

Examining the Escalation of *Classroom Collapse* in Japanese Schools and Suggesting Possible Solutions

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Introduction to a Classroom in Chaos

September, 1998. Imagine a classroom numbering roughly forty students, ages sixteen to seventeen, divided evenly along gender lines with twenty female and twenty male students. All the students are attired in various altered and disheveled forms of the school uniform and sport a variety of artificial hair colors, from brown to a seemingly popular shade of orangish-blond, and even pink. As would be expected of a group of teenagers, prior to class they are boisterously engaged in a variety of leisure and social activities.

When the team-teachers enter the classroom, ten minutes late to class, nothing changes. The students' behavior continues as if the team-teachers were not even present. Roughly ten or so students are asleep at their desks. At least an equal number are either sending instant messages or emails or even talking to friends out loud using their mobile phones. Quite a few students are reading large comic books or magazines. There are even a few who are playing video games or listening to music on headphones. A number of female students can be seen looking into large mirrors and applying make-up. Those not actively engaged in the previously mentioned activities are busily chatting away with their friends. Lastly, there is a boy lying down on the floor at the back of the classroom, asleep.

The lead team-teacher, the JTE (Japanese Teacher of English), begins to shout at the top of her lungs. Outlandish as it may seem, she is not scolding the students or screaming for them to be silent. She is attempting to teach. She is aiming to speak louder than a class full of forty energetic high school sophomores. She does not succeed. They ignore her lesson almost entirely and go about their business as if she were not there, pausing only when directly spoken to by the teacher and then going back to their previous diversions as soon as the direct interaction ceases. This continues for about thirty minutes before the JTE dismisses class ten minutes early and retreats back to the teachers' staff room until the next class when she repeats the same process all over again. All this goes on as the American team-teacher, the ALT (Assistant Language Teacher) looks on in a flabbergasted state of absolute horror and disbelief.

International Perceptions of Japanese Society

Although the previous scene is a rarity at college-prep high schools, it has become all too common at the majority of average ranked public schools throughout Japan. These images are a stark contrast to the standard stereotypes disseminated internationally by both mass media and even by academic research. When most outsiders think about Japanese society and Japanese education in general, they are likely to imagine large classes of neatly groomed and academically diligent pupils with an unwavering respect for teachers. The common representation put forward by major media sources, journalistic and academic, as well as by popular movies, is that the Japanese are a severely authoritarian society in which authority figures expect subordinates to treat them with absolute respect or suffer severe consequences.

These common international perceptions appear to be contradictory to the reality many classroom teachers in Japan are facing today. Many teachers at both the primary and secondary levels are faced every day with a group of students who feel they can do as they please without any fear of being held accountable for their misbehaviors, creating an environment where little, if any, learning goes on at all. Although such classroom environments are far from being the norm, the recent perceived increase in their number has sent a shockwave of alarm throughout the educational community. While international media sources continue to rave at the supposedly universal scholastic superiority of the Japanese education system, the domestic Japanese media has been inundated by alarms of a national educational crisis. As Bryan Ross of the *Mainichi Shinbun* put it, “Unfortunately, anarchy is no longer a rare state in the classroom” (1999).

How did the international perceptions of Japanese society come to be so far from reality? Western stereotypes of Japanese education and Japanese society at large tend to originate from the hackneyed portrayals of Japanese people in Hollywood movies. People in America are likely to form an opinion of what a Japanese teacher would be like from the only sources available to them, the 1984 John Avildsen movie, *The Karate Kid* and its sequels, featuring the *karate* teacher, Mr. Miyagi as a strict disciplinarian who expects absolute obedience from his pupil. American exposure to Japanese culture is almost exclusively limited to these authoritarian models demonstrating dire consequences to anyone who offends the authority figure. It should be noted that Japanese authoritarian figures are often portrayed as monstrously oppressive villains whose eventual overthrow is used for comic effect, such as in the films *Gung Ho* (Howard & Ganz, 1986) and *Blind Date* (Edwards & Dunne, 1987), among many others.

Stereotypical Hollywood portrayals are to be expected, but more disturbing is the amount of academic research published by those who, all too often, are escorted by officials in the Japanese government to elite schools, are shown a few highly rehearsed “model classes,” and are only allowed to interview students, parents and faculty that are hand-picked by the researcher’s government handlers, the whole time being misled that what they are seeing is typical of Japanese education (Bracey, 1997; Lewis, 1999). Other so-called researchers publish works about the

Japanese education system without even bothering to get any first-hand information, relying solely on scavenging information from the published works of others. Americans are routinely force-fed this misinformation by their well-intentioned university professors as well as by politicians attempting to exploit this information as a way to assault the American education system (Berliner & Biddle, 1995; LeTendre, 1999; Lewis, 1999).

Even the most cursory of searches for information about the Japanese education system, or of education in Japan in general, will yield a seemingly endless supply of articles written praising the quality of academics, the dedication of the students and flouting Japan's international superiority on standardized test scores. What negative press education in Japan does receive usually centers on school being too strict and on the suicide-inducing stress caused by Japan's system of meritocracy, rewarding for their entire lives those who pass entrance exams to prestigious high schools and later, exams for prestigious universities, and dooming those who are unable to compete academically to the despair of being labeled as inferior until the day they die, forced to take their places among the dregs of society or being forced to become *ronin* who take exams repeatedly until they succeed at getting accepted into a university (Schooland, 1990; Wray 1999; Tsuneyoshi, 2001). This stereotype was not created out of a void. These problems definitely do exist, but there other dilemmas that may be far more menacing to Japanese society in the long run.

It is not until recently that the international media and researchers have begun to look past these common stereotypes to reveal an entirely different set of problems facing Japanese educators: *ijime* (bullying), *futōkō* (school refusal), violent juvenile delinquents, and *gakkyū hōkai* (classroom collapse). These social problems do not stop at the educational system, as children suffering from them are likely to go on to develop other problems that have increasingly begun to plague Japanese society: *hikikomori* (shut-ins who may be so reclusive as to not even leave their rooms), *furitā* (serially underemployed temp workers who reject the idea of keeping a stable full-time job), *parasaito shinguru* (*parasite singles*, describing adult children who live at home long after the time has come for them to become independent) and *nīto* (borrowed from the British acronym *NEET*, coined to describe young adults who are **N**ot currently **E**ngaged in **E**ducation or **T**raining). Every week, if not almost every day, there are stories in the domestic newspapers in Japan leading readers to believe, "Japan is becoming a nation of slackers," (Bremmer, 2002). It seems that the 21st century has either seen a rise in problems associated with juveniles and/or young adults or has finally awoken to problems that have been going on for quite some time.

