educational climate does not favor learning by exploration; emphasis on accountability and competency testing favors simply objectives rather than the learning of concepts and relationships. (Edinger, 57)

Teachers have the means to stimulate learning in students but fail to use them because of funding problems, laziness, or reluctance to part with tradition.

The fact remains that teachers form a necessary part of education. They can create classrooms with healthy learning environments if left unfettered by the regulations that cannot meet the learning needs of a child as well as the teacher who has day to day contact with her. American schools need to pay their teachers better, treat them as professionals and avoid smothering them with legislated rules to ensure that they are doing their jobs. With better professional education and a little prodding, most teachers can develop into creative and informative instructors if given the opportunity to try new things and find the best methods that work for them and their students. To instill professionalism into teaching, salaries need to be raised and maintained at a comfortable level and class sizes should remain small for the teachers' peace of mind and the students' benefit.

Middle Class Ethos

Apathy among the students plagues America's schools. In the Japanese system, students have an incentive for going to school: a college diploma almost guarantees the security of a lifelong job. The American system of education and occupations does not offer the same assurance. Even with a college degree, Americans may not have a solid, fulfilling career. The long-sought dream of "a college education" has fallen by the wayside since over half of the population has had some post-high-school education, and they have not experienced significant positive results.

The current grading system rewards students with letter grades that really do not mean much. For the brighter students, grades offer reinforcement and an incentive to keep achieving good grades. The slower students, since they cannot achieve good grades, soon conclude that a report card has no finite value. Students mostly produce artificial work. That is, their work has no purpose, no audience, no reason for existence beyond satisfying a teacher, or, just as likely, satisfying whoever developed the dittos that go along with the prepackaged curriculum:

Most kids get good at these exercises, figuring out that filling in the blanks with words or phrases from the test is all they need to do. As soon as these worksheets are handed back, they are wadded up and deposited in the trash, usually on the way out the door in the afternoon. (Wood, 153)

The atmosphere in which we compel students to learn reflects the factory-style thinking of earlier decades. Past educators designed many older schools, urban schools in particular, like factories with passive, assembly-line teaching techniques that have clearly failed to educate the masses of students at an adequate standard of literacy and numeracy:

Standardized reforms arising from the imperatives of the work place do not necessarily serve the educational needs of children. The current wave of educational reform, with its call for standard tests and top-down policies, is hailed as the solution for schooling in a highly technological society; but its high-tech rhetoric is rooted in the tradition of industrial social efficiency that dominated school reforms in the early part of this century. (Altbach, 186)

Most people do not become complex thinkers as a result of working in a factory, yet the U.S. education system subjects millions of children to that kind of environment everyday. The U.S. has labor laws preventing children from working in factories but no laws against schools that treat them like a product, slapping on the nuts and bolts and moving the students on down the line. Some reform

movements simply regurgitated the factory/school concept with demands for standardized tests and a dictated curriculum—update the machines, but they cannot disguise the factory.

Many students attend large schools where educators lose them in the shuffle. These schools funnel the slower students into overcrowded “slower” education programs with too few teachers. Teachers, who have to attend to the slower students in their classes who should attend the “slower” classes, have little time for the gifted and leave them largely on their own. The gifted and talented students usually do fairly well for themselves, but they deserve just as much of the teachers’ time and sometimes get it through advanced classes. The average students, however, suffer the most:

In many large public schools today the average student is likely to be more invisible. In such schools, handicapped students may have individually prescribed programs, tabs are kept on the troublemakers, and teachers may notice that a student in the top, college bound track has taken a nosedive, but the broad middle mass is likely to be faceless. If one’s aim, though, is to save a soul or imprint a character ideal, then every soul is equally worth saving and each imprint deserves close inspection. (Bunzel, 136)

No elementary school should be larger than the principal’s ability to recall the name of every child attending that school. High schools should average no more than twelve hundred to sixteen hundred students for reasons of discipline and the self-confidence of the students. Schools can be further divided within themselves, so that each student belongs to a smaller group under the guidance of a teacher for counseling purposes. Smaller groups of fifteen to twenty students will not overwhelm teachers, and the students will have a designated adult to help them with their school-related or personal matters.

