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The Path to Adulthood According to Japanese Middle Schools

Descriptions of learning and teaching in Japanese schools suggest the existence of two different worlds. One labeled “holistic” emphasizes personal development and an experimental approach to learning.1 The other is a text-centered, lecture format geared to transmitting information necessary for university entrance exams.2 The first is characteristic of grade schools and preschools, the second of high school. The transition between these two worlds is the middle school (grades 7–9). Middle schools combine a lecture format for academic instruction with a broad range of “nonacademic” activities that emphasize the development of the “whole person.”

Middle schools are accurately labeled. They mark a key transitional point in Japanese education. From preschool through the university level knowledge is increasingly specialized and in this process the middle school is the point when for the first time teachers are subject specialists. In Japan middle schools also reinforce a division between the academic and nonacademic sides of the curriculum. Japanese education focuses on the development of the whole person.3 The curriculum includes a wide variety of nonacademic activities—music, art, sports, field trips, clubs, ceremonies, homeroom time—designed to enhance the full development of the

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(“whole”) person. In fact, the very definition of teaching encompasses not only responsibility for the transmission of explicit knowledge, but also counseling, guidance, and discipline—tasks which in the United States are either viewed as parental or beyond the scope of teachers who are not counseling specialists. Middle school thus retains the elementary school’s emphasis on the whole person, but also puts increasing emphasis on an efficient, teacher-centered approach to instruction geared to future entrance exams.

The nonacademic, enrichment, counseling, and disciplinary activities and the intensifying rigor of instruction establish an apparent set of pedagogical and developmental contradictions. While these are inherent to some degree in any system of education, they are notably polarized in Japan due to the marked emphasis each receives. The middle school sits longitudinally in the middle of this polarity. It also marks a pivotal juncture in the student’s education and occupational career. Compulsory education (to ninth grade) is an undifferentiated system—no streaming, nor special programs for the gifted, the learning disabled, or any other special group. At the end of middle school, students take entrance exams leading to hierarchically ranked high schools then to even more extensively ranked universities. The lack of any formal differentiating mechanism before the end of ninth grade has led to the rise of cram schools called juku and other developments reflective of the real competition. Thus in middle school the reality of stratification through exams confronts virtually all students and their parents with future income, prestige, and job security riding on the results.

Just as the school system begins to make concerted and high-stakes academic demands on them, middle school students find themselves experiencing the onset of puberty. Friendship, cliques, and interest in the opposite sex assume great importance in their lives, perhaps particularly

4. The broad scope of teaching and learning in the middle school curriculum is based on the concept of shidō. Areas of school responsibility are defined as different kinds of shidō. Gakushu shidō refers to academic or subject instruction. Dotoku shidō signifies moral instruction, hoken shidō health education, and shunro shidō educational and occupational guidance counseling. Seto shidō or seikatsu shidō refers to student guidance which includes discipline, counseling, and a myriad of activities or events designed to involve students in the life of the school. For a thorough discussion of the concept and its centrality to teaching in Japan, see LeTendre’s article in this issue.

5. Rohlen, Japan’s High Schools, p. 121.

within public schools which are coeducational. Students begin to develop a varied and independent social life, albeit somewhat tame by U.S. standards. However, unlike in the United States, the looming high school entrance exams define middle school life as properly an intense, academically focused time. Students are expected to settle down, to face up to the importance of exams, and to adapt to the outside adult world in terms of future job and educational realities. The future weighs heavily, and they must consider their talents, family finances, and above all their own motivation and self-discipline in order to fulfill their own ambitions. In the United States, adolescence is seen as a time of awakening individuality and of a gradual introduction to the privileges of independent adulthood. More freedom is the formula and expectation. The two nations, despite similarities in curriculum, thus view teaching and learning in grades 7–9 in very different ways.

This paper asks how the Japanese middle school resolves its pedagogical and other contradictions and sets its stamp on the formation of “adulthood.” Academic instruction and the myriad of disciplinary and counseling activities labeled “lifestyle management” (seikatsu shidō) are contrasted and their synthesis in a particular systematic approach is analyzed. The descriptions and analysis are drawn from fieldwork done between 1983 and 1986 in three public middle schools in Tokyo referred to as Kita, Higashi, and Nishi. All three of the schools are “average” in a number of ways. They are located neither in the affluent central city nor suburban districts nor in the poorer “low city” areas to the east. None of them was seriously troubled by major discipline problems of bullying or violence. Each matched the city-wide average of 94 per cent for matriculation to high school.

Academic Instruction

The majority of students’ time in school was spent in instruction in nine basic subjects: Japanese, math, social studies, science, an elective (invariably English), art, music, health/PE, and shop/home economics. Of a total of 32 class hours per week, 27 were classified as instruction. The other five hours a week were allocated to health, moral, and educational and occupational guidance, and special nonacademic activities that were part of student guidance. Despite the teacher emphasis on the importance of these five hours to the middle school goal of personal development, regular subject instruction dominated the school day.


8. All names of places, institutions, and individuals are fictional.
Japanese public school teachers rarely deviate very far or very long from the official Ministry of Education approved texts. Unlike teachers in the United States who often tailor texts to local needs and their own teaching styles, Japanese teachers are forced to adhere closely to the text because (1) the pace required to cover the material does not leave time for extras and (2) the national curriculum is the basis for high school entrance exams. Disregarding the text will handicap students in the competition for places in high school. In short, ministry guidelines, ministry-approved texts, and training for exams wrest instructional control out of the hands of individual teachers and even individual schools.

Classroom Organization. Teaching style and classroom organization are as homogeneous as the curriculum. All instruction is large-group instruction. I found no multitask organization of classrooms and small-group work was rare in academic subjects (Japanese, math, social studies, science, and English). This contrasts somewhat with elementary schools and illustrates that teachers are under pressure to provide an “equal” education geared to the most efficient transmission of material for entrance exam preparation. Consequently, most classes were text-centered lectures.