Defining Classroom Collapse

Classroom collapse (学級崩壊/*gakkyū hōkai*), also referred to as *classroom disintegration* or *classroom chaos*, is a term that has come into vogue to express a teacher's complete loss of control of the classroom environment, describing "a situation in which students ignore their teacher and act up, walk out, run amok, speak out of turn or even destroy supplies" (Otake, 2002). The term,

gakkyū hōkai, hereafter referred to using its most common English translation, *classroom collapse*, first appeared in the *Asahi Shinbun* newspaper in 1997, and was used to refer to a phenomenon occurring in elementary schools. In nearly 10 years since the term was coined, it has been extended to include breakdowns taking place in secondary schools as well, with the majority of articles referring to cases of *classroom collapse* happening in junior high school classrooms.

Common characteristics of *classroom collapse* are:

- students generally milling around the classroom and refusing to sit down during the lesson
- a large percentage of students riotously chitchatting to the point where the teacher's lectures are basically inaudible and rebuffing requests by the teacher to be silent
- outright refusal by many students in the class to perform assigned tasks (insubordination)
- students entering and leaving the classroom, or even the school grounds, at will, even well after the lesson time has started
- active use of electronic devices, such as music players, video games and mobile phones, snubbing appeals by the teacher to cease their usage
- organized playing of card games or other games during the lesson
- in some reported cases (Otake, 2002), organized boycotts of a teacher's lessons

Is *classroom collapse* a new trend or is this a phenomenon that has been taking place for some years? For us to answer this question, we must first determine what is and has been considered a *normal* teaching environment in Japan. Although it would be ideal to include all 47 prefectures in our attempt to establish a definition for *normal*, it is tactically impossible to gather enough evidence to firmly support any nationwide conclusions, so the definition of a *normal classroom environment* will be limited to evidence amassed from empirical data gathered from interviews conducted with informants working in the field of education in the Tokyo Metropolitan Area, comprised principally of Tokyo, Kanagawa, Saitama and Chiba prefectures, as well as from personal experience as a classroom teacher in secondary schools in Kanagawa prefecture. Informants' names, as well as the names of their schools, have been kept anonymous to keep their working relationships with their peers and superiors intact.

My 2½ years experience as an ALT for the Kanagawa Board of Education placed me in three public senior high schools in Yokohama. The Board of education gives an unofficial ranking of A, B or C to each prefectural school based on the perceptions of the students' overall academic ability. Informants working in school systems in the Tokyo Metropolitan Area confirmed that a similar ranking system is used in other prefectures as well. I worked in one *B-ranked* senior high school and was fortunate enough to work in two *A-ranked* senior high schools, one of which is considered to be among the top-tier of senior high schools in Japan. Informants from all three levels were interviewed, with the vast majority having experience in *B-ranked* senior high schools.

Most of the students at *A-ranked* senior high schools will go on to a four-year university education. Those attending top *A-ranked* senior high schools will attempt entrance exams for

elite universities, so pressure to perform academically is high. Behavioral problems in class at *A-ranked* senior high schools are rare. *B-ranked* senior high schools are considered normal, with some amount of students going on to four-year universities, but with many not seeking any further education after high school. Most graduates of *B-ranked* high schools who do continue their education, go on to pursue technical degrees or on to two-year colleges which are usually limited to accepting female applicants. People graduating from *B-ranked* senior high schools constitute the majority of the Japanese population. Behavioral problems at *B-ranked* senior high schools are commonplace. Senior high schools that have a *C-rank* have very few students who continue their education after high school. Informants describe *C-ranked* senior high schools as a dismal environment where chaos rules and very little learning occurs. Behavioral problems at *C-ranked* senior high schools go far beyond simple misbehavior, with violence, against teachers as well as peers, vandalism and other criminal behavior being routine.

The anecdote detailed in the introduction describes an event that took place in the fall of 1998, at a *B-ranked* Kanagawa prefectural senior high school located in Yokohama. In the 2½ years that I worked at that school, I conducted weekly team-teaching lessons with a rotation of eleven different JTEs. Unfortunately, the events portrayed in the opening anecdote do not represent the worst classroom experience I had at that school. Of the eleven team-teachers I worked with, all eleven had to suffer through severe behavioral problems during every lesson. Of those eleven, most made no effort whatsoever to correct the situation. The norm was to teach as if nothing were wrong and to ignore the misbehavior entirely. A more scientific assessment of the situation comes to us from a lengthy observation of public schools in Japan by Gerald LeTendre that showed that most Japanese classroom teachers ignore behavior that would be considered disruptive in schools in the United States, such as chatting or using mobile phones (LeTendre, 2000).

The few JTEs that I worked with that did seem to actively acknowledge the misbehavior merely reacted to it with visible frustration and occasional scolding of the offending students. Using the definition for *classroom collapse* established earlier, only three of the eleven teachers in question could be considered to be subject to habitual *classroom collapse*. The remaining eight teachers experienced either intermittent *collapses* of entire class periods or occasionally experienced temporary *collapses* during lessons depending on the level of the structure of the classroom activities that the teacher attempted. Even during the most highly-structured, teacher-centered or textbook centered activities, usually more than half of the students were visibly off-task.

Most ALTs working in *B-ranked* senior high schools, who served as informants for this article, confirmed that the standard definition of *classroom collapse* could be applied to many of the classes they had taken part in. Those working at *A-ranked* senior high schools confirmed that such *collapses* are completely nonexistent. Informants working at *C-ranked* schools acknowledged that their schools were rife with *classroom collapse*. Japanese informants were more hesitant to concede that they, themselves had routinely experienced classroom collapse, but all Japanese informants believed that it was common among lower-ranked schools and that they knew of colleagues who had suffered from it.

One Japanese informant conceded that such teaching environments existed even when he started his teaching career more than twenty years ago. After graduating with his teaching certificate, he had the misfortune of leaving his easy life as a college student at one of the most elite universities in Japan, for a teaching job at a very low *C-ranked* school. He said that he felt an extreme culture shock, not realizing that such schools even existed in Japan. He confided that he almost did not survive the experience, lamenting, "I questioned what the purpose of education was. I felt like I was a zookeeper. I almost quit."

According to a report released in 2001, by the National Institute for Educational Policy Research, more than 30% of elementary school teachers reported that they had experienced *classroom collapse* (French, 2002). An earlier survey conducted by the Japan Teacher's Union in 1999 found that more than one-third of the primary school teachers responding to the survey wanted to quit, with more than half citing *classroom collapse* and another 16% citing poor relations with students' parents for their main reason (Murakami, 1999).

It is likely that the *classroom collapse* has been a common phenomenon for quite some time, based not only on data collected from JTEs and ALTs that were interviewed, but also based on the documented cases of the sometimes violent confrontations that took place between rowdy students and ALTs as early as in the late 1980's (McConnel, 2000). Culture-shocked ALTs who were frustrated by the JTEs perceived lack of action to correct an unworkable situation took it upon themselves to try to establish some modicum of order in the classes they were team-teaching, with sometimes grave results. McConnel notes that confrontations between culture-shocked ALTs and their students continue to present problems for the JET Program.