In the past decades, educators generally accepted idea of the breakdown of the middle class ethos because the traditional family unit seemed to be in jeopardy. To compensate, they launched programs through the schools, but the lower classes, to whom educators primarily aimed these programs, didn’t respond well to what they perceived as an intrusion. Yet, the middle-class ethos functions in parent(s) though the definition of the family unit no longer means two parents, 2.5 children and a dog (Bunzel, 83). Because of high crime rates and unemployment, the parent(s) of children who attend urban schools fail to effectively impart their values to their children. The apathy experienced by urban children has steadily begun moving into the suburbs and rural areas as well:

My visits to urban high schools across the country showed them to be large, impersonal places in which students lack a sense of belonging and see no connection between what they are asked to do in the classroom and the world that awaits them outside the school. I found the atmosphere in such schools often unsupportive

of education and the demands and expectations low. Students say that they are unmotivated and that they see no reason to attend school, except that there is little else to do with their time. (Long, 145)

Researchers have found that high schools with twelve hundred to sixteen hundred students produce more literate students than high schools with two to five thousand students. Also, educators can further divide a high school into smaller groups of fifteen to twenty students under the care of a teacher who acts as an advisor, an ally, and gives adult guidance on a personal level.

Students in American schools have low motivation and discipline. Japanese schools cultivate a sense of perseverance in their students while American schools do no such thing. Middle-class American students have had everything given to them too easily, provided by parent(s) who want to do better for their children. These children grow up believing that everything will continue to be handed to them and do not develop their capabilities. Lower-class students do not view education as a way out of poverty and do not put forth an effort. As John Bunzel wrote in Challenge to American Education, "*Willpower* or some equivalent--effort, drive, energy, commitment, some word connoting intention and purpose--would indeed be needed in discussing both the immediate past and the probable future of American education" (27). Parent(s) do play a large role in the educational motivation of children since research shows that children who are not learning how to read usually have parent(s) with limited or no education (Edinger, 15). This statistic greatly affects minorities, especially Hispanic children whose parents migrated to the U.S. as teenagers and adults. Until schools and parents foster a sense of motivation in students, the students will continue to do just the minimum or below and get away with it.

In Japanese schools, teachers give homework unconditionally and especially for the mediocre students. American teachers have stopped assigning homework, despite its value, since the students probably will not do it, and grading homework takes a considerable amount of time away from planning lessons:

Almost all the reports deplore the disappearance of homework, or at least its decline. Most teachers agree. Students cannot learn it all in school. Homework increases time on task, and it tests a student's ability to work independently. Homework can be part of a process of inculcating good work habits and responsibility. But it is easier for legislators and administrators to mandate homework than it is for teachers to deal with some of the problems homework creates . . . [such as] students who don't know how to do it when they get home and who have no one to help them, or students who repeatedly refuse to do it. (Altbach, 206)

Assigning "busywork" for homework negates its own purpose because the students do not learn anything new or work with complex thinking problems. An alternative type of homework sends students out into the community or into their own homes to research or observe for class projects. This requires students to think and act independently, to develop discipline in completing assignments, and actually do something worthwhile. In Schools that Work, George Wood advocates that,

students learn best when they are engaged in real experiences yielding genuine products, that these experiences should be related to the student's daily life and locale, and that student themselves should play a major part in making decision about their work. It is this type of education that will have a long-term effect on students, teaching them how to learn, linking them to their community, and showing them they can make a difference. (59)

Schools can endow a sense of discipline and purpose in students through creative teaching that stimulates a love of learning. These methods should stress that learning is fun, and allow cooperative work and student input into what they learn to develop thinking skills for use outside of the school setting. Homework should form a vital part of American education to develop discipline and independence among the students. Until schools, parents, and the students themselves act, the outlook for American education remains dismal and stymied in apathy.