Lecture classes in middle schools mean that student participation is limited to teachers stopping briefly to probe students for answers, opinions, or reiterations. There is minimal time for discussion of tangential topics, for eliciting student opinions, or for organizing hands-on or experimental projects. This pattern is in strong contrast to student-centered classes typical in early elementary schooling in Japan where teachers often engage students through lesson-related activities in which students find their way to a teacher-determined awareness or understanding.9

Okabe-sensei’s English class, for example, epitomized the teacher-centered, text-oriented approach. A description of one of his typical classes from my field notes illustrates the style:

When Okabe-sensei walks into the class a few minutes after the bell has rung, the class slowly quiets down for the opening greeting. A student calls out “Stand up!” and the students rise. “Attention!” he calls, and most students stand straight without talking. “Nakamura, be quiet!” Okabe-sensei reprimands one boy. “Bow!” says the voice. Everyone bows and sits down. As the noisesubsides, Okabe-sensei says, “Now take out your textbooks and turn to page 14. Today we will begin Lesson 4. This lesson deals with comparatives and superlatives. In Japanese we use motto (more) and ichiban (the most) plus an adjective to express such differences. Please look at the key sentence at the bottom of the page. I am smaller than a whale,” he reads. He translates the sentence into Japanese and explains the basic rule for forming English comparatives. “In English you add -er

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to some adjectives to form the comparative. Now let’s listen to the tape.” He plays the tape recorder and the students repeat the new words and the six sentences of text after the tape recorder as a group.

At the end of the tape he asks who has looked up the meaning of the words for this lesson. “Have you done your lesson preparation? Nakamura, what does ocean mean?” The boy quickly turns around to face the front. “You don’t know? I thought so. You’d better prepare next time. Kubo, what about you?” This student is unable to answer either. “Sasaki,” he says calling on a better student to get the answer. This goes on until the new vocabulary words have been defined. He instructs the students to get out their notebooks and copy what he puts on the board. He puts up the key sentence. Under it he writes S be (verb) + er than (noun) and gives a Japanese translation.

“I want you to memorize this sentence.” He repeats the sentence and asks five students to stand up and read it from the book and then another two to repeat it without looking. He seems to call on the less able students to read and better students to repeat without looking. Next he reads the first sentence and calls on a student to stand and translate it. “Very good,” he says of the performance and repeats the translation. The class is very quiet as students write the translation under the English in their books. He continues to call on better students to translate, correcting and supplementing their translations. All students can answer. He then asks two students to read the whole dialogue. Just as the second student begins to read the last sentence, the bell chimes the end of class. Okabe-sensei has him finish reading. The students stand, bow, and class is dismissed.

Okabe’s class was typical in that (1) digressions and discussion did not impede the efficient transmission of material; (2) personal opinions, jokes, or practical examples to make classes more relevant were rare; and (3) students were not involved in group problem-solving trying to figure out the grammatical rule from examples themselves as they might be in a more student-centered class.

Not all classes were as completely text-oriented and teacher-centered as this. Some teachers paused to bring in practical everyday examples and problems, or to relate their personal experiences and opinions, yet few classes had even 15 or 20 minutes of student-centered activities. On occasion teachers gave students five to ten minutes of independent work time at the end of the period. Invariably this time was spent doing comprehension questions and drills from workbooks designed to reinforce text material. In only one out of my 103 class observations used in this analysis did a teacher of Japanese give small groups of students time to discuss the relevance of a reading in the text to a contemporary problem—that of bullying in schools. Only one teacher out of 39 teachers regularly had students present text material to the class. This social studies teacher as-
signed groups of students sections in the seventh-grade geography text. He reverted to lecturing the following year when he taught eighth-grade history, a subject he deemed too difficult for student presentation. In academic subjects only science labs, scheduled once every two to three weeks, approached the more student-centered or experimental teaching methods.

In sum, both compared to early elementary school in Japan and to many American middle schools, instruction in Japanese middle school classes is soberingly intense, fact-filled, and routinized. Motivation must come from the students and self-discipline is at a premium. There is little, if any, provision for individual differences either in interests or abilities.

Teaching Styles and Ideology. Small differences in teaching style, furthermore, were the basis of bitter disagreements among the faculty. The ministry with its local administrative bodies and the Japan Teachers Union acted as lightning rods in this debate. Polarized faculties tended to align themselves strongly with one or the other side. Union membership or active participation in ministry-sponsored activities did not always predict teaching style; however, small differences in teaching styles tended to express subtle, yet important ideological differences among teachers who became entwined in the ministry/union rivalry.

Teachers aligned with the administration had more teacher-centered, text-oriented classes while union teachers’ concern with the less academically able students led them to stress motivating and engaging students more than the transmission of exam-useful information. Union teachers attempted to make subjects “relevant” and interesting. They criticized administration-aligned teachers for being “authoritarian” and of “teaching at a level above students’ heads.” In contrast, the administration-aligned teachers referred to the “inadequate teaching standards,” “noisy” or “unruly” classes of union teachers who ignored the “real” needs of students—preparation for entrance examinations.

The fairly even divisions between union and non-union members at my field schools eliminated overall differences in the teaching styles between the schools. More to the point, however, is that the differences were not very large in a comparative sense, but because there is so little room for variation and experiment for middle-school teachers, even small differences seemed very large in the charged political atmosphere of the school.

Evaluation. Teacher-centered, text-oriented classes were matched by evaluation methods that stressed individual mastery of material in the text. In academic subjects, performance on written, short-answer, multiple choice, or fill-in-the-blank type midterm and final examinations overwhelmingly determined the final grades. Neither verbal ability, nor class participation, nor the ability to work in groups, nor the ability to write well significantly affected grades.

Students received term grades on a numerical scale of five to one cor-
responding to the A to F scale used in the United States. To rule out grade inflation, the Tokyo Board of Education set the percentages of each grade teachers could give according to a normal distribution curve. Thus for each subject 7 per cent of all students in a grade level received 1s and 7 per cent 5s. Another 24 per cent received 2s, 38 per cent 3s, and 24 per cent 4s. Whether everyone does poorly or well, grade distribution stays the same, tying individual scores to the performance of the rest of the class.

Teachers of academic subjects based no less than 60 per cent of grades on exam scores. In nonacademic subjects (art, music, health/PE, home economics/shop), written exams accounted for approximately 40 per cent of final grades. Midterms and finals usually accounted for 70—80 per cent of grades in academic subjects. One social studies teacher said he calculated 70 per cent of grades from midterms and finals, 20 per cent from quizzes and homework, and 10 per cent from attitude. A science teacher gave two quizzes which counted for 16 per cent of the grade. Midterms and finals accounted for the remaining 84 per cent. He subtracted points on an ad hoc basis for poor attitude. One English teacher said he derived 90 per cent of grades from exams and 10 per cent from attitude. In practice, he determined grades solely from exams then docked students with “attitude problems” as much as a whole numerical score on the report card.