It is likely that the result in higher awareness of the phenomenon of *classroom collapse* may be more of a result of media frenzy rather than any true increase in classroom breakdown. There appears to be a conflict in opinions as to whether this is truly a new and increasing crisis or whether this is something that has been around forever that people are just now noticing due to the memorable new terminology used to describe it. Immediately after the coining of the term *gakkyū hōkai* in 1997, there seems to be a spur in the publication of articles about various breakdowns in the teaching environment (Erbe, 2003).

The same thing can be said about bullying (*ijime*) that gained notoriety in 1985 when a girl wrote, "Please stop bullying," on her suicide note. Publications, both mass-media and academic, regarding bullying surged. Again in 1994, after a boy left a voice message on the answering machine of a suicide hotline that he intended to kill himself because of being bullied, there was a glut in the media coverage of bullying (Erbe, 2003).

In the year 2006, a third wave of media frenzy occurred when letters were sent by teenagers to several education officials, including the Minister of Education himself, specifying specific dates that the writers planned to commit suicide to escape being bullied and demanding that the government do something to stop bullying ("Japan's Education Ministry Receives Second Letter Warning of Student Suicide Plan," 2006). The small flurry of suicide letters to government officials were, surprisingly, not all anonymous. Some students included their names and addresses on the envelopes, such as one girl's who bemoaned, "I hate everybody. I will die." ("More Bullying-

Suicide Letters Sent,” 2006).

Juvenile delinquency is also widely perceived to be on the rise, due mostly to the intense media coverage each aberrant event receives. The *Sakakibara* incident in 1997 sparked hysteria that young people were becoming increasingly dangerous when a boy decapitated an elementary student and sent taunting letters to the police until finally apprehended. The average person on the street today appears convinced that young people today are much more dangerous and more prone to criminal activity despite the fact that government statistics meticulously gathered since the 1950s show that juvenile crime peaked in the 1980s (Ito, 2002). It should also be considered that much of the crimes that are currently recorded into the statistics for juvenile crime are minor crimes involving minor shoplifting and bicycle violations, crimes that were not included in statistics in the past (Foljanty-Jost & Metzler, 2003). Although the mass media portrays this current generation to be more dangerous than any before, it was actually their parents or grandparents who were the deadliest with 448 homicides committed by juveniles in 1961, compared to just 105 cases in 2000 (Ito, 2002). Juvenile crime did take a jump in 1996, but has been on the decline ever since and has never come even remotely close to the juvenile crime rates of many other countries, such as Germany, South Korea or the United States (Fojanty-Jost & Metzler, 2003)

We have shown that despite the current interest in social problems involving juveniles and the schools they attend, the reality is that these are problems that may have existed for quite some time and the recent attention they are receiving from media sources may not reflect a “crisis,” but merely a media-created hysteria. Regardless of whether *classroom collapse* is a recent trend or not, it has now been established that is not merely a creation of the media, but is recognized as something taking place extensively at least throughout the Tokyo Metropolitan Area, if not throughout the whole of Japan. Although usually used to refer to alcoholism, the cliché “the first step toward recovery is admitting you have a problem” seems apropos. Whether it is a new problem or old is irrelevant. A legitimate problem does appear to exist. Now, how do we deal with it?

Causes of *Classroom Collapse*

Like any complicated predicament, it is best to analyze the root causes rather than to blindly attack the symptoms. Literature compiled on the subject, points to the following:

- changes in parenting and the rise of individualism
- changes in the family structure
- increased urbanization
- institutional problems within the schools

Changes in Parenting

Older generations might claim that the youth of the 21st century behaves very differently

than they did when they were young. Crime statistics point to the contrary. As stated earlier, the juvenile crime rate was much higher in the sixties through the eighties. Perhaps the generation that was responsible for the two highest spikes in juvenile crime when they were young is also responsible for raising children who are unable to conform to traditional standards of behavior.

After the War, the Japanese population benefited from an unparalleled economic boom, featuring rapid economic growth for a period of over forty years. The wartime generation showered their children with love in the form of material goods and allowed them more social freedom perhaps than ever seen before. During the *bubble economy* it seemed as if the wealth of society were on an eternal upward swing and living a successful life probably began to be something that was taken for granted. Suddenly, a country with deep divides between the *haves* and *have-nots* saw an unprecedented increase in those who considered themselves to be middle class. Even working class people considered themselves to be among the middle class.

The *baby boomer* generation appears to have taken on some values not widely seen before. As Japan moved into the category of economic superpower, young people began to wait later than the previous generation to get married, a trend that was taking place throughout other highly developed countries as well. Young people were taking advantage of the extra time to enjoy life. When they did get the desire to settle down and get married they were far more likely to seek out a *love marriage* rather than go through the traditional channels of an arranged marriage. The post-war generation was much more inclined to seek out personal happiness and it is very likely that they passed these values on to their children.

The wartime generation struggled and has an appreciation for hard work. Their children, the *baby boomers* may have not experienced these struggles firsthand, but are likely to be very familiar with their parents' struggles and have an appreciation for the fact that the quality of life they enjoy today is a direct result of the wartime generation's efforts. The children of the *baby boomers*, sometimes referred to as the *junior baby boomers*, as well as current generation of youth, have not seen or experienced the kind of struggle endured by their grandparents or great-grandparents, and are much more likely to take their families and the opulence of Japan for granted.

Researcher, Hideo Takayama conducts a survey each year asking teenagers what they desire. In the 1960s, they asked for things for their families, like a TV or a refrigerator. In the 1970s, the desires were still family-centered, but more luxurious, such as a color TV or a car. The 1980s saw a shift toward selfish desires, such as a Walkman or a baseball glove. But in the 1999 survey, Takayama was shocked at how many young people could not think of anything at all that they desired, even when prodded (Larimer, 1999). This current generation of youth has had it easy, being provided by their parents' with all their material desires.

Perhaps it is not fair to condemn the current generation of parents for spoiling their children without considering that they are a product of the current opulence of Japan. Even through the current recession, a term that merely means an economic slowdown rather than an actual shrinking of the economy, Japan continues to be a prosperous nation whose residents enjoy an affluent lifestyle. It is likely that previous generations of parents would have overindulged their children

just as much if they had possessed the means to do so. *Amae*, which psychologist Takeo Doi defines as, “indulgent dependency,” is perhaps the central trait of Japanese parent/child relationships (1973). It is natural for parents to attempt to “indulge” their children as much as possible. We can see from Hideo Takayama’s surveys, that as the wealth of Japan increased, so did the egocentricity of teenagers’ responses of what they desire. It seems only natural to assume that parents are expected to give children as much as they can to make their lives as happy as possible. Previous generations spoiled their children as much as they could. This current generation of parents is no different. They just have more means with which to spoil their children, creating children who truly do not know what it is like to do without.

