

## SECTION ONE

### THE FELLOWSHIP PURPOSE - ORIGINAL AIMS v REALITY

The original aims of my fellowship were heavily influenced by a desire to investigate the extent to which successful commercial management programmes such as the Total Quality Management can be adapted for use in school, in order to enhance the quality of education provided. The original investigation of Total Quality Management was somewhat curtailed however by the early discovery that such systems are held in much regard by Japanese educators. The emphasis of my research was shifted then to

## **WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST - TRAVELLING FELLOWSHIP 1997**

Fellows need to be prepared for such shifts in emphasis in order to allow for worthwhile work while in the host country. These issues are discussed in the following chapters.

JAPAN - 7 SEPTEMBER - 16 OCTOBER 1997

The following chapters discuss the 'domestic' aspects of the fellowship, from a geographical and intellectual distance before the fellowship begins.

### 'DOMESTIC' ASPECTS OF THE FELLOWSHIP

### THE ADEQUACY OF THE GRANT

The grant proved to be generous allowing for the development of initial plans once in situ.

1997 CHURCHILL FELLOWSHIP  
MANAGING CHANGE IN THE WORKPLACE

AMANDA ROBERTS

#### DISSEMINATION PLANS

A number of different levels of dissemination of my research results are appropriate

#### **THE FELLOWSHIP PURPOSE - ORIGINAL AIMS v. REALITY**

The original aims of my fellowship were heavily influenced by a desire to investigate the extent to which successful commercial management programmes such as the Total Quality Management can be adapted for use in school, in order to enhance the quality of education provided. The in depth investigation of Total Quality Management was somewhat curtailed however by the early discovery that such systems are held in scant regard by Japanese educators. The emphasis of my research was shifted then to an investigation of elements which Japanese educators do regard as significant - namely, school discipline systems and their correlation with Japanese culture, the link between educational success and life chances and parental involvement in education.

Fellows need to be prepared for such shifts in emphasis in order to allow for a worthwhile study of issues which become apparent once a fellow becomes immersed in the culture of the host country. These issues sometimes need to be allowed to supplement or even replace a potentially sterile investigation of areas planned perforce from a geographical and intellectual distance before the fellowship begins.

#### AREA 3 - Parental involvement in education

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The grant proved to be generous allowing for the development of initial plans once in situ.

METHOD - Whole staff training

#### AREA 4 - Government/public support for education

AUDIENCES - Times Education Supplement readers

METHOD - Publication of article

## **DISSEMINATION PLANS**

A number of different levels of dissemination of my research results are appropriate:-

### **AREA 1 -Enhancing the quality of classroom practice**

AUDIENCE - Staff at present school

METHOD - Whole staff training

### **AREA 2 -Strengthening staff/student relationships**

AUDIENCE - Staff at present school/linked middle schools

METHOD - Liaison projects/whole staff involvement

### **AREA 3 -Parental involvement in education**

AUDIENCE - Staff at present school

METHOD - Whole staff training

### **AREA 4 - Government/public support for education**

AUDIENCE - Times Education Supplement readers

METHOD - Publication of article

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE FELLOWS.

- **Start planing early** - Contacts in the host country inevitable take longer to reply to requests for information than one would imagine. Starting to make contacts seven months in advance of my fellowship commencement date did not prove to be over cautious!
- **Take the opportunity to telephone other fellows prior to your travels.** The insights given can be both practical and reassuring.
- **Be brave and arrange accommodation in situ.** The first two or three nights in a new country can be booked in advance but otherwise flexible plans prove beneficial.
- **Travel light.** Multiple moves and heavy luggage do not go well together.
- **Be prepared to find some aspects of your fellowship difficult.** Six weeks at home would probably not pass without some disappointment or upset. The same is true of your six week fellowship. Knowing that some things will go wrong and that you may sometimes even wish that you'd 'never started the whole thing in the first place' helps when bad moments do occur and ensures that the odd moment of despair does not spoil an otherwise wonderful experience.
- **Take things one step at a time.** Coping mentally with the challenges of the whole six weeks at once can prove too much for the best of us. Tackling (and relishing) each hour of each day proves both more probable and more enjoyable.