Other non-test forms of evaluation had almost no place in final grades. Teachers did assign book reports in Japanese class and independent science or social studies projects for summer homework, but these contributed little to final grades. One science teacher assigned independent science projects for summer homework, but weighted them as only one part of his quiz grade which comprised only 20 per cent of the final grade. Even the teacher who used student presentation of class material counted the presentation as only a nongraded homework assignment. Together with lecture-style classes, the weight of examinations in determining final grades stresses individual comprehension of a specific block of codified information, prefiguring of course the form of high school entrance examinations.

**Juku and Classroom Instruction.** The wide variety of types of *juku* that compensate for the public school system’s lack of individualized instruction and differentiating mechanisms before the high school level have a substantial, yet equivocal effect on classes. On the one hand, *juku* probably dampen the demands for already overburdened teachers to provide extensive after-school or vacation remedial help to students who have fallen behind. At each of my field schools, grade level faculty teams established some kind of informal remedial tutoring for struggling second- and third-year students. Yet as teachers admitted, they could not provide enough help nor did their help solve the basic problem of what to do with students who were not keeping up with the curriculum. *Juku* fill this gap. They may also heighten students’ awareness of the need for serious study, reinforcing the
disciplinary and academic messages of school. The more frequent exposure to demands for study and information on the realities of “examination hell” may gradually motivate students toward harder work.

On the other hand, many teachers expressed guardedly negative reactions to juku. Juku undermine teachers’ authority as subject specialists: even though they may be as knowledgeable as juku teachers, public school teachers cannot express the extent of their knowledge because they must follow the curriculum. Juku teachers, by contrast, can provide more specialized knowledge and training for exams. Teachers also felt that juku attendance essentially undermined classroom discipline. A common complaint was that students attending “express” juku aiming at entrance to elite schools became bored and disrupted class because they were so far ahead of their regular classes.

Summary. To an American observer this picture of Japanese instruction looks decidedly uninspiring and old-fashioned. At best it seems an efficient approach for conveying masses of information. In the United States, the newest pedagogical trends emphasize both student-centered or cooperative learning and incorporation of “enrichment” or nonacademic content—art, music, drama, physical activity—into academic subjects. The goal is the participation of all students in class by teaching to the diverse learning styles of different students. By implication, total reliance on lectures alienates many students who cannot succeed in the traditional classroom setting. If lecture-style classes have been so alienating, why are Japanese schools not plagued by alienation and consequent problems of discipline and deviance?

In fact, by several indices the middle school is the most problematic level of Japanese schooling. Over the past ten years statistics in the Government White Paper on Youth show the highest rates of bullying, violence, and school refusal in Japan among middle school youth. Compared to the problems of drugs and violence in the United States, Japanese school problems of deviance and student motivation seem mild, yet are of great concern to educators and the public in Japan.

Instead of incorporating nonacademic content into academic courses, Japanese middle schools pursue a different approach both to promote student involvement in schools and to create social order conducive to lecture-

10. For a concrete example of new teaching strategies for classroom teachers, see Bernice McCarthy, The 4-MAT System: Teaching to Learning Styles with Right/Left Mode Techniques (Barrington, Ill.: EXCEL Inc., 1987).


style classes. The Japanese middle school curriculum includes a large but separate dose of nonacademic activities. Japanese middle school students actually spend proportionately more time on nonacademic subjects and activities than their American counterparts.\textsuperscript{13} Some activities, such as the weekly “required club” period or long homeroom periods, are part of the weekly schedule. Others such as field trips, ceremonies, special events, and preparation time for special events pepper the school calendar with so many breaks from regular classes that there are few weeks when classes are not cut to accommodate some special activity. Along with extracurricular clubs, these special activities are designed to increase students’ participation and sense of belonging to the school. Compared to the United States, Japanese middle schools spend less time on academics, but use a more efficient, focused method of information transfer which in turn allows more time for the nonacademic side of the curriculum. The nonacademic side of middle school also includes the central concept of lifestyle guidance (\textit{seikatsu shidō}).

\textit{Lifestyle Guidance}

Lifestyle guidance is a set of disciplinary practices meant to mold student lifestyles and attitudes both in and out of school. It encompasses the kinds of classroom management or disciplinary activities familiar to American teachers, but is more far-reaching in its meticulous regulation of the students’ use of time, their appearance, movements, and their home life. The goals are healthy social, emotional, and physical development; optimal academic performance; and the early detection and prevention of discipline problems.

\textit{Assumptions of Lifestyle Management}. Several assumptions I have distilled from teachers’ comments underlie the methods and philosophy. First, discipline is inseparable from academic instruction. Second, the effectiveness of control rests on warm interpersonal relations between students and teachers. Third, affection alone is not enough; schools can and should engineer a disciplined social environment organized to support school goals. Fourth, teachers should guide all students toward one explicit ideal of student behavior. Fifth, the goals of both school and home—the success of the child—are identical, and require home/school cooperation.

While teachers everywhere believe that discipline is crucial to the success of instruction, the lack of any mechanisms to isolate and segregate “problem” students in Japanese schools tightly couples the success of academic instruction for all students to the teacher’s ability to maintain control

\textsuperscript{13} Hua Yang, “Teachers: Specialists with an Academic Focus or Generalists with Diffuse Responsibilities: A Comparison of Middle School Teachers in the U.S. and in Japan,” Stanford University, unpublished manuscript, 1992, p. 52.
over the most disruptive, unmotivated members of the class. Where mixed ability classrooms are the norm and tracking or programs for students with special needs non-existent, “disruptive” students cannot be relegated to lower tracks or classes for the learning or emotionally disabled. Special education classes exist only for the physically and mentally handicapped. Nor can disruptive students be removed from class or suspended from school; teachers maintain that the constitutional guarantee of equal educational opportunity prohibits such action. In lecture classes disruptions can impede the transmission of information to all students more than in a multitask or individualized class where teachers can deal with individual discipline problems at the same time learning activities are taking place. Thus, the quality and quantity of instruction for the most highly motivated students is directly related to the behavior of the most problematic students, a point most teachers are acutely aware of.

The starting point of control is a close, personal relationship between student and teacher. Japanese teachers portray the ideal teacher not as a strict authoritarian figure, but as a caring role model who exercises implicit, not explicit control over students’ in-school and out-of-school lives.

Seki-sensei: The starting point of all education is the love of teachers for students. Out of love and consideration a heart-to-heart or close relationship of mutual trust can grow. Mutual trust means a relationship in which two individuals become indivisible or inseparable. We Japanese are a people who value relations with others, cooperation and understanding between people. You can’t separate (people with a relationship like that). For example, if two people decide to meet and one is late, the one waiting will wait ten, twenty, thirty minutes or until the other comes.14

The indivisibility of the teacher/student bond is a key element in teachers’ definition of their role. Applied to discipline it means that teachers must never give up on students even when they rebel and resist. They should keep trying to bring the “lost sheep” back into the fold of healthy involvement in school life.