Another common criticism made by teachers against parents is that they are not doing their job to teach children the basics of proper behavior and self-control at home. This current generation of parents waited much later to get married than their predecessors and was much more likely to seek out love rather than an arranged marriage. Self-fulfillment appears to be an important character trait for this transitional generation. There is an increasing trend among parents today not to desire to smother their children’s free will, but to encourage them to do as they want. These parents want for their children to be happy, not only by showering them with all their material desires, but by allowing them to have the individual liberty to have their own will and pursue their own spiritual and emotional desires. The synthesis of a desire for children to express their individuality and the overindulgence associated with *amae* can create an explosive mixture. In an interview with Tomoko Otake, a staff writer for *The Japan Times*, a principal of an elementary school in Tokyo was quoted as complaining that “parents are confusing selfishness with individualism” (2002).

Again, perhaps the parents are being unjustly criticized. As noted earlier, it is standard practice for teachers to ignore what would be considered unacceptable behavior in most American or European classrooms (LeTendre, 2000). Teachers can be said to indulge these selfish behaviors as well. Traditionally, children have been expected to behave properly while in public, but when at home are allowed few restrictions. Boys, in particular, have customarily had few limitations placed on their behavior while at home (Doi, 1973; Kataoka & Kasumoto, 1991). According to Professor Chisaki Toyama-Bialke of Tokyo University, “By comparison to American or German mothers, Japanese mothers are less likely to feel annoyed and more willing to excuse children’s behavior, believing that they are not yet responsible or do not understand the situation” (2003). Despite expectations of appropriate behavior, misbehavior by children often goes unpunished because of the conventional belief that children are too young to know any better and therefore should not be disciplined. Erroneous stereotypes held internationally, characterize the Japanese to be authoritarian and American society to be libertarian. In truth, the opposite is true. In a 1996 survey, “85% of the 16-to-18-year-olds surveyed (in Japan) said they had the freedom to rebel against their parents, compared with just 16% in the U.S.” (Larimer, 1999)

Changes in the Family Structure

Parenting trends employing a precarious blend of respect for individualism and use of traditional *amae* are not solely to blame for a rise in self-centered and publicly unacceptable behavior. Other changes in the family structure must also be considered: the greater age of new parents, the decline of the birth-rate and increase of single child households, the growth in the number of nuclear families, and the amount of absentee fathers and working mothers.

A gradual decrease in the birth rate can also be attributed to the post-war generation's desire for a life with more freedom. Birth rates continue to fall to this date, aggravated both by the number of singles in their thirties and by the number of parents who opt to only have one child. Japan recorded its lowest birthrate ever in 2005, at 1.25 babies born per woman over a lifetime ("Japan Birth Rate Begins to Rise," 2006). Since a rate of 2.1 is needed to keep the population level static, Japan's population has been shrinking for the last few years ("Final Census Data: Population Declining but More Foreigners," 2006). With one or no siblings, this generation of children has not had to learn from the kinds of compromises that previous generations with many siblings benefited from.

Related to the declining birth-rate is the growth in popularity of the nuclear family. Past generations valued the extended family. Previous societal norms dictated that the eldest son was responsible for taking care of his parents in their declining years. Three, and sometimes four generations living under the same roof was common practice. Although this tradition still lives on here in the beginning of the 21st century, it is in a state of rapid decline. More and more young married couples are living alone with their one to two children. The rise in three-person households, two parents and an only child, has taken away a valuable opportunity for children to learn the social skills needed to be able to make compromises and to be able to adapt when things do not go as they would like. A child with no siblings and no extended family living in the house does not learn how to get along with people of different ages (Otake, 2002) and gets to entirely monopolize his mother's attention. In short, children in this younger generation have been spoiled because they are used to always getting their way and are not able to easily make compromises.

In public, however, children are expected to show empathy for others. Traditional child rearing style centers on the parents and extended family teaching empathy to their children to understand how their behavior affects other people. A typical comment from a Japanese mother would be something like, "If you do that, other people won't like you" (Doi, 1973). Traditionally, explicit teaching of proper behavior is combined with modeling by the family members of appropriate behavior. Japanese children are much more likely to be taught behavior through this type of *osmosis* than their Western counterparts. (Toyama-Bialke, 2003).

The lack of the presence of siblings or an extended family is compounded by the absenteeism of many fathers who work or go out to work-related drinking until late at night, sometimes seven days a week. *Time* magazine's Tim Larimer interviewed one Tokyo teenager that told of a strange man coming to his home when he was a toddler. He asked his mother, "Who is that

man?” She replied, “That’s your father,” to which he responded, “What’s a father?” (1999). When Japan was still basically an agricultural society, the children would work alongside their family at an early age and would get to spend every evening with their extended family. In modern times, the norm is becoming an isolated existence of only mother and child. The child who grows up as an only child in a nuclear family, with a father who works late, has only the mother as a role-model, with the absent father and grandfather unable to provide a much needed positive male role-model. Without an extended family or older siblings to use as role-models, learning through *osmosis* cannot easily take place. The mother bears all the responsibility on her shoulders.

Increased Urbanization

One of the chief causes of the rise of the nuclear family and demise of the extended family is the increased urbanization seen in the late 20th century that shows no signs of slowing down. In 1858, Japan was an almost entirely agricultural society, numbering between 31-32 million. From the 1930s to 1945, Japan’s population is estimated to be around 70 million. By the 1980s, Japan had increased to over 120 million inhabitants. Much of the new population left the rural farm communities and headed for urban areas. Now, the Tokyo Metropolis makes up almost 1/3 of the total population of Japan, crammed into a relatively small area (Shinryo, 1996). Even today, young people continue to flee rural communities for the excitement and opportunity of big city life.

Not only do these new parents miss out on the benefits of an extended family, but they lose the sense of community that comes from living in a small town. People in the Tokyo Metropolis often do not benefit from a sense of community any more and often do not even know their own neighbors (Otake, 2002). Japan is often described as a *shame-based* culture, but this shame comes from fear of being ostracized from the group and from the community (Davies & Ikeno, 2002). Teenagers nowadays are frequently rude in public. There is tendency for people living in the Tokyo Metropolis to avoid confrontation and not to talk to strangers (Kataokoa & Kusumoto, 1991; Yamada, 1997). This, combined with the sheer vastness and number of people in the Metropolis gives young people a sense of anonymity and invincibility. They feel that they can do whatever they want to in public without consequences. The lack of a sense of community is akin to the loss of interactions with an extended family. Young people do not get the chance to assimilate traditional values because they do not form the close relationships with enough older people needed to learn proper living through examples, or *osmosis*.

Institutional Problems within the Schools

Parents are not the only ones taking criticism. When government researchers published their findings, they cited “teacher incompetence” as the main cause of *classroom collapse* (Otake, 2002). This may be an unjust blanket criticism, since it is the parents who have the greatest ability to form the child’s habits. By the time a child starts kindergarten, they will have spent from 3-4 years being raised by family members and will have already developed a certain amount of social skills. Teachers of the highest degree of skill and training would have a difficult time

teaching a class full of students that had not been prepared by their parents for the transition into school life.