Universities

Categorizing American universities as an advantage or a disadvantage in American education requires more than a cursory glance. Worldwide, American universities possess the best reputations. More countries send students to the United States for higher education than to any other country. However, the decline in elementary and secondary education has affected the standards of American universities. Foreign countries send their best and brightest students to U.S. colleges; American students, except for the very top students, can hardly compete with these dedicated and disciplined individuals. Graduates of American universities win many Nobel prizes, but these graduates often come from other countries.

American higher education seems to be caught in the same cycle as compulsory education. The students don't learn well enough in high school what they need to get into college. The colleges then

lower their admission standards to suit the abilities of the students and create remedial programs for entering freshmen. Because colleges have lower admission standards, high schools lower their graduation requirements since students can get into colleges without doing as much and the cycle continues.

Colleges should require a certain standard for admission without the aid of remedial programs. Remedial programs belong to the compulsory levels of schooling and not to higher education. If a student cannot manage in college without a remedial program, then that student is not academically ready to enter college. In Education on Trial, William Johnston wrote that "Colleges and universities had created massive remedial programs to cope with hordes of semi-literate students, but kept silent about how their own lowered admission standards had undermined high school graduation requirements" (11).

Why would the "best" colleges in the world feel pressured to lower their admission standards? The answer lies in economics. The admissions standards for a given group of students automatically excludes the lowest positions on the academic scale, regardless of these students' financial backgrounds and abilities to pay for higher education. With lower standards, more students can and will enroll in colleges which satisfies enrollment quotas and forsakes the quality quota:

There is another source of worry . . . that under the pressure of declining age cohorts and tight budgets, our enrollment-driven colleges and universities will subordinate everything, including academic standards, to the need to keep entering classes up to budgeted levels. And that, too, is an old American tradition. (Bunzel, 197)

With the majority of colleges not exerting any pressure upon high schools to produce prepared students and other influences, the high schools relax their graduation requirements to the point of basic literacy as the top goal rather than a minimum standard for every student:

At the beginning of the 1980s, only a third of all American high schools required more than one year of math for graduation. Less than a third even taught calculus. In that same year only one-third of all high school students had completed three years of math. And students in the general and vocational tracks (who make up 60 percent of all high school students) were worse off: only one in five of those students had graduated with three years of math. Half of all high school graduates in the United States took no math or science beyond the tenth grade. (Bunzel, 205)

Taking into account that 58 percent of all Americans attend college indicates that some of these students who didn't take math or science in high school still gain admission to college (Finkelstein, 65).

Naturally, with lower admissions standards and lower quality students pouring in, colleges have also relaxed their graduation requirements. Liberal arts colleges lessen the number of credits required in the major area of study and add core curriculum classes that do not demand deep research, offering only general overviews of subjects. Non-liberal arts colleges require fewer core curriculum classes that offer a broad-base of knowledge rather than one-sided degrees:

In the last forty years colleges have permitted the erosion of curricular requirements so that bachelor's degree can be obtained from 86 percent of all colleges without having studied the classical civilizations of Greece and Rome; from 75 percent without having studied European history; and from 72 percent without American literature or history. The significant change is the foreign language requirement, which 90 percent of colleges had waived by 1966, but that nearly 50 percent now require. (Johnston, 23)

American universities will not remain at the pinnacle if they do not improve their admissions and graduation standards to ensure the quality of students to whom they award degrees. This fact means sacrificing the enrollment quota, the economics factor, for the sake of educational excellence.