Given this kind of relationship, students who disobey are not just breaking a rule. They betray the love and trust of their teachers. One girl testified to the effectiveness of such an approach in her description of the third-year class trip where a large number of students brought snacks along in defiance of school rules.

Nishino: At the inn in Kyoto, all of us were herded into the dining hall where all the teachers lectured us. Amano-sensei spoke last. She said, “We trusted you this time. After two incidents how could you let us down?” Then she began to cry right in front of us and said, “Even though you

14. All individual quotations are taken from formal, tape-recorded interviews.
betrayed us I still can’t disown you.” I’ll never forget that. We were really moved. I still think we should be able to take candy. I didn’t, and it was stupid of the other kids to do it, because of course the teachers will check. But Amano-sensei really moved everyone with her devotion to us. We really had good teachers at Nishi.

While in theory discipline is the establishment of a relationship of trust and mutual understanding, the school does not rely totally on the tenuous bond of affection between teachers and students for discipline. Nor is the bond of affection left up to the vagaries of personality. Schools engineer environments that build teacher/student relationships. Basically a group of teachers moves with their students from one grade to the next and home-room teachers are responsible for all aspects of student well-being.

Teachers defined appropriate student behavior as chūgakusei-rashii, literally “like or the very model of a middle school student.” The suffix rashii, which can be affixed to most role or status names, implies a single normative ideal and image. Internalization of school rules and norms, realization of the importance of study, and a buoyant, cheerful (akari) personality are the marks of a chūgakusei-rashii student. According to teachers, this is the single image against which all students should be measured.

Teachers everywhere stress the necessity for cooperation and understanding between school and home. In Japan schools set the agenda for cooperation by defining a lifestyle supportive of education and attempting to socialize parents to agreement with it.

“Understanding” Students. These assumptions guide the development of a system of detailed lifestyle guidance and parent socialization tagged “understanding” (rikai) students. Discipline consisted of gathering information on the details of students’ lives, feelings, and attitudes then persuading students to adopt the prescribed pattern embodied in the numerous routines of the school. This emphasis on lifestyle muted discussion of socioeconomic differences in academic performance. Privately teachers acknowledged the effect of socioeconomic status on academic success, particularly in extreme cases. Yet publicly they emphasized how lifestyle or basic daily habits (kihonteki na seikatsu shūkan) determine academic success.

Much of the information gathered on students was a combination of daily activity surveys, diaries, and reflection essays (hanseibun). Activity surveys monitored the details of student time use and personal habits out of school: how they spent their free time, their money, and even what they

Diaries monitored student feelings and activities while essays probed student attitudes toward school.

Students filled out a “Daily Life Notebook” (Seikatsu nōto) every day to remind themselves of their assignments and to allow teachers to quickly evaluate their lifestyle and attitudes. Spaces for school days were a record of homework assignments with a place to check review of the day’s work and a block to use as a diary of events and feelings. The space for Sunday was a time line that students color coded to reflect how they spent their day. In the small section at the bottom entitled “Reflection on this Week,” students checked off answers to questions about how virtuous they had been: Had they done good deeds, helped at home, studied enough, done their homework, and been healthy? Teachers collected the notebooks at various intervals to check them and gain at a glance what they thought was pertinent diagnostic information to be used to help students improve their academic performance and to predict potential discipline problems.

Some teachers also used unstructured group diaries to tap into students’ after-school activities and private thoughts. Fixed groups of five to seven students in a class (han) circulated a bound notebook in which one person each day took turns writing a page or two about anything he or she wished. Although such unstructured diaries took teachers longer to read, they contained more revealing (and amusing) personal information than the “Daily Life Notebooks” in a way that strengthened the teacher/student relationship by allowing personal comments from both.

For example, one first-year girl wrote about how happy she was joining the band and in contrast how bored she was in classes. She added several paragraphs of personal questions and comments to her homeroom teacher: “Why does your hair stand up on end? Why don’t you get a perm instead? Have you always been so short?” In response, the homeroom teacher commented in the margins:

Good for you that you’ve joined a club. The percussion section is difficult, I hear. I’m sure with lots of work you’ll become good. Do persist and don’t give up easily. But about your studies. You don’t understand why you’re studying yet. For whose sake do you study? Certainly not to please me. Everyone has subjects they are weak in. What is important is to begin conquering them, isn’t it? At any rate, don’t run from your weaknesses. By the way, I’m going to get a haircut next week after the Cultural Festival when I’m not so busy.

The group format also invites peer participation in the process of social control. Opening oneself leads not only to close interpersonal relationships, but to the discipline and scrutiny of society—in this case, one’s classmates.16

16. I am indebted to Thomas Rohlen for this observation (personal communication, September 1992).
Schools also employed time-use diaries the week before exams to help students learn to budget their time wisely. At the end of each day students color coded their time use: yellow for time in school; blue for personal time, e.g., bath and toilet, etc.; red for meals; green for free time; orange for study time at home; and purple for other lessons or juku. Every two or three days the teachers collected the records to check student time use and pencil in such comments as:

Cut your TV time to one hour after dinner! No wonder you stay up too late studying and are so tired the next day at school. You still have time before exams. Change your study habits today!

Good idea to get up early in the morning to study an hour before school. You’re fresher in the mornings. I’m sure your efforts will pay off at exam time.

Teachers used a similar format to monitor use of vacation activities. Before summer and winter vacations students received a booklet entitled “Guidelines to Vacation.” The first section contained school rules for vacations, space to fill in vacation objectives (e.g., to review the semester’s work, to help at home, or to work on a difficult subject, etc.), and a time line to color code with plans for a typical day. (The guide suggested using the morning hours for studying and the afternoon for recreation.) The second section had space to write subjects studied, hours studied, a record of activities for the day, rising and bed times, and physical as well as psychological condition for each vacation day. A section at the end asked students to reflect on how well they used their vacation and for parents’ comments and signature.\(^7\)

At Nishi, winter vacation reports included a record of New Years’ present money (otoshidama). This extra page contained columns for the name of the person who gave the money, the giver’s relationship to the student, the amount of the gift, and how much money was spent on what. The teachers’ rationale for requesting this account was twofold:

Tabiki-sensei: We like to know how much money students have at their disposal and how they spend it. It’s not good for middle school students to have too much money. They often buy inappropriate things like expensive clothes, snacks, or computer games which fuel competitive feelings among students who don’t have large allowances because of family circumstances. If they save it, it’s all right and we encourage them to save most of their money.