On the other hand, a teacher who lacks the skills needed to be a good teacher runs the risk of losing control of his class, even if it is made up entirely of students who have been raised properly. In 2002, two hundred eighty-nine teachers in Tokyo were found to be incompetent, including one teacher who continued teaching his lessons even after all the students had left the classroom (“289 Teachers Found Incompetent in 2002, 3 Dismissed”). In 2005, nearly twice as many teachers were judged to be incompetent (“Record 566 teachers judged incompetent”, 2005). In order to establish an environment where learning can take place requires a firm foundation of content knowledge in the subject the teacher teaches, an ability to form good relationships with students, and a first-rate use of teaching methodologies.

A teacher who lacks knowledge in his content area or lacks the most basic skills of teaching methodology is in danger of losing his status as an authority figure. My experience in the JET Program as an ALT for Kanagawa prefecture introduced me to a variety of JTEs, some of whom had an excellent command of the English language, and some of whom could hardly stutter out a semi-coherent sentence without first turning into a nervous sweaty red-faced trembling mess. It was common for teachers to avoid me for fear of having to speak English, even going as far as to duck into the bathroom to escape if they saw me coming down the hall. The head English teacher at one school (an *A-ranked* school) avoided me for almost two full years before I finally met him. When I did meet him and he was forced to speak English, I completely understood why he had steered clear of me for so long. Most embarrassing of all was the fact that many of the elite students at *A-ranked* schools have superior skills in English to their teachers, and they know it. Unfortunately, lack of skill in the content area is probably not limited to only English teachers.

Teaching skill is not restricted to content knowledge. Interpersonal skills are of the utmost importance in teaching (Carnegie, 1936; Fay & Funk, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 1997; MacKenzie, 2003), and even more so here in Japan where the guidance roles of a teacher are considered to be more important than academic roles (LeTendre, 2000; Tsuneyoshi, 2001; Toyama-Bialke, 2003). The stronger the rapport that the teacher shares with his students, the less likely it will be that he will encounter discipline problems. Forming a good relationship with students is no guarantee to avoid behavioral problems, but forming a bad relationship with students sets the teacher up to experience challenges to his authority and damages the harmony he needs to establish in order to teach effectively.

In Natsume Sōseki’s classic novel, *Botchan*, the title character moves from his urban home in Tokyo to take a teaching job at junior high school in a rural area. Being slightly nervous on his first teaching day and being filled with a bit of arrogance at his self-perceived superiority, he attempts to intimidate his students by speaking quickly and loudly in the Tokyo dialect, using as many slang words as he can to keep them off balance. When a student requests him to speak a little more slowly, he responds by scornfully replying, “I’ll oblige you by speaking more slowly if you really cannot follow me, but being a Edo (Tokyo) man through and through, I cannot speak your dreadful dialect, and you’ll have to wait patiently until you can understand me”

(Sōseki, 1904). As expected, he permanently damages his relationship with the students and they proceed to make his life as difficult as possible throughout the rest of the novel. In any relationship, not just teaching, establishing a hostile tone will assure that no meaningful communication will go on between the two parties (Carnegie, 1936).

Possible Solutions to the Problem

- Providing professional development for teachers
- Increasing parent-teacher support
- Hiring more official trained guidance counselors
- Getting administrators more involved
- Decreasing class size and/or school size
- Establishing and enforcing reasonable school and classroom rules

Providing Professional Development

As stated earlier, being well-trained and well-prepared for class is no assurance to prevent behavioral problems, but being poorly trained and poorly prepared can lead to disaster. Professional development begins during the university years, in content and education classes and, most importantly, during the internship period. It is standard practice in Japan, for perspective applicants for teaching certificates to go back to their alma mater for a four week internship that usually consists almost entirely of observation. If the interns are allowed to teach a lesson, they do so under strict control of the mentor teacher who will usually plan the lesson for the intern.

During the time that I worked at *A-ranked* senior high schools in Yokohama, university students came to do their internships each year. At the highest *A-ranked* school, the interns were not “trusted” to teach the students since they were afraid that it could hurt the high school students academically. When I asked about this, I was told that the interns were not real teachers, but were students themselves, and the senior high school students’ studies were too important to turn over to an unlicensed inexperienced college student. After graduation, the interns would start their first teaching jobs without any support from a mentor teacher and without having ever stood in front of a real group of students to teach them. In many cases, new teachers are thrown into a real classroom with real students and must learn on the job without any experienced professional present to guide them.

When compared to internships in other countries, the Japanese system appears comically amateurish. Some countries require interns to train teaching real students under a mentor teacher for a full year before they can apply for a teaching certificate. In almost all cases, the interns will practice teaching by taking over some, if not all, of the mentor teacher’s class load. In most states in the USA, the time period of the internship coincides with one university school term (quarter or semester). The internship is taken for college credit as a university course which the intern must pass in order to graduate and qualify to apply for a teaching certificate. In the US system, the intern is placed in a public school located near the university campus,

almost never their alma mater. A professor from the university will check on the intern's progress and will even evaluate their teaching ability by observing classes. At the end of the internship, the university professor and mentor teacher at the high school will assign the intern a grade for the internship course. If the intern does not perform satisfactorily, he will not graduate and will not qualify for a teaching certificate. Failing an internship is not a rare occurrence.

One way to improve the situation in Japan's public schools is to assure that only the most qualified university graduates can apply for a teaching certificate. I used to teach courses required for a teaching certificate at Nihon University's College of International Relations. Each year, more than one hundred students were accepted into the certification program, yet only a few, usually only 1-3, would be able to pass the certification test. All, more than one hundred, of these applicants went to do their four-week internships at their alma maters, wasting a lot of people's valuable time and missing a lot of their university coursework in the process.

Some states in the US require all applicants for an internship to pass a basic competency test prior to being permitted to do their internship. If the applicant does not pass the test, they will not be trusted or allowed to run a class filled with real public school students. Requiring students to pass their certification test in order to qualify for an internship would drastically cut down on pointless internships. This would free universities up to establish relationships with surrounding primary and secondary schools who would gladly accept proven candidates into lengthily quality intensive internship programs. Having the interns go to area schools and radically reducing the amount of interns through some form of elimination, such as a certification test, would allow university professors to go and evaluate the interns and assign them a grade.

Serving an internship at a school that is more representative of the population at large, rather than at the applicant's alma mater will give them a more realistic training for what lies ahead. Any person becoming a teacher is obviously a college graduate, meaning that they almost certainly graduated from a college-prep high school, placing them roughly around the top 35% of high school graduates in Japan. Going back to their alma mater, almost certainly an *A-ranked* school, will not prepare them for the kinds of problem students they are likely to encounter when they begin their teaching careers.