Universities and colleges rightfully offer specialization in one subject. However, some high schools have moved to specialized curricula. High schools should not train students for the job market unless the student is academically incapable of entering college. Japanese high schools specialize to an extent, making students choose between humanities and science emphases, but their students continue to graduate with an overall education that has prepared them to enter the job market or to go on to higher education:

[Specialization] is for higher education, not the high school . . . Schools do not need to introduce more and more courses and greater specialization; they need, rather, to teach the full range of knowledge, including the language arts and social sciences in greater depth. The issue is not whether the schools help the United States compete in a world market, but whether students graduate from high school with a strong general education. (Altbach, 34)

In the area of specialization, high schools should leave the task to colleges because, more importantly, high schools need to educate all of their students to the point that they can write a comprehensive essay, complete algebraic equations, analyze a problem, etc., so that the students are ready to face the rigors of college. Universities have the responsibility of adhering to their admissions standards and raising them if necessary so that high schools will fulfill their role of readying students for college by raising their own graduation requirements.

Minorities

For the purpose of this paper, I define a minority group as any group other than white, middle or upper class students. For the most part, this definition of minority includes non-white, poor, and non-English speaking students, but I extend the definition, in specific instances, to include female students.

Minorities present a continuing problem in American education because studies show that minority students do not do as well in school. The United States government has a responsibility to educate minority children, but minority levels of illiterates and high school drop-outs remain much higher than white middle-class levels. Minority children face their first obstacle in standardized testing that results in ability tracking of students—ability tracking that, once determined, rarely changes. Lois Edinger found that,

standardized intelligence testing, in the final analysis, serves to legitimize the status quo and to keep powerless the ethnic groups at the lower rungs of the social ladder. The results of such test are used to justify the non-education of minority youths and to relieve those who are responsible for their learning from accountability. (119)

The majority of students in the slower tracks come from non-white and poor minority classes. The slower tracks in elementary and secondary education produce students who drop out because they are dissatisfied with the inferior education that they have received or who graduate but do not go on to college. The slower tracks probably do not have the “good” teachers and more likely have inconsequential classes, which demonstrates why minorities account for only 2.5 percent of the doctorates awarded in physical science and 2.8 percent of the doctorates awarded in engineering in 1986 (Long, 150).

The size of the urban schools that they attend further aggravates the plight of minority students. Urban high schools boast the impersonal size of up to five thousand students. Researchers have found “an important relation between school size and students self-confidence and life performance: the latter have been found to decline as school size increases” (Bunzel, 34). Educators treat the students in these schools as more faces in the crowd. No one can give more than a handful of

these students any particular attention because too many of them attend school in the same place at the same time.

The personal biases, conscious or unconscious, of teachers also affects the way that teachers treat their students. If, as research claims, teachers have preconceived ideas of how well a child will do in school based upon that child's ethnic or financial background or her sex, then that child has an unfair advantage or disadvantage in the American education system:

Several studies have found teachers to rate white children as having more academic potential than black children when presented with only pictures or tape recordings of the children. Studies have also found teachers expect more academically from middle-class children than from poor children. Teachers then interact with children in the classroom in accordance with their expectation for performance. Observational studies in classrooms have found teachers to interact with, call on, ask harder questions of, and praise middle-class white male students most; lower class and minority students are called on less and their responses accepted, praised and elaborated upon less. Minority male students are the targets of more negative remarks from teachers than any other group; minority female students tend to be ignored or praised more for social accomplishments, while white females tend to be praised for neatness more than males, and for academic accomplishments more than black females. (Altbach, 145)

American education short-changes minorities by the largely unconscious actions of teachers, which explains why the self-confidence of minority children does not increase proportionately as they complete the sequential levels of schooling as the self-confidence of white children increases. However, society gives higher status to a bachelor's degree earned by a minority student than to a bachelor's degree earned by a white student (Altbach, 225).

