

SOME EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS IN THE U. S.

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Next spring some 1,500,000 students will graduate from high-schools all over the United States. They represent the Senior classes of institutions whose total enrollment is some 36 million pupils. The education of these students costs the American taxpayer about 14 1/2 billion dollars a year. This is a large investment in both money and the lives of our young people. What kind of an education are they getting? What are the American problems and do they differ vastly from those facing the Japanese? Let me detail a few of our difficulties and some of my observations in relation to Quality, Discipline, Parents and Administration.

The quality of American public schools is probably our most widely discussed problem in education today. Many of the younger married people, particularly those who are themselves college graduates, are deeply distressed at what appears to be serious defects within our public school system. There are no uniform standards throughout the country except for those supplied indirectly by college entrance requirements and/or the College Board Examinations. Supposedly each state is responsible for all public education within its boundaries but, in fact, each community tends to run its own schools with the degree of State influence depending upon the locality. The State legislature can and does a lot funds for public education from kindergarten through high school but its most direct influence is usually confined to the State Universities. For the most part, secondary schools are run by school boards which are elected or appointed.....this again depends upon the locality. Each school system has its own school board to whom the Principal is supposedly directly responsible. "The schools these boards command reflect vastly different standards. The teachers they hire receive grossly varying salaries and the final results range from splendid to shameful"-(1)- Some schools are frankly little more than trade schools which try to teach their pupils little else other than marketable skills which they can later use in finding jobs. Others go through the motions of supplying a liberal arts background but are, in truth, doing not much more for the children than trying to make them reasonably respectable citizens when they conclude their formal educations at the age of 17 or 18. Still other schools send up to 90% of their graduates to top ranking colleges. Therefore, as perhaps you can see, it is extremely difficult to draw any generalities except to say that it varies widely. However, most Americans are agreed that too much of the current curriculum has been infiltrated by courses which make the school try to fulfill too many jobs, courses which do not basically contribute to the intellectual improvement of the student. For example, in.

some Kansas City high schools it is possible to spend 1/2 of the Jr. and Sr. years taking courses in Public Speaking, Band, Auto Driving and Family Relationships. These are hardly what you or I would call a severe intellectual challenge. The misapplication, by his disciples, of some of the theories of John Dewey is partially responsible for this along with the fact that American families have tended to change their views as to the role of the school in the community and have welcomed the broadening of the curriculum. It has taken some of the burden off their shoulders. Our own Teachers Colleges must also assume some of the blame for they have stressed methodology far more than mastery of subject matter. It has occasionally produced disastrous and ludicrous results in terms of the quality of education received by many of our students. Some of our teachers know the proper way to plan a lesson or how to stand at the blackboard but they do not know what to say while standing there. I believe that some studies, currently being sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation, on the present state of public education may do much to clarify our nation's most pressing needs and desires.

(1) Time Magazine—November, 1959

Parents and discipline should be grouped together for, in my experience, the child who has little or no discipline at home is almost always a problem at school. Our disciplinary problems seem much the same as yours; we have tardiness, absentees, cheating, occasional insubordination and misbehavior in class. Most of these matters are dealt with inside the school, it is the institution which supposedly makes the punishment fit the crime. Some schools have detention periods on Friday afternoons or Saturday mornings, since we run on a five day week, others take away student privileges such as athletics or joining student-run clubs and activities. In extreme cases the parents are notified of the misdemeanor, brought to school and the student is either placed on probation or possibly dismissed. Dismissal, however, is rare in most public schools because of the laws governing mandatory school attendance. For the most part, and occasionally to the detriment of the school, the public schools must either segregate the uncooperative boy or hope that somehow he will adjust to the demands of the school and his fellows. Primarily, as in all schools, the most fundamental requisite for good discipline resides primarily in the classrooms, with the individual teacher.

We too have our P.T.A. and our occasional parents who are reluctant to recognize the authority of the school. I think our index of parent interest is about the same as yours. We have a small group of very active parents in each class, a majority who are only mildly concerned, and those in orbit who are practically complete strangers to the school and its activities. I think our parents tend to try to interfere more, and do dominate, the actual running of the school, sometimes through direct

talks with the headmaster but mostly through the school board. In my school, which is a private institution, it is different. There is a board of trustees but they administer finances only, all academic matters are the responsibility of the headmaster and his teachers. The parents must deal directly with us. This, I gather from talks with some of my colleagues at Komaba, is distinctly different from what happens here in Japan.

Our administration functions in much the same fashion as yours. We have our business offices and a business manager, a head teacher whom we call the Dean, and the various departments organized according to subject matter. The latter usually operate with a single "Head" who is most often directly responsible only to the Headmaster. The Dean's main function is overseeing the discipline and conduct of the students and he is often placed in overall charge of the various student activities which occur outside the academic area. Excuses for lateness, permission to go to the dentist and breaches of the rules for conduct are all handled by the Dean. The Principal's main function is to supervise the smooth integration of the academic and administrative branches on the one hand, while soothing parents and, in most private schools, trying to raise money with the other.

This has been a very sketchy outline of one of the major problems in American education, also touching on some other aspects of American schools which might be of interest to my Japanese friends. I'm sure that there are numerous things which I have left unsaid or unmentioned and I should be most happy to answer any questions, at any time, which you feel need clarification. I should like to take this opportunity to thank my colleagues and the students at Komaba High School for the courtesy and consideration which they have shown me throughout my stay this year.