By requesting this information we also want to help students remember their obligations to the people that have given them money. We return the

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\(^7\) With the cut of Saturday classes once a month beginning in the fall of 1992, a number of schools began to use a short but similar form to survey time use on Saturdays when there is no school.
sheets to them to keep as a record so that they can refer to them even ten years from now when they will need to begin to repay their obligations.

Teachers used the information gleaned from these types of activity records not only to help students develop better lifestyle habits but also as an index of the quality of family life. Teachers often stated that “good” homes had a regular lifestyle where the mother was home to make meals and send children to bed at regular times following the pattern prescribed by the school. Small details yielded significant information. For example, one teacher said that if a child marked that he or she was up until 11:30 or 12:00 at night talking, there was almost certainly a problem in the home.

The faculty at different schools also devised special probes to assess home life. For example, at Nishi teachers carried out an extensive survey of eating habits. The real purpose of the study, not conveyed to parents or students, was to assess the quality of family life.

Tabiki-sensei: When I first came to this school I was told that there were a lot of working mothers and single parents. A lot of fast-food [insutanto shokuhin] or something like tempura on rice [tendon] which can be delivered with no salad or soup showed more clearly than anything else that the mother was working. When I asked later if the mother was working, the answer always jibed with the results of the food survey. I don’t even need to pay a visit to the home when I survey eating habits.

Mothers who are not cooking well-balanced meals for their families are not sufficiently concerned with their children, the teacher implied. 18 Each of these forms of information-gathering codifies student responses in succinct, concrete terms to allow a teacher to easily evaluate 30 to 40 students. These small, concrete bits of information about lifestyle indicate factors teachers believe predict academic performance and discipline problems. Lifestyle is the outward manifestation of socioemotional adjustment.

18. When teachers mentioned working mothers, it was to bemoan their general effect on children. Like comments on “today’s family,” comments on working mothers expressed a sense of general social decline. In practice, there were working mothers of small children with exemplary lifestyles and academic performance which everyone knew existed but failed to mention in conversations on working mothers per se. The prejudice against working mothers focused on the stereotype of mothers working in small family businesses or bars with late hours which made it difficult to supervise home life. Perhaps the issue of working mothers was a veiled indictment of the inadequacies of homes of lower socioeconomic status where women do tend to work.

Tabiki-sensei herself had been a working mother when she was younger. She seemed to deal with the conflict between the ideal of a full-time mother and the reality of working by becoming a superwoman. Even without children at home at the time of my research, her schedule was grueling: up at 5:00 a.m. to cook a traditional Japanese breakfast, at school by 7:30 to supervise early morning club practice, arriving home after 7:00 each night to prepare dinner and do housework before retiring at about midnight.
Frequent essays and questionnaires probed students’ socioemotional status more directly by monitoring student feelings toward school events, peers, and home life. At Kita the first-year teachers collected 19 different kinds of questionnaires and essays over the course of one year. Most of these were “reflection essays” (hanseibun) about the various special events or turning points in the year with titles such as “Reflections on First Quarter,” “Reflections on Athletic Field Day,” “Becoming a Junior High School Student,” etc.

The concept of hansei and the use of reflection essays are ubiquitous in Japanese society. Hansei may be translated as reflection but the term has overtones of self-criticism and confession measured against the yardstick of socially defined norms of behavior and emotions. In schools these essays were both a disciplinary tool to encourage errant students to repent their misdeeds and a means of socializing children to appropriate feelings and emotions. Reflection essays assess student attitudes toward school in order to determine understanding of the fundamental lessons of middle school life: the importance of cooperation, group life, doing one’s utmost, and the value of all work. Just as there is a “correct” lifestyle, so there are “correct” emotions for particular events.

Parent/Teacher Communication. Effective lifestyle guidance rests heavily on parents’ communication with and “understanding” of the school, teachers claimed. Communication included supplying parents with frequent, detailed information on school events, teacher monitoring of home life, and concerted attempts at home socialization. Teachers, not parents, set the agenda for communication, and they tell, rather than ask or consult or advise.

Schools sent home a large volume of notices that both informed and socialized. Each grade at every school published a monthly newsletter containing pertinent announcements, teacher advice, and requests for parental support of school discipline. For example, one Nishi first-year newsletter for the month of May began with a list of the upcoming events, a long section on how to effectively study English (a new subject to first-year students), and a warning that forgotten items (wasuremono) were becoming a problem. Parents were requested to help their children develop routines to insure that they would not forget their necessary books and supplies.

Teachers’ concerns usually set the agenda in parent/teacher meetings.

19. I am indebted to Catherine Lewis for the observation on developing “correct” emotions (personal communication, June 1993).
20. My request for all information sent home with students in one class netted two or three notices per week.
While face-to-face interaction created rapport on both sides, most meetings were structured to place teachers in authority and parents in passivity. Formalized home visits were one of the most important of these occasions. During the first term of each year, homeroom teachers visited the home of each of their students. Despite their perfunctory, 10- to 15-minute, formal nature, teachers said they learned quite a bit.

Eguchi-sensei: You can tell a lot about the family just by the entrance way. If the entrance way is clean and the shoes neatly lined up, probably the family is proper. But if the shoes are scattered carelessly about or the entrance is quite dirty, then we know that either the mother is working or that the home is undisciplined. In contrast, when I went to Wake’s house it was clean and organized, but totally devoid of any sense of home. When I walked in it was cold and impersonal, as if no one actually lived there. At the time I didn’t think anything of it. But when we had problems with Wake, I discovered that her mother is quite aloof and distant from the children. She’s too preoccupied with other activities. My first reaction to the home should have forewarned me.

Like the other lifestyle indices, home visits supplied outward signs or evidence of inner qualities teachers believed they could read easily and accurately.

Parent/teacher group discussions tended to establish teachers as authorities on the child’s behavior rather than focus on parents’ concerns. The basic discussion format was a teacher-led session of parents’ confessions of their children’s inadequacies. Like the use of group diaries among students, parents’ public confessions of their children’s weaknesses exposed behavioral problems to the scrutiny of society—in this case, other parents, where teachers indirectly, yet powerfully set standards of evaluation. A class meeting at Higashi began with the teacher’s description of the academic and behavioral strengths and weaknesses of the class as a whole. Each of the mothers followed the lead of the homeroom mother chosen by the teacher as the representative of the class to the PTA and talked about her child’s lifestyle problems or personal shortcomings. The teacher either confirmed or disconfirmed the problem behavior, then added her own diagnosis of the student’s strengths and weaknesses.