Minorities, especially Hispanics, also face the language barrier. To succeed in American society, one must be able to comprehend and effectively communicate in the English language. American education should not discourage minority children from learning and speaking their or their parents' native languages, but minority students should learn English so that they can continue their education past high school. Because of or in spite of bilingual education programs,

persons with Spanish language backgrounds in grades 5-12 were about twice as likely to be two or more grades below the grade level expected for their ages than were those with English-speaking backgrounds. Another finding from the study was that those with Spanish language backgrounds dropped out at a higher rate (45 percent) than the aggregate of other language minorities (30 percent). (Edinger, 39)

I did not find statistics lamenting the language problems of Asian or European minorities which

indicates that Asian and European students readily learn English and assimilate into American society. Black students also have problems with standard American English because their parent(s) may speak a dialect of American English. To function in a predominantly English-speaking American society, minority students must adequately master the English language before they complete high school.

Students will have a clearer idea of who they are and what they can do if the education system does not force them into preset molds based upon ethnic group, economic class, sex, or tested abilities. Minority children deserve an education as much as, if not more than, middle-class white children. The problems that have ensued due to the presence of minority students must be dealt with because the public has the obligation to honor these students' right to a free education:

Many young people remain in school today who in the past would have "adjusted" to the educational system by leaving it. Now, the less skilled, less motivated, and less self-controlled students continue to go to school—more or less. Furthermore, law and practice have recently made it more difficult for these young people to drop out when they want to; or for educators to exclude them when they want to. It has become more incumbent upon the public schools to educate all children as much as reasonably possible regardless of the mutual unsuitability of the students and mainstream conventional schooling. (Gold, 1)

Minority students will not go away no matter how much they or their teachers would like them to. So far, American education has not proven itself effective in dealing with a student body that deviates from the white, middle-class norm. Modifying or doing away with standardized tests and ability tracking may help minority students. Teachers must also avoid unconscious prejudices that favor white male students. Minorities make the United States' diversity possible and education must honor these students' rights to a free education.

Violence and Discipline

American schools, especially in the inner city, instead of acting as institutions of knowledge, have increasingly turned into prisons rife with guns, drugs, and crime. Every year, juveniles perpetrate three million crimes on school property. In 1987, school administrators reported 183,590 injuries to students and teachers. Every day, students bring over one hundred thousand guns with them to school (Ostling, 116). In almost any school, whether rural, urban or suburban, approximately 15 percent of the

students bully or become the victims of bullies (Bjorklund, 195). During the 1987-88 school year, students attacked over five hundred teachers just in New York City (Wekesser, 63).

To fight the waves of crime in schools that make the news on a regular basis, many school districts implemented security systems consisting of armed guards, metal detectors, and locked doors. Expenses aside, such security measures should not be necessary. For example, "The New York City schools now operate the 11th largest security force in the U.S. Most city schools have locked doors; fifteen of them use metal detectors; ten schools allow entry only with computerized ID cards. Cost of all the security: \$60 million annually" (Ostling, 116). The teachers fear their students. The students fear their teachers and other students. These kinds of schools have degenerated into prisons that focus on crime and punishment rather than the education of children. When children find themselves placed in a prison-like setting where survival matters more than learning, they develop into juvenile delinquents.

The major obstacle that schools face in maintaining a semblance of discipline appears to be the size of the school. When a school throws together five thousand high school students every day for the purpose of educating them, educators revert to crowd control as a form of discipline because nothing else seems to work with so many people. Crowd control as an educational tool subjects children to a hostile environment that forces students to behave or else. Crowd control solves nothing and further aggravates the problems of gang violence:

"Get tough" law enforcement measures do not seem to work . . . These measures have not resulted in lower levels of gang violence and conflicts between gangs and with police are becoming more frequent and violent...a "siege mentality" is highly destructive to the learning process. (McEvoy, 31)

Any school that treats students as criminals waiting to happen does not deserve the title of "school." These schools maintain "discipline" in a tyrannical manner, and the students see no other course except to rebel—after all, the school expects it of them:

A great many of the discipline problems in public schools are not due to inherently incorrigible children, but often can be traced to the way children are treated by the school and by fellow pupils. Curiously, hundreds (perhaps thousands) of our schools are run more in the mode of military dictatorships than of friendly, democratic communities . . . Management by intimidation, when it attempts to crush all in its path from the superintendent's office to the principal's building to the teacher's classroom, produces more unruly behavior than it ever stops. (Parsons, 116)

Individual teachers, supported by their principals, should maintain discipline by exercising control over their classrooms without stifling their students with threats and “Thou shalt not” lists. Schools should protect their students from outsiders but in such a manner that the children do not realize it or feel imprisoned.