After they become certified and practicing classroom teachers, they should be required to attend and present at workshops. Workshops and extended training in classroom management would be invaluable to teachers working in *B-ranked* and *C-ranked* or schools that are difficult to work in for some other reason. These workshops could be used as a chance for teachers to counsel each other and to talk about their problems. Being a classroom teacher can be one of the loneliest jobs in the world, especially if you feel there is nobody with whom to confide problems. Under the current system, most teachers never have an opportunity to brush up on their skills or to learn new methods (French, 2002). Also, a strict system of observation and evaluation, especially during the first few years should be used to guide teachers toward improvements. If needed, these observations and evaluations should be used to remove teachers that have repeatedly proven themselves to be incompetent.

Increasing Parent-Teacher Support

Japan and the US are stark contrasts in regards to whom the child *belongs*. In the US, it is clear the parents are the legal guardians of the child and they entrust the school to take care of their children and to educate them, providing a valuable service. Conventional wisdom states that it is the parents' responsibility to make sure that their children behave themselves and not cause problems for the teacher or for their classmates. In my experience, students would usually immediately terminate unacceptable behavior when faced with the possibility that I would contact their parents. In cases when it is necessary to call a parent, the goal (one that is not always successful) is to approach the parent with the intent to team up and work together to solve a problem, with the child's best interest in mind.

When the child is not on campus or taking part in a school activity, the school has little or no authority over what the child can or cannot do. In a situation where the child has gotten into legal trouble, the parents will be notified immediately, and the school will almost certainly be left out of the equation. Such matters are considered to be the family's private business.

In Japan, the child is primarily considered to be a student and is thought to be a ward of the school. The schools typically have a lengthily list of acceptable and unacceptable behaviors and, if the rules are violated, will execute some form of discipline to offenders, usually scolding, but sometimes something more severe. The most certain way to get in trouble is to be caught smoking or riding a motorcycle in public while wearing a school uniform because it brings shame to the school. If the student gets into legal trouble, the homeroom teacher will be called. Sometimes the parents will be contacted, as well (Toyama-Bialke, 2003).

The working relationship between parents and teachers is tenuous at best, both in Japan and in the US. Teachers in both countries cite this as one of the most stressful parts of their job (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Murakami, 1999). Teachers often feel like society's janitors. They have to clean up the mess when a student has severe family problems, lives in a dangerous neighborhood or suffers from poverty. Parents, many of whom are college graduates themselves, are counting on educators to keep their children safe and to provide a good learning environment. It is common in the US, and is becoming increasingly more common in Japan for parents to second-guess their children's teachers and to even question their qualifications (French, 2002; Ito, 2002).

The solution may lie in the technology of the future. Already, many public schools in the US require teachers to post lesson plans, classroom assignments, homework, and test scores on-line for parents to access, using a secure password protected account. Even more effective is that the student's disciplinary record is also available for the parent to access. In some cases, administrators require teachers to inform parents via the Internet any time an official disciplinary action, such as a detention, is carried out. As the proliferation of personal computers continues, it is only a matter of time before all classroom teachers and parents have access to such accounts.

While working for an *A-ranked* school in Yokohama, I learned that parents are only informed about the students' progress three times a year, after each trimester grading period, unless the

student gets into some kind of criminal trouble. Repeatedly scoring low on tests or repeatedly not doing homework goes unreported, as do all but the most severe disciplinary problems. While discussing the grading systems of the US and Japan with one of my former colleagues (a JTE), I mentioned that at the high school in America that I used work for, parents were kept apprised about academic progress every five weeks and were usually contacted any time the student received disciplinary action and were usually contacted if the student started performing badly academically, even in the middle of each the five-week periods between progress reports and report cards. His response was very telling. Contemplating having the same system at his job here in Japan, he irritably asked, "Do parents really need to know that much?" He liked as little contact with parents as necessary, considering such a high degree of contact to be an invasion by the parent into the school's domain.

If the parent and teacher have a good working relationship with the child's best interest in mind, they should not mind working closely together. After all, the child will only *belong* to the school for a few years. His relationship with his parents will last a lifetime. Which should be more intimate? If the child is creating problems or is suffering from problems, the parents and teachers should feel compelled to work together to solve them. If the child's behavior *is* the problem, presenting a unified front will make the child more inclined to think about changing any undesirable behavior (McKenzie, 2003; Toyama-Bialke, 2003).

Hiring More Official Trained Guidance Counselors

This is a case where the Americans and Japanese can learn from each other. The American high school homeroom system features an almost non-existent relationship between the homeroom teacher and the students. In the US, the homeroom teacher's primary, usually sole, responsibility is to check roll and send an absentee list to the main office. The homeroom period is usually fifteen minutes long and is more or less a time for students to socialize a little before they separate and go off to separate classes that they have either elected to take or have been placed in based on state requirements or level tracking within the school. Guidance counselors are no better, as they do not usually have very much interaction with students unless they are in some sort of trouble. The exception to this is when a counselor is trying to help a student get accepted to college.

In the Japanese system, the homeroom is of paramount importance. Not only is this group of students connected together throughout the year for special functions, they usually stay together in the same room all day long. The homeroom teacher is truly responsible for the welfare of the students under his watch, taking care of their regular academic guidance and providing regular counseling to them in their times of need. I would strongly suggest maintaining the Japanese homeroom system where a teacher is in charge of a group of students and that group of students takes part in school activities as an organized unit. I would also advocate introducing this system to the US.

Adding trained guidance counselors would not take away from the homeroom teacher's obligations or authority. Used correctly, counselors would assist the homeroom teacher when he

needs it, when seeking information or when dealing with a problem with a student. Students with behavioral problems all too often suffer from problems at home. Classroom teachers usually do not have the proper training to deal with severe problems. It is times like this when a person who actually has training in counseling should step up to help organize everyone involved, parents, teachers and administrators, to tackle the problem to improve the situation. Unfortunately, many people in the teachers' union have opposed the addition of trained guidance counselors, claiming that it would take away what is widely considered to be the primary school or secondary school teacher's main obligation, to establish rapport with the students and to help guide them through life.

One informant grumbled that adding trained guidance counselors would reduce him to being no better than a *juku* (supplementary private after-school *cram* school) teacher, however, if guidance counselors were added, it would free up more of the teacher's time to focus on creating engaging quality academic lessons. Then students would not have to pay extra to go to *juku* to get the quality academics that are lacking at their regular schools. Some teachers may balk at this concept because it runs contrary to traditional views that the primary goals of teachers are not academic, but to provide guidance (Tsuneyoshi, 2001; Toyama-Bialke, 2003). Times may be changing, however, as a recent Education Ministry poll revealed that an overwhelming majority of 69% of respondents replied that schools should not be taking care of matters affecting children's lives ("How to Cope with 'Classroom Chaos,'" 2001). Interestingly, it was older and more experienced teachers who were more likely to respond in such a way and younger, and perhaps more idealistic, teachers more likely to reject such thinking.