Private conferences between the homeroom teacher and individual parents with their children to talk about academic performance set up teachers as academic authorities. The ability of juku and achievement tests by pri-


22. See Fujita, “’It’s All Mother’s Fault,’ ” pp. 82–84, for an almost identical illustration of a meeting for mothers of children at a day-care center.
Fukuzawa: *Path to Adulthood* 77

vate testing companies to provide more accurate assessments of a student’s academic potential and chances on high school entrance exams detract from public school teachers’ authority. Yet teachers can diagnose the specific causes for a student’s poor performance because of their knowledge of a student’s motivation, personality, and lifestyle. Many teachers said they used this conference to stress the importance of lifestyle and attitude in determining grades. Moreover, for parents who do not send their children to *juku*, the teacher’s advice and analysis are the main source of information for making the third-year decisions about postgraduation schooling or work.

Explanatory meetings before trips were particularly instructional in intent. Teachers repeated to parents the information they had given students about the trip schedule and rules. Infrequently parents questioned the need for a particular rule or practice. During one such meeting the teachers used the question as an opportunity to underscore the connections between school policy and the well-being of their children. They launched into a meticulous explanation of the rationale for the policy which displayed their expertise and experience as well as (at least publicly) squelched dissent.

The annual “Classroom Observation Day” did allow parents a chance to observe one or two of their child’s classes in progress and privately evaluate the teachers. Despite parents’ private criticisms of teachers or school practices, the meeting after class observations was a talk by teachers, not a forum for discussion.

Real parental concerns or criticisms rarely came out in any formal or public meetings. Their confessional or highly structured framework as well as the general unspoken agreement on the need to avoid public controversy discouraged criticism of teachers and the school. However, parent/teacher communication was not totally one-way. To bridge the communication gap created by the exclusion of parent concerns from official communication channels, one faculty member acted as a liaison to the community, privately and informally ferreting out what parents “really” thought of school policies. While specific individual concerns perhaps went unmet, general parental concerns might quietly come to the attention of teachers.

**Problem Management.** Despite the efforts of teachers to bind students to them, involve them in school, change their lifestyle, and educate their parents, they did not always succeed. Their disciplinary response depended on the seriousness or type of violation and the number of students involved, with some variation by school. However, we again see several consistent themes.

Teachers believed discipline was most effective by those closest to students. The organization of the school around homerooms and absence of auxiliary counseling or guidance personnel maximize homeroom teachers’ roles in disciplinary action. In turn, homeroom teachers often attempted to
use peer pressure from classmates or clubmates and build a united front with parents to effect changes in student behavior.

Punishment consisted of lecturing students until they “understood.” Physical punishment, suspensions, and expulsions were technically illegal.23 Discipline consisted of students’ recognition of the error of their ways, sincere repentance, and resolve not to repeat the problem behavior again, hence the centrality of reflection in disciplinary action.

Whether to a whole class or to individuals, teachers used a limited set of appeals for good behavior. They used the term chūgakusei-rashii as a norm defining appropriate behavior; stressed the tendency of uncorrected, minor problem behavior to escalate into more serious offenses; invoked the need to avoid inconvenience to others; played up the tendency of society to judge individuals by their group affiliation and groups by the behavior of individuals; and played on the personal bonds they developed with students.

Small, non-chronic breaches of the rules—forgotten items, talking out of turn, tardiness, running in the halls, etc.—elicited no more than a comment to “Bring it tomorrow without fail,” “Be quiet, you’re disturbing the class next door,” or “Don’t be late again” by whichever teacher was present. Chronic infractions of minor rules by individuals, class attitude problems, and the interpersonal dynamics of a homeroom were the responsibility of the homeroom teacher. Differences, particularly at this level, existed between teachers’ strategies for dealing with classroom management problems. In the union-aligned faction at Nishi or at Kita where the entire faculty leaned toward peer control strategies, teachers established frameworks requiring cooperation and held students accountable for each other’s behavior. Han were responsible for the behavior of their members and class representatives were responsible for class misbehavior.24

These teachers frequently used students to spot and solve problems of classroom discipline by defining a problem then charging a group of class

23. Ken Schoolland, Shogun’s Ghost: The Darkside of Japanese Education (Westport, Conn.: Gergin and Garvey, 1990), argues that physical punishment and violence are very much a part of Japanese schools today. It is difficult to gauge how widespread violent incidents in schools actually are. In my research I never witnessed violence toward students by teachers. However, physical forms of discipline have been very much a part of Japanese tradition. For a discussion of physical discipline for spiritual ends, see Rohlen, “The Juku Phenomenon,” pp. 219–20. At one of my field schools physical discipline, particularly the use of seiza (sitting in a formal kneeling position) was a common practice until the media campaign against physical punishment in schools in the mid-1980s forced teachers to abandon what they knew had been a technically illegal, but they claimed effective, approach.

leaders with the responsibility to solve it. At one such session a union teacher at Kita scheduled a meeting of the class representatives and hanchō (group leaders) after school to talk about the perennial problems of poor class attitude, forgotten items, and tardiness. The students began the meeting themselves. When their homeroom teacher came, the students had listed the problems, but had not devised any solutions. After much discussion and no solutions, the teacher made two suggestions. The students eventually chose his suggestion to keep track of forgotten items and tardiness by han then punish groups with a large number of violations by having them all stay after school.

A union teacher at Nishi who used student leaders and peer pressure to enforce daily rules raised a similar problem (from field notes of the discussion):

Amano-sensei: We have a problem with cleaning.
Yazawa [class representative]: Yes, not everyone cleans and that’s unfair.
Nakayama-kun leaves his work half undone.
Amano-sensei: Is that all right with the rest of you?
Kodaira [hanchō]: But we can’t say anything to our friends.
Amano-sensei: I don’t think that [not saying anything] is really friendship. There are a number of boys in this class who mock seriousness. How about a box to report who is not cleaning?
Kodaira: But that would be tattling.
Amano-sensei: Then why don’t you just gently chide your friends. Telling someone who is not cleaning is helping them improve themselves. You’re responsible for the situation. Hanchō are supposed to help the class representative. You’re more powerful in teaching your peers what is correct. They may notice their error if a friend points it out.

After much discussion and prodding from the teacher, the group at last decided to make a suggestion box into which people could put notes without adding their names.

The difficulty both teachers had generating peer pressure to enforce school duties suggests the limits of peer pressure at an age when peer groups are increasingly important. Unlike preschool teachers, middle school teachers cannot count on spontaneous support for minor school rules. Only with lots of teacher prodding did students reluctantly assume the role of their brother’s keeper.