Private and parochial schools do not face the same problems of maintaining discipline. The students may not necessarily want to attend private schools any more than other students do not want to attend public schools. However, parents who send their children to private schools take a more active interest in their children’s progress and will probably ensure that their children attend school and do not create drastic disciplinary problems:

Parents who pay tuition are more likely to be concerned about their children’s education and more apt to insist that they behave properly and keep up with their studies. And parent involvement is one of the most important ingredients in a student’s success. Also, [it is doubtful that] the Catholic schools face the problems [public schools] do with poor attendance and truancy . . . Parents who are paying for the privilege would make sure that their children attend school. The public schools, on the other hand, not only have to deal with children who “ditch” school but with some parents who deliberately keep their children home (presumably to baby-sit or to do homework). And even the best of teachers can’t teach a child who isn’t there. (Greenstein, 58)

Schools cannot solve the problem of violence by forcing children into a behavioral mold because, whether parents or teachers think so, most children do have minds of their own and as human beings refuse to be forced into someone else’s idea of good discipline. As long as parents remain uninvolved, teachers do not know how to maintain control in their classrooms, and administrators implement “security measures” that resemble crowd control, discipline will remain a disturbing problem in American education. Schools should be friendly places where the students can go to find refuge from the crime, unemployment and poverty of the inner city, not a military regime. Schools should invest students with responsibilities for the upkeep of the school to keep the students involved, cut down on vandalism, and demonstrate to the students that they also have a stake in the maintenance and running of their schools.

Closing Remarks

In spite of all of their problems and because of the unique qualities of American and Japanese education systems, both nations have the ability to restructure education to provide a more enriching experience for their citizens. The results of Japanese precollege education hold the highest honors in the world with the most literate and numerate society. Yet the Japanese pay a high price for these results—monetarily and in the academic exploitation of children. American schools produce some of the best individual minds in the world but fail to properly educate the general population at an acceptable and competitive level.

The more that I studied what I originally perceived to be two completely different education systems, the more convinced I became that American and Japanese education systems are not that different. Both systems have problems with violence, minorities, schools run like prisons and dictatorships, strict guidelines for their teachers, passing children who are not ready to move on, basing a child's academic competency on his ability to take tests, universities that undermine their own purposes, and so on. The difference between Japanese and American education lies in the cultural reactions that have resulted from these problems. As far as education is concerned, the Japanese system achieves success—Japanese people are literate and numerate. However, the Japanese system exerts extreme pressure upon children and teenagers. Character building or not, that kind of pressure on adolescents cannot be beneficial. The students resent the pressure and have turned to violence to rebel against a system that has made them suffer. American education has failed to educate the general populace satisfactorily. The United States has lost its academic edge to other nations who invest more effectively in their education systems. To remain an economic giant, the United States must reform its education system because too many students fall through the cracks.

The solutions to the problems of American and Japanese education seem, to me, rather simple and obvious. The implementation of these solutions will be complicated and take time, money, and the will to do better than what past reforms have done. American education can change for the better since the system is decentralized and individual school districts have the freedom and openness to change to develop their own curricula to fit the needs of their students. Yet, wave after wave of reforms have occurred and most have failed to effectively restructure the education system. Japanese education, governed by the Ministry of Education can be changed in one sweeping reform and adapted to by

Japanese students and society--not impossible considering Japan's historical adaptability. While Japanese education has its problems, they will win the economics race against the United States unless educators, parents, and students take advantage of the potential of American education.