Getting Administrators More Involved

In my 2½ years of teaching at public schools in Japan, the principal, or *kōchō sensei*, was a complete mystery to me. He seemed to be away from campus an awful lot, and when he was there, he always seemed to be snugly tucked away in his office, the only climate controlled room on campus. My first *kōchō sensei* was not a former English teacher, but spoke quite a bit of English (more than some of the actual English teachers), so I would occasionally stick my head in to say hello and to enjoy the heating or air-conditioning for a few moments. He never seemed very busy.

When I asked my co-workers about the *kōchō sensei*'s responsibilities, they gave a very standard nondescript answer, "He is in charge of running the school," which left me rather unsatisfied. When pressed for more information, they came up with the idea that he manages the financial side of the school. They also came up with the idea that he "represents the school" as a figurehead. When pressed further, they did not really seem to know much at all about what the *kōchō sensei* does, and seemed visibly puzzled about it themselves.

American administrators, both principals and vice-principals, take care of the financial management of the school and perform some the public relations duties as their Japanese counterparts. In addition, they work very closely with teachers and students, as well as parents, solving

problems that take place during lessons or anywhere else on campus. Administrators are often required to sit and observe teachers' lessons and to give them feedback on how to improve. The bulk of work that American principals do is to handle the unpleasant task of dealing with disruptive students.

The benefits of an active principal and vice-principal to *A-ranked* schools and the purpose they can serve at *B-ranked* and *C-ranked* schools are very different, but just as important. At higher ranked schools, the administrators can spend more time observing classes and evaluating teachers with the intent of helping them to improve their lessons, as part of their continuing professional development. Although *classroom collapse* at high ranked schools is highly unlikely, the teachers at those schools will have to be rotated to different schools after a certain time period. For Tokyo prefectural schools, the rotation period is every eight years. For Kanagawa, it is every twelve years. Helping teachers to improve themselves while teaching at a high ranked school might help them survive if the next school they get rotated to is a low ranked school. Of course, such observations can also help to reveal severely incompetent teachers who might run into problems at lower ranked schools, including: *classroom collapse*, violent confrontation with students, inability to relate to troubled students, and even the possibility of a nervous breakdown due to stress. Such teachers could be dismissed, retrained or kept away from lower ranked schools to avoid problems.

Administrators at low ranking schools would serve the same purpose as their American counterparts, helping teachers to provide an acceptable learning environment by dealing with disruptive students who might serve as a distraction to other learners. In the US, schools with a high reputation typically have only one vice-principal. Larger city schools in neighborhoods with lots of social problems usually have a few vice-principals to assist teachers. Providing teachers at *B-ranked*, and especially at *C-ranked* schools, with support from a team of principals would send a message to the students that the teacher is not alone, and if things go beyond the classroom teacher's ability to control the situation, there is a higher authority that will come to his rescue. My experience is that even the threat (a warning) of sending a student to the principal's office is enough to cause most disruptive students to alter their behavior. Students do not want to be removed from class.

Decreasing Class Size and/or School Size

Both class size and school size have been the subject of much debate for many years in the US. The final conclusion was that even though it is a lot more expensive to have smaller classes and smaller schools, the benefits are worth it and taxpayers are usually willing to foot the bill. US class sizes are regulated by state laws, so there is a small amount of variation from state to state, ranging from 24 to 32. A recent survey of US parents showed that they got upset if the number of students in a class exceeded 25 (Gordenker, 2003).

Class size in Japan has gone through some reductions over then last sixty years. Prior to 1958, the number of students stipulated for each class was 50. The limit was dropped to 45 and finally down to 40, where it stands today. There is increasing pressure by government officials

to bring the number down to 30 (Nakanishi, 2005). Some officials have even pushed to cut class sizes in half, down to 20 (Murakami, 1999). Cutting class sizes, especially at lower ranked schools and in all elementary schools would greatly relieve the pressure experienced by classroom teachers attempting to manage a lesson in what is already a difficult environment. Dealing with 20 problem students is difficult enough. Dealing with 40 is impossible.

On a related note, New York City can boast of an accomplishment that greatly reduced behavioral problems at public schools in low-income/high-crime areas. The idea was to create micro campuses of no more than 200 students. The program was greatly successful at reducing all disciplinary problems across the board (Darling-Hammond, 1997). Rather than closing schools in Japan due to the population decline, would it not be a better use of the already available real estate to form smaller schools, especially in the case of *C-ranked* schools? The concept behind the micro campus is that it restores a sense of community that is missing from life in a *mega-metropolis* such as New York or the Tokyo Metropolis. Students cannot fade into the anonymity of the crowd when they do something wrong because everybody knows who they are.

Establishing and Enforcing Reasonable School and Classroom Rules

The topic of school and classroom rules is the subject of a research project I am currently working on and plan to expound on at length in a future publication, so I will only go briefly into concepts behind the use of clear and reasonable rules.

All my life, I always thought Japan to be an oppressively authoritarian society, until I came here and realized how libertarian it has become. Part of the change has come from more rebellious and individualistic youth, but most has come from increasingly permissive teachers and parents. Teachers worry far too much about being liked by students to the point that they lose their value as perspective role-models. An abundance of high profile cases of physical abuse by teachers, including at least two that resulted in the deaths of students (Schooland, 1990), has made teachers hesitant to use corporal punishment, which has been illegal for some time. This, combined with cases of violence against teachers, has caused teachers to take a passive posture when dealing with what they perceive to be potentially dangerous students. In today's world, all students are thought to have the latent possibility to be dangerous and suddenly *snap* in a fit of *kireru* (a term that literally means, *to snap*) (Fujita, 2003).

One might argue that there are already countless school rules in place and that students violate them with impunity and that adding more rules will not help. More rules is not what I am advocating. Currently, the school rules for most schools are so numerous and so picky as to be considered ridiculous to the student body. Myriad regulations exist governing not only hair-styles, hair color, make-up, and appropriate dress, but sometimes these rules measure requirements down to the millimeter and, in the past, were ruthlessly enforced by ruler-wielding faculty (Schooland, 1990; Wray, 1999). This is a case where a few clear and reasonable rules are more effective than an enormous glut of nitpicky rules governing the most irrelevant parts of a student's life. Is it really necessary for the school to be notified if the child is going to leave town with parents? Is it really so important that students not be allowed to go see movies in theaters?

Such rules are so ridiculous that they cannot even be referred to as outdated. Such rules **never** made any sense. Students are savvy enough to see through the charade.

Starting in the mid 1990s, students started an open rebellion against dress codes, by dying their hair, wearing jewelry and altering their school uniforms. Even students at prestigious *A-ranked* public schools began to rebel. The girls of the *kogyaru* subculture went a step further by dying their hair outlandish colors of gray or orangish blond, tanning their skin until they looked as if they were made of leather, and wearing bizarre blue make-up on their eyes and lips. One *kogyaru* fashion that became mainstream were *rūzu sokkusu* (loose socks) that resemble leg warmers. This fad fashion had all but vanished by the publication of this article. This brings us to the question, “Does it really matter if they dye their hair or wear make-up or jewelry?” Are there not more important things that teachers should be trying to regulate? The result became an overabundance of ludicrously unenforceable rules that left teachers and administrators laughably shaking their heads, waving their fingers and futilely scolding rule breakers in a Monty Pythonesque manner, “Stop! Or I shall say, ‘Stop!’ again!” (Gilliam & Jones, 1975).