Other teachers (usually aligned with the administration) structured work to eliminate the need for cooperation or peer pressure and dealt directly with problem behavior themselves. Teachers with peer control strategies assigned a group of students to clean a particular area during the
daily cleaning of the school then left the division of work and responsibility for completing it to the group. In contrast, teachers with a direct style compartmentalized the work and responsibility. They assigned each student a particular area of cleaning responsibility then reprimanded students who did not complete their work.

Teachers often used peer control for classroom discipline problems, but they turned to a what might be labeled a counseling or reflection approach of delicate manipulation of interpersonal relationships when dealing with interpersonal problems, as an incident of bullying illustrates. One morning a homeroom teacher entered his homeroom and found a boy named Miyata crying. When he questioned him, he found that three boys had been asking him which girls he liked. When Miyata did not answer, they pounded him on the head. The teacher instructed the perpetrators to see him immediately after class in the teachers’ room to confirm what had happened. That afternoon after school he had the three go to a corner of the room, kneel on the hard floor, and write reflection essays. The teacher did not like what the boys wrote.

Nisugi-sensei: In short, they blamed the victim. One boy wrote that Miyata was repulsive so that naturally every time he saw him he wanted to hit him. They were frank, but showed no consciousness of their own guilt, so I had them come after school again the next day. I tried to impress on them that just because you don’t like someone doesn’t mean you can hit them. I talked to them about Miyata’s problems and tried to make them see how he must have felt. This time they seemed to understand how wrong they were. I had them write another essay to be sure. Now I’m working on improving the relations between them. I’ve asked the three boys to greet Miyata every morning politely. In addition, I’m trying to build up Miyata. He has no friends so I’ve asked another boy or two in the class to try harder to include him in things, even to just say hi to him in the morning.

Discipline procedures for more serious incidents involved the teachers of the whole grade. When teachers at Nishi discovered that close to one fourth of the first-year students had been chewing gum and eating candy in school, they mobilized as a grade. One day at 5:00 there was an announcement over the PA system requesting about eight boys to report immediately to the teachers’ room. When several of the students summoned did not appear, their homeroom teachers began calling their homes. In the meantime, the other teachers began to extract informal confessions from the students already gathered. At close to 6:00 they reached at home the boy who had allegedly given out most of the gum. His homeroom teacher got on the phone and ordered him to get to school immediately.

After all the students were assembled the teachers began questioning the students and discovered that gum and candy had been trading hands for several weeks. The teachers dismissed the students at about 7:00 and stayed until 8:00 planning what they would do the next day.
The next morning in the homeroom period at the beginning of the day, each teacher passed out slips of paper to all the students in the class with instructions to confess whether or not they chewed gum or ate candy at school, and if they did, who they gave it to, who they received it from, and the dates for each transaction. During free periods that day the teachers collated the data from every student on a big chart, cross-checking the information. Some students reported giving or receiving gum or candy from students who did not confess. The teachers marked these students who did not confess for special questioning. Then they divided students into groups of 10 to 15 by sex, homeroom, and receipt or bestowal of the contraband. The next day after school the library was arranged into a temporary courtroom and groups scheduled for questioning. The four homeroom teachers sat in a line at long desks facing the line of 11 to 16 standing boys or girls. Along the side at another table sat teachers attached to the grade, the head of the guidance committee who came in and out to hear parts of the proceedings, and myself. Neither the head teacher nor principal played any obvious role.

The following is an excerpt from my field notes of the interrogation of a group of girls who received something.

Kasuga-sensei: We’ll begin the investigation of the facts. Each of you in turn please tell us who you received gum or candy from and when.

[The first girl states that she took candy from a friend twice.]

Kasuga-sensei: What did you think when you accepted the candy? Did you know that it was against school rules?

“Yes,” she replied in a small voice, “so I took it home to eat.”

Nezu-sensei: How about the second time?

First girl: I ate it at school.

Nezu-sensei: You knew it was wrong yet you ate it. And the second time your willpower to resist what you knew was wrong lessened. You see how small things anesthetize your conscience into thinking that breaking rules is not a big thing. We’re really disappointed in you. Next time how can you tell us you won’t accept sake?

[The girl sniffs back a few tears. The second girl brought gum but didn’t confess to bringing it yesterday. She says she was asked by a friend to bring it.]

Nezu-sensei: Well, if you were asked to bring sake would you bring it?

[She says no.]

Nezu-sensei: How can you say you won’t? Both candy and alcohol are forbidden in school, but you brought candy didn’t you?

Amano-sensei: Bringing gum is bad but lying about it is worse. Lying is
the worst thing in the world. Really shameful and traitorous. It’s the worst thing a person can do.

[The girl begins to cry. The next two girls had brought cough drops for sore throats. The teachers are less severe with them.]

Kasuga-sensei: What should you have done, when you had a sore throat?

Two girls: We should have either asked permission or gone to the nurse.

[As they go on, the teachers emphasize how such small things escalate into smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol.]

Kasuga-sensei: Such small things show that your hearts are rotting. What would you think of me if I was a student who ate candy and you were a teacher? You wouldn’t trust me, would you? Those of you who are leaders, everyone will do what you do.

Kasuga-sensei: This concludes the investigation of the events. Do you know why you are not supposed to have gum and candy in school?

Girl: Because you can’t study if you’re eating.

Kasuga-sensei: That’s right, but there is also a difference between studying at home in your bedroom and studying at school. In a group at school, small violations of rules can escalate to the point where you can’t distinguish between right and wrong.

Nezu-sensei: Rule violations bring shame to both you and the whole school. If people in the neighborhood see you, they will judge you not as an individual but as a Nishi student. If Nishi’s reputation grows bad, and word spreads, high schools won’t want to take Nishi students. How can you jeopardize the chances of the upperclassmen to get into high schools with such selfish behavior? Would you like to go to X Gakuen [a private high school in the neighborhood with a terrible reputation]?

[They all answer no.]

Amano-sensei: The first time you received gum or candy, wasn’t there a small voice inside of you saying no?

[All the girls raise their hands. There is lots of sniffing and wiping of eyes.]

Amano-sensei: You have both a good heart and a bad heart. This time you listened to the bad one. A murderer is the same; he listens to the bad one. You all haven’t gone that far but you’re fueling the growth of the bud of a wicked heart. Show the best of yourselves! You are girls so you will eventually become mothers. If you can’t differentiate between good and bad, how can you possibly raise a child properly? Such moral confusion will be transmitted to the next generation. This is why we teachers want you to reflect on what you’ve done. Get rid of that budding evil in yourself. In your life now you probably do lots of things half-heartedly, cleaning at
school, committee duties. You have not been concentrating on what you have been doing. Mend your sloppy ways now. For your sake we are angry at you today.