I realize now the rarity of my educational experiences. I was fortunate in my parents and in the public schools that I attended because I received a healthy dose of middle-class ethos, ambition, and personal attention because I happened to be "gifted." If all students had the opportunities that I had, then American education would produce much better, learned students. And yet, I still believe that even my education fell short of I might have accomplished--without robbing me of my youth due to studying.

Hopefully the current wave of reforms will bring about the necessary changes to restore American education to the ranks of the "model" education systems. While Japanese education rightfully holds the title of a "model" system, reforms could solve many of the problems now plaguing Japanese society. Radically different or inherently the same, Japanese and American education must be reformed and improved upon for the greater benefit of students and society.

Bibliography

- Altbach, Philip G., et al. Excellence in Education: Perspectives on Policy and Practice. Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus, 1985.
- Barth, Roland S. Improving Schools from Within. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990.
- * Bereday, George Z. F., and Shigeo Masui. American Education through Japanese Eyes. Honolulu: Hawaii University Press, 1973.
- Bjorklund, David and Barbara Bjorklund. "Battling the School-yard Bully." Parents. Vol. 64, No. 4, Apr 1989. 195.
- Bunzel, John H. Challenge to American Schools: the Case for Standards and Values. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Cogan, John, et al. "Knowledge and Attitudes toward Global Issues: Students in Japan and the United States." Comparative Education Review. Vol. 32, No. 3, 1988. 282-97.
- Chung, Po S. "Engineering Education Systems in Japanese Universities." Comparative Education Review. Vol. 30, No. 3, 1986. 417-30.
- Cummings, William K. "The American Perception of Japanese Education." Comparative Education. Vol. 25, No. 3, 1989. 293-302.
- Cummings, William K. Education and Equality in Japan. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980.
- Duke, Benjamin. The Japanese School. New York: Praeger, 1986.
- Duke, Benjamin C. "The Liberalisation of Japanese Education." Comparative Education. Vol. 22, No. 1, 1986. 37-45.
- Edinger, Lois V. Education in the 80's--Curricular Challenges. Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1981.
- Elmore, Richard F. Restructuring Schools: the Next Generation of Educational Reform. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990.
- Finkelstein, Barbara, et al, eds. Transcending Stereotypes. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 1991.
- Fujimura-Faneslow, Kumiko. "Women's Participation in Higher Education in Japan." Comparative Education Review. Vol. 29, No. 4, 1985. 471-89.
- Gold, Martin and David W. Mann. Expelled to a Friendlier Place. Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1984.
- Greenstein, Jack. What the Children Taught Me: the Experience of an Educator in the Public Schools. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1983.
- Grubb, W. Norton. "The Convergence of Educational Systems and the Role of Vocationalism." Comparative Education Review. Vol. 29, No. 4, 1985. 526-48.