AMANDA ROBERTS

SECTION TWO

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust for providing both the inspiration for my fellowship travels and, together with The Welles Foundation, the support to allow me to pursue them.

Thanks must also be afforded to the many Headteachers, teachers, students and ordinary citizens who have helped me to understand and appreciate the knowledge which they have to offer.

**JAPANESE EDUCATION - A LESSON IN  
PARTNERSHIP**

A report on a study of the structures, systems and underlying ethos of the Japanese education system.

1997 CHURCHILL FELLOWSHIP  
MANAGING CHANGE IN THE WORKPLACE

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Thanks must also be afforded to the many Headteachers, teachers, students and ordinary citizens of Japan who, through their patience and generosity, helped me to both understand and appreciate the wealth of experience and knowledge which travel and enquiry have to offer.

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## INTRODUCTION

The huge number of educational initiatives introduced into British schools in the last ten years, together with the increasingly difficult challenge of preparing young people for a positive future has necessitated a fundamental re-evaluation both of internal school management systems and of the wider relationships between teachers, students, their parents and society at large. The practice of looking towards other countries to provide a model for re-vitalisation has itself raised some interesting issues, particularly in relation to the Pacific Rim countries. Why, for example, do Japanese students consistently excel in international scholastic aptitude tests, far outstripping their British counterparts? Does the answer lie in the Japanese national attitude to education, with high government expenditure and strong links between education, employment and social status? Is it in the structure of the education system itself, perhaps influenced by the commercially successful Total Quality Management approach? Or is it a product of the attitude and efforts of individual students?

The award of a 1997 Travelling Fellowship provided me with the opportunity to embark on a six week trip to Japan in search of possible answers. My research led me to visit Junior and Senior High Schools in Tokyo, Kyoto and Hiroshima, with some fascinating insights emerging.

The following four chapters further investigate, then, the initial propositions made, analysing documentary evidence in the light of the empirical study of Japanese schools carried out in the period 7 September to 16 October 1997. In the concluding chapter, conclusions reached are translated into recommendations on possible applications of positive elements of the Japanese system to British education.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE JAPANESE EDUCATION SYSTEM - PRINCIPLES AND STRUCTURES

Article 26 of the 1946 Constitution, whilst providing for education for all children, yet gives little indication of the central aim of Japanese education. The somewhat bland dictate that

'all people shall have equal education correspondent to their ability, as provided by law.'

was however helpfully embellished in the 1947 Fundamental Law of Education in which the central aim of education is defined as the development of self-reliant citizens of a peaceful and democratic state and community, with a respect for human values.

Thus the preamble of the Fundamental Law of Education states:

'We shall esteem individual dignity and endeavour to bring up people who love truth and peace, while education which aims at the creation of a universal yet highly individualised culture shall be spread far and wide.'

The two basic principles enunciated in this declaration - the emphasis on citizenship, together with the concomitant link between education and life chances, and the recognition of the question of individuality in a nation-wide system - continue to influence both Japanese educational structures and thinking. The educational structure through which these aims are theoretically realised originated from the United States of America and is tabulated below. Inevitably, for an individual student a more complex pattern of intermittent pressure lies below the surface of the neat divisions of the tabulated version of the educational experience. Thus the carefree phase of early childhood comes to an abrupt end at the age of three as young children enter the world of the kindergarten with its often rigid routines and strict codes of conduct. The pressure continues through Elementary and Secondary School as the series of examinations needed to progress to the next stage of education are sequentially faced. The patterns of student discipline and study which inform and allow for this programme of learning are considered in subsequent chapters.