[Most of the girls are almost sobbing.]

Kasuga-sensei wraps up the session: So from today try to rethink how you live your daily life. Let this be an opportunity for you to enrich your life.

After the group interrogation, students wrote a reflection essay with a note from either parent. In their notes some parents questioned the school’s discipline. In response the teachers called an emergency parent/teacher meeting to explain the school’s policy and their actions to parents. Teachers were pleased at the outcome of the meeting; many parents frankly expressed misgivings about school policy, but when the teachers explained their position, the extent of the problem, and their rationale, they felt they had won the support of even the most critical parents.

The most serious problems went to the head of the guidance committee, the head teacher, and the principal who carried out discipline with the help of the teachers of the grade. When a boy at Kita ran away from home, the principal and the homeroom teacher dealt with the parents. In this case, the principal promised that the boy would not be treated as a runaway and asked to write a formal reflection essay. Although even the homeroom teacher wanted a formal confession, the principal’s promise to the boy’s father was honored. Several days later the boy returned to school where his classmates and teachers made efforts to make him feel comfortable. The teachers received the father’s permission to question the boy informally; he wrote an essay but a written record of the case was not sent on to the police.

Conclusions

Japanese middle schools have developed a variety of disciplinary activities to instill students with a disciplined, well-organized lifestyle. Discipline is personal: teachers state that discipline begins with a caring relationship. Therefore, homeroom teachers who have the greatest knowledge of and close relationships with their students are the primary disciplinarians. Discipline is psychological: students reflect on their misdeeds until they “understand,” i.e., internalize school norms and routines. Discipline reaches into the home: lifestyle management is more penetrating than physical punishment and makes it possible to supervise home life.25 This intensive program of social control requiring much time and energy from teachers attests to the need to build social order. The orderliness ascribed

to Japanese society is not given, but generated at many points throughout society and over an individual’s lifetime.  

Detailed discipline of student behavior in and out of school supports a text-centered, lecture-style approach in academic classes where the transmission of knowledge depends heavily on order within the classroom. By the middle school level, academic instruction has moved away from the preschool/early elementary pattern of experiential learning through engagement in concrete tasks to a text-centered approach similar to that in high schools. Lecture-style classes at the middle school level do not mean a lack of emphasis on the whole person. An efficient, teacher-centered approach to instruction is separated from a variety of social, emotional, and moral training activities that occupy proportionally more time in Japanese than U.S. middle schools. Both middle schools and elementary schools define learning as a process of personal development. Formal school objectives and individual teachers’ definitions of education rephrase the ministry objective of “students fully realized as human beings.” Again and again teachers said that their mission was to “aid human development” or to “help students discover themselves.”  

In the United States similar ideals of self-discovery and personal development pervade educational philosophy. Education should create a critical, questioning, independent adult who is “inner directed” in a moral and universalistic sense. In Japan the same terms express a different set of meanings. Personal development and self-discovery are closely linked to an acceptance of one’s social role and its requirements. The goal is the development of an “outer-directed,” compliant adult with a situationally based sense of morality.  

Personal development in Japan is a progression through a number of predetermined social roles. This sequence establishes strong expectations of age-appropriate behavior along a predetermined developmental path. Teachers who have traveled further down the path guide students along the same road toward maturity. Along this well-worn path distinct stages mark what is appropriate for one age and inappropriate for another. Gradually the child moves from a free, unrestrained existence toward one increasingly defined by social demands. Maturity is the ability to fully adapt to outside social realities and responsibilities that lead not to self-negation or conformity in the Japanese view, but to personal fulfillment.  

The definition of the ideal middle school student reflects the transi-

tional position of this stage between the relative freedom of early childhood and the concerted demands for adherence to the heavy social responsibilities of adulthood. In early childhood, behavioral norms for “good children” emphasize a set of traits that facilitate social connectedness but allow personal autonomy. Words commonly used to describe preschool children such as genki (spirited or active), akarui (cheerful or vivacious), and hakihaki (clear or brisk) imply both sociability and autonomy. Even the term sunao (obedient) implies a frankness or naturalness in intent coupled with a cooperative spirit.\textsuperscript{29} Within preschools teachers de-emphasize outward compliance with rules while they gradually cultivate children’s understanding of socially appropriate behavior.\textsuperscript{30} Taken together, descriptions of preschools and terms used to describe the ideal child suggest that early childhood is a time to develop a cooperative, socially engaged child who is at the same time spirited or autonomous.

At the middle school level the characteristics of the ideal student shift. This ideal is one of a well-organized, disciplined lifestyle built on compliance with and internalization of social norms codified in formal and informal school rules. Middle school is a priori a time for study. Thus, a mature student realizes the need to buckle down to serious academic work. Academic classes do not need to be made relevant, entertaining, or even intellectually stimulating. At this level study is a sober business. Sociability is defined not only in terms of a cheerful or buoyant personality but as having good manners and a sense of responsibility. Students who are not dependent on teachers’ explicit reminders and structuring to achieve these characteristics are described as self-aware. Thus, self-awareness in the Japanese context signifies acceptance of one’s socially defined role and its requirements.

These ideals of maturity for middle school students neatly dovetail with the academic demands of the educational and vocational system but are part of a larger definition of human development that is different from that in the United States. As Ruth Benedict observed, in Japan a “U-curve” of development gives the greatest autonomy to young children who are not yet full members of society and to the elderly who have retired from active social participation. The greatest pressures and responsibilities rest on those in the middle—adults in the prime of life who are expected to carry them out with autonomous self-discipline but little latitude for independent action. In the United States, the ideal curve is almost reversed. Restrictions


of early childhood fall away with the emergence of the inner-directed, independent adult only to re-emerge again when childrearing or the physical limitations of old age curtail independence. \(^{31}\)

Japanese middle school with its numerous, specific behavioral prescriptions and concerted demands for serious study is a significant step toward an adult-like adjustment to outside social realities. In the United States the ideal of student-centered classes at the middle school level and individual choice of electives embody the increasing freedom and responsibility granted to question, criticize, and choose in pursuit of independent adulthood. These differences between U.S. and Japanese middle schools are obviously intertwined with cultural conceptions. Educational models reflect and recreate cultural conceptions of development, of the social organization of adult responsibility, and of maturity itself.

**OCHANOMIZU WOMEN’S UNIVERSITY**