- Hendry, Joy. "Kindergartens and the Transition from Home to School Education." Comparative Education. Vol. 22, No. 1, 1986. 53-8.
- Holloway, Susan D., et al. "The Family's Influence on Achievement in Japan and the United States." Comparative Education Review. Vol. 34, No. 2, 1990. 196-208.
- Horio, Teruhisa. "Towards Reform in Japanese Education." Comparative Education. Vol. 22, No. 1, 1986. 31-6.
- Ichikawa, Shogo. "Japanese Education in American Eyes." Comparative Education. Vol. 25, No. 3, 1989. 303-7.
- Isser, Natalie. The American School and the Melting Pot: Minority Self-Esteem and Public Education. Bristol, Ind.: Wyndam Hall, 1989.
- Johnston, William J. Education on Trial: Strategies for the Future. San Francisco: ICS Press, 1985.
- Kida, Hiroshi. "Educational Administration in Japan." Comparative Education. Vol. 22, No. 1, 1986. 7-12.
- King, Edmund J. "Japan's Education in Comparative Perspective." Comparative Education. Vol. 22, No. 1, 1986. 73-81.
- Kinmouth, Earl H. "Engineering Education and its Rewards in the United States and Japan." Comparative Education Review. Vol. 30, No. 3, 1986. 396-416.
- Kobayashi, Testuya. "The Internationalisation of Japanese Education." Comparative Education. Vol. 22, No. 1, 1986. 65-71.
- Lewis, Catherine C. "Japanese First-Grade Classrooms: Implications for U.S. Theory and Research." Comparative Education Review. Vol. 32, No. 3, 1988. 159-72.
- Long, Robert Emmet. The State of U. S. Education. New York: Wilson, 1991.
- Lynn, Richard. Educational Achievement in Japan. London: MacMillan, 1988.
- Mangieri, John N. Excellence in Education. Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1985.
- McEvoy, Alan. "Combating Gang Activities in Schools." Education Digest. Vol. 56, No. 2, Oct 1990. 31-4.
- Narumiya, Chie. "Opportunities for Girls and Women in Japanese Education." Comparative Education. Vol. 22, No. 1, 1986. 47-52.
- National Commission on Excellence in Education. A Nation at Risk: the Imperative for Educational Reform. Washington, D.C.: The Commission, 1983.
- Newsweek. "Ranking the Rich and Poor." Vol. 121, No. 22, May 31, 1993. 22.
- Ninomiya, Akira and Toshitaka Okato. "A Critical Analysis of Job-satisfied Teachers in Japan." Comparative Education. Vol. 26, No. 2/3, 1990. 249-57.
- Ohita, Takashi. "Problems and Perspectives in Japanese Education." Comparative Education. Vol. 22, No.1, 1986. 27-30.

- Okihara, Yukata. "The Wide-Ranging Nature of the Japanese Curriculum and its Implications for Teacher-training." Comparative Education. Vol. 22, No. 1, 1986. 13-8.
- Ostling, Richard N. and Jordan Bonfant. "Shootouts in the Schools." Time. Vol. 134, No. 21, Nov 20, 1989. 116.
- Parsons, Cynthia. Seeds: Some Good Ways to Improve our Schools. Santa Barbara, Cal.: Woodbridge, 1985.
- Picken, Stuart D.B. "Two Tasks of the Ad Hoc Council for Educational Reform in Socio-Cultural Perspective." Comparative Education. Vol. 22, No. 1, 1986. 59-64.
- Pierce, Truman M. Imperatives of Lasting Public School Reform. Auburn University, Al.: Truman Pierce Institute for the Advancement of Teacher Education, 1987.
- Sarason, Seymour Barnard. The Predictable Failure of Education Reform. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991.
- Sarason, Seymour Barnard. Schooling in America: Scapegoat and Salvation. New York: Free Press, 1983.
- Schoolland, Ken. Shogun's Ghost. New York: Bergin and Garvey, 1990.
- Shimahara, Nobuo K. "The Cultural Basis of Student Achievement in Japan." Comparative Education. Vol. 22, No. 1, 1986. 19-26.
- Sommers, Carl. Schools in Crisis: Training for Success or Failure? Houston: Cahill, 1984.
- Torney-Purta, Judith and John Schwille. "Civic Values Learned in School: Policy and Practice in Industrialized Nations." Comparative Education Review. Vol. 30, No. 1, 1986. 30-49.
- Tsukada, Mamoru. "Institutionalised Supplementary Education in Japan: the Yobiko and Ronin Student Adaptations." Comparative Education. Vol. 24, No. 3, 1988. 285-303.
- Wekesser, Carol. America's Children: Opposing Viewpoints. San Diego: Greenhaven, 1991.
- Willis, David B. and Carol A. Bartell. "Japanese and American Principals: A Comparison of Excellence in Educational Leadership." Comparative Education. Vol. 26, No. 1, 1990. 107-23.
- Wood, George H. Schools that Work. New York: Dutton, 1992.