Within the formal structure of the pattern of the education system lies a similarly stringent pattern of course content. Both the curriculum and recommended textbooks are standardised by Japan's Ministry of Education - 'Monbusho', with the result that a rigorous pace of education is established nationally which all students must follow. Critics of this somewhat bureaucratic system must fight against the impressive results which it undoubtedly fosters in terms of levels of student competence in core subjects.

CHAPTER 2 - THE DEBATE ON SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

Pre-conceived notions regarding the behaviour or attitudes of the members of an unknown culture are perhaps created to be dispelled. An acknowledgement of this fact does not however mitigate the bewilderment when such dispelling occurs before your

**JAPANESE EDUCATION - A STRUCTURAL PERSPECTIVE**

AGE	SCHOOL TYPE	OPTIONS	YEARS
3-6	KINDERGARTEN		3
6-12	ELEMENTARY		6
12-15	LOWER SECONDARY		3
15-18	UPPER SECONDARY	FULL-TIME PART-TIME CORRESPONDENCE	3
18-22	HIGHER EDUCATION	UNIVERSITY	4
18-20/21		JUNIOR COLLEGE	2/3
15-20		TECHNICAL COLLEGE	5

## CHAPTER 2 - THE DEBATE ON SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

Pre-conceived notions regarding the behaviour or attitudes of the members of an unknown culture are perhaps created to be dispelled. An acknowledgement of this fact does not however mitigate the bewilderment when such 'dispelling' occurs before your very eyes. Thus the shock of the enforced collapse of my belief in the angelic nature of Japanese childhood, previously evidenced in the media image of serried ranks of pupils, concentrating avidly on the gems of wisdom emanating from their teacher's lips, was real and palpable.

Far from being naturally subdued and attentive, Japanese children are lively and often seem blithely unaware of any expectation to conform with classroom rules. Similarly, rules often remain unenforced by the teacher who will concentrate his or her efforts on those students who are attending and leave the rest to their own devices. Thus children routinely chat, look out of the window or sleep. In the most bizarre scenario witnessed, a child used a cigarette lighter to attempt to set fire to money he had taken during the lesson from another child, and all without a word of reprimand from the teacher. The perceived lack of engagement of a substantial number of class members is perhaps less the result of a lack of enthusiasm on the part of the teacher but rather a by-product of a pedagogic system in which children are required to sit still and listen for many hours each day, without being given the opportunity to take an active part in their own learning through a variety of methodological approaches used in British classrooms.

Japanese educators are aware of their tendency not to overtly discipline members of their class, referring to cultural norms by way of explanation. Thus the notion of the preservation of group harmony, the most important aspect of Japanese social interaction, translates in classroom practice into a concentration on the well-being of the group. Teacher interaction, of a positive or negative kind, with individual students would disturb the group dynamics and is therefore to be avoided. Indeed, given that most classes comprise of forty or more students, such interaction would prove challenging to achieve.

Japanese teachers seem then to fear disruption less than their Western counterparts, viewing the teacher's enthusiasm and commitment as the key to engaging children, rather than the enforcement of a rigid set of classroom rules. Thus teacher and student do not see themselves as opposing forces in a battle for classroom supremacy but rather, in the case of attentive students, as allies in the battle against the examination, and in the case of those who do not wish to attend, of almost no consequence to one another. The

British commitment to ensuring that all children have equal access to a given educational experience, in reality meaning that some children must be 'forced' to behave attentively in order that they may receive it, presupposes an extended role for the teacher, that of master. In some Japanese schools the continuing ritual of mutual bowing at the start and end of a lesson implies the concomitant notion of respect yet this is not always vindicated by subsequent pupil behaviour.

A strong disciplinary stance on the part of Japanese teachers was not then a feature of the research study schools. Pupils in some schools were observed to attend more readily to their teachers than their counterparts in other institutions. This did not seem to be the result of overt oppression but rather a consequence of a particular pride in their school and a clear understanding of the benefits of education in terms of future life chances. The following chapter moves on to investigate this aspect of the Japanese education system in terms of its role as a motivator of positive student performance.