School or classroom rules might not be effective in preventing unacceptable behavior in all students, but the current system of many complicated and picky rules does not serve justice to anyone involved. The opening scene of this paper depicted the chaos of my weekly trips to a *B-ranked* school in Yokohama. I should take this time to point out that *B-ranked* is normal. These were not bad kids. They were just undisciplined. The first few months of my experience were miserable. Some JTEs had developed a self-defense mechanism that allowed them to completely shut out all the misbehaviors and to teach the class as if everything was alright and all the students were on-task. Others were like me, stressed and exhausted at the end of each 30–50 minute session, with the duration of the class depending on how much stamina we had that day.

After a year, I approached my team-teachers (JTEs) about using classroom rules for proper decorum, like I used when I was a high school teacher in the US. The initial reaction was that I was trying to do something terrible to the students and that I should work harder to form good relationships with them. Not one to give up easily, I pursued the topic for a few weeks, only to be told that what I proposed was illegal, as a violation of the students’ human rights. A couple of phone calls later, including one to the Board of Education, and I was able to inform them that what I proposed was completely legal and had the blessings of the Board. They eventually succumbed and classroom rules, **written in Japanese** were disseminated to the new students in April of 2000. There were only four simple rules that were clear and reasonable and had consequences that were reasonable and proportional to the offense (See Appendices A & B)

The day came and the rules were explained by the JTE. The result was that I had almost no trouble with the students for the entire year. Behavioral problems all but ceased. The same was true with classes for all four JTEs I worked with, even the ones who experienced severe habitual *classroom collapse*. The rules were effective for all eight courses at that school.

A few students tested the rules (violated them to see what would happen), as students are apt to do, (Fay & Funk, 1995; Marzano, 2003; McKenzie, 2003). When they did, the consequences were enforced in a “matter of fact manner” (McKenzie, 2003), without any shouting or visible

anger (Carnegie, 1936). This was not a personal confrontation. The rule was reasonable. They knew it and the consequences and chose to accept those consequences. Despite fears by the faculty of insubordination and an ensuing violent confrontation made so famous by other JET participants, (McConnel, 2000), the entire year went smoothly, without any major incidents, and with most of the students eagerly following the clear and reasonable rules that had been given to them.

They were not bad kids. They just needed some leadership. They could tell that the rules were reasonable, so they saw no reason to disobey. When I asked my team-teachers if they were using the school rules when I was not present, they said that they did not, claiming that the only reason it worked for me was that I was a foreigner and that they could not do such things because they were Japanese. I am guessing that the chaos continued in their classes when I was not there. Again, these were good kids, who really just needed to be guided.

Concluding Thoughts

Classroom collapse is probably not a new phenomenon here in Japan, but it does seem to be more common than it was. The strict discipline, enforced with brutal corporal punishment, is a thing of the past. Both parents and teachers are making the same mistake trying to be gentle to the children and non-confrontational, allowing the children the freedom to do what they want. There is a fine line between expressing one's freedom and just being selfish and inconsiderate of others. Changes in demographics, parenting and teaching philosophy, as well as the rise of individualism have changed the educational landscape forever.

Institutional changes are needed, including more counselors, more involvement from administrators, and smaller classes. We cannot wait for the government to make these changes, for we have already lost enough fine young minds to the feeble provincial strategies that are currently in use. It is up to educators and family members to set the standard. Will this be a lost generation that not does not only fall short academically, but fails to learn indispensable social skills? We must choose the path of leading them, and guiding them in their decisions, by setting a clear standard for them to follow. This standard should be taught by setting clear and reasonable limits and consistently and fairly enforcing consequences for improper behavior. Children also must learn from our examples. Without teachers and family taking on the role of leadership, children will be left with nobody else to emulate but each other.

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Appendix A: English Version of Classroom Rules (1998)

Oral Communication B Classroom Rules

1. This is an English conversation class. If students are chatting during the lesson, the lesson will not run effectively. During the lesson, students must listen carefully and not speak unless answering a teacher's question in English or otherwise taking part in classroom activities.
2. When your classmates are speaking English, listen. It may help you later if you listen to what they say. Not listening will make it much more difficult if you are asked a question.
3. Sleeping in class is not permitted. If you are sleeping, we will wake you up.
4. The following items must be put away immediately when the teachers enter class:
 - Mobile Phones
 - Comic Books, Magazines, or Other Reading Materials not related to class
 - Print Club Pictures or Other Pictures
 - Playing Cards or Other Games
 - Game Boys or Other Video Games
 - Make-up and Make-Up Mirrors
 - Radios or Other Music Devices (Walkman, MD Player, CD Player, etc.)
 - Homework from Other Classes
 - Letters

Having these Items out during class will result in a **WARNING**.

"I will say, **You have a WARNING!**"

If the item is not put away for the rest of the class, the item will be immediately confiscated until after school. Confiscated items must be reclaimed at the end of the school day in the staff room.

The offending student must apologize in English:

"I'm sorry. May I have my _____ back?"

Mobile phones will be turned off while they are confiscated.

Appendix B: Japanese Version of Classroom Rules (1998)

オーラルコミュニケーションBクラスでの規則

1. このクラスは、英会話の授業です。もし授業中に生徒がおしゃべりをしていたら、授業は効果的には進みません。授業中はよく聞いて、英語で発言する時以外はおしゃべりをしてはいけません。
2. クラスメートが英語で発言しているときは、静かに聞きましょう。他の人が答えているのをよく聞いていると、後で自分が指されたときに参考になります。
3. 授業中の居眠りは**絶対**に禁止です。授業中寝ている人は、**必ず**起こします。
4. 先生が教室に入ってきたら、下記の私物は**すぐに**しまいましょう。
 - 携帯電話
 - 漫画、雑誌、その他の授業に関係のない読み物
 - プリクラやスナップ写真
 - トランプやその他のカードゲーム
 - ゲームボーイなど
 - 化粧道具や化粧鏡
 - ラジオ、ウォークマン、MDプレーヤー、など
 - 他のクラスの宿題
 - 手紙

これらの物を授業中に持っていた場合は、“警告”をうけます。

“**You have a warning!**”といます。

警告を受けた後で、一度でもそれを出しているのをみかけたら、即刻没収し、放課後まで返しません。没収されたものは、放課後教員室で返却するので、必ず取りにこなければなりません。その時、没収された生徒は、英語で謝罪し、英語で没収されたものを返してもらうように頼まなければなりません。

“I’m sorry. May I have my _____ back, please?”

なお、没収した携帯電話はすべて、電源を切っておきます。