### CHAPTER 3

## EDUCATION FOR LIFE - THE LINK BETWEEN EDUCATIONAL PERFORMANCE AND LIFE CHANCES

Rohlen (1985:25) describes contemporary Japan as 'a society of employers and employees', where educational credentials and educated skills are central to employment, promotion and general social status. Japan is a meritocracy shaped by educational competition.'

The link between educational success and life chances is indeed extremely strong. Both students and parents readily admit that 'failure' in school is an obstacle which proves almost insurmountable in future life plans. Conversely, success in school leads to entry into a prestigious university which itself ensures entry into a successful company and the accompanying package of promotion and security. The price for success is a high one however and exacts a punishing routine of study from even very young children.

In their discussions of success the Japanese themselves emphasise effort rather than ability. The belief that anyone can succeed if only they work hard enough has both positive and negative consequences however. Ostensibly inclusive, it rejects the overt labelling of children at a young age as 'achievers' or 'non-achievers', focusing instead on latent potential in all. The punishing schedule of examinations, used to progress children through each phase of schooling and widely referred to by the Japanese as 'examination hell', demands a high price in terms of the loss of childhood to endless study however. Thus one out of three primary school students attend after school classes with, during the last year of Junior High School, three out of four students attending cram school - 'juku' - in order to pass the exams to the best high schools (Condon 1985:122). The ultimate price is similarly all too often paid by some, with teenage suicide stories being an annual traumatic consequence of the examination season. Others who fail to enter the school or university of their choice fight the natural depression accompanying a poor result and decide to try again. Known as 'ronin' these students often prefer to persevere for several years rather than take up the option of attending a less prestigious educational establishment.

An interesting distinction arises between the sexes however in terms of the relative effect of educational success on future achievement. In terms of higher Education, girls tend to follow the 2/3 year Junior College route rather than undertake 4 years of University studies. Paradoxically, those female students who choose to follow the four year route often find that job opportunities become more rather than less illusive. The explanation

for this apparent inconsistency lies in the complicating factor of the existence of a supposedly 'correct' age for women to marry. With 25 proving the magic age past which a young woman is viewed by large sections of society as 'left on the shelf', companies are loathe to employ a woman who has used up a precious two years of her potential working life on 'unnecessary' university studies, given that the majority of women do not continue in full time employment after marriage.

Less dramatic consequences of a life centred on education are to be witnessed in many school classrooms. Students, exhausted by the continuous round of after-school clubs, 'juku' and studying deep into the night, sleep through their daily lessons, with teachers once again concentrating on those who are alert and interested and allowing others to continue to slumber in peace. The effects of this education-centred existence do not end in the classroom however but permeate out to determine many aspects of family life as the next chapter illustrates.

## CHAPTER 4

### 'EDUCATION MAMAS' - PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN STUDENT SUCCESS

Parents the world over are concerned to do their best for their child in terms of supporting their educational endeavours. In Japan, this natural concern has become almost a national institution however, with many viewing a woman's most important job as the promotion of her child's educational opportunities, both at home and in school. Thus the notion of 'koyoiku mama' - 'education mama' - is born.

Japanese mothers are all too aware of the impregnable link between education and future success, with higher education providing the key to social mobility and status. With the goal of ensuring the security of her child's future, education mamas devote themselves to buying supplementary workbooks, researching which school or university is the best for their child, helping with homework and providing rewards for scholastic targets achieved. Budgetary priorities are similarly determined by educational issues, with many families devoting 20% of their income to their children's education (Condon 1985:121).

It is in the detail of the education mama's life that the real effects of the pursuit of glory through education on child and family alike become evident however. The popular Japanese saying - 'Sleep four hours, pass, sleep five hours, fail' - refers to the devotion needed by all if a child is to be successful in the relentless series of examinations which characterise the Japanese system. Thus not only is it prescribed that the child should not 'waste' more than four hours of precious studying time on sleep, but neither must the mother. Instead she must stay awake, providing the child with snacks deep into the night and with encouragement when spirits start to flag.

The rewards for this devotion to study are reaped when entry to preferred school or university is finally gained. Yet concerns over the effect of such unrelenting pressure on children's lives are beginning to be more forcefully voiced, with the result that many education mamas now prefer to carry on their duties in secret, for fear of being accused by the community of pushing their child too far. It is in this atmosphere of tension between the need to achieve and growing qualms over the effects of methods employed that many Japanese children and their families currently continue to live, and to study.

\* School managers need to minimize to strive to improve the quality of the education which takes place in school classrooms. Only then can the sought-after engagement of real partnership with students be assured.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Japanese educators, surprised by their glowing international reputation, point to their own problems with disruptive students, to the lack of individuality in teaching methodology and to a national concern to discover an appropriate education system for the 21st Century. Japanese education undoubtedly produces a very high average level of accomplishment, based to a large degree on the single-minded devotion of whole families to education's demands.

The lack of both appreciation and fostering of individuality in students - perhaps an inevitable by-product of any such focused system - is a source of difficulties however, both for the many teachers who must compromise their views of the true nature of a balanced education and for companies who require in their employees the spark of individual initiative and find only corporate, learned wisdom. The process of reform of Japanese education, underway since 1970, appears to be veering towards the introduction of a curriculum which allows for greater creativity and individuality yet progress is slow and debate heated (Hendry 1995:112). Any potential lessons learnt from Japan must then acknowledge that no one country or system holds all the answers. This being recognised, a number of key recommendations can be made.

- Japanese scholastic achievement has little to do with classroom discipline and much to do with the high degree of youth engagement with education fostered by teachers, parents and society at large. We need to consider ways in which to promote a positive view of British education, emphasising the importance of achievement whilst avoiding the damage done to individual students by the excesses of the 'examination hell'.
- The current balance between Governmental pressure and support of teachers needs similarly to be reviewed in order to ensure that involvement in education is a positive experience for all.
- School managers need to continue to strive to improve the quality of the education which takes place in school classrooms. Only then can the sought-after engagement of and partnership with students be assured

- The positive relationship between students and teachers in Japan is seen as an important by-product of the high student and staff involvement in extra-curricular activities. Consideration should be given to ways of enhancing extra-curricular provision and uptake in Britain, perhaps by a contraction of the school day, freeing time for 'recommended' after-school activities.

Hendry, J. (1995) *Understanding Japanese Society*. London, Routledge.

- Parental input into their child's education is a major strength of the Japanese system. We need to develop additional ways of harnessing British parental power in support of their child's schooling, in order to ensure a unified approach to individual student success.

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**Appendix 1 - Outline Itinerary**  
**Duration of Fellowship - 7 September 1997 - 16 October 1997**

**TOKYO - 7 September 1997 - 21 September 1997**

Kaishin Daisan Junior High School - 10 -11 September 1997

Meeting with Teachers' Consultant, Kyoto Board of Education - 11 September 1997

Hitachi Headquarters - 18 September 1997

**Further helpful visits in "tourist" capacity:**

Nishin Textile Centre - 14 September 1997

Sony Exhibition Centre - 19 September 1997

**KYOTO - 22 September 1997 - 1 October 1997**

Meeting with Teachers' Consultant, Kyoto Board of Education - 22 September 1997

Momoyama Senior High School - 24 - 25 September 1997

Hokuryo Senior High School - 26 September 1997

Prefectural Commercial High School - 29 September 1997

**HIROSHIMA - 2 - 16 October 1997**

Kumano Junior High School - 2-3 October 1997

Gionkita Senior High School - 6-7 October 1997

### **FINAL REFLECTIONS**

A Churchill Foundation Travelling Fellowship is heralded as 'a chance of a lifetime' and so it proves to be. The experiences which it facilitates and the insights thus promoted cannot but have a profound effect on every fellow. Personally, I continue to draw great strength from my experiences in Japan and know that my view both of life and of myself has been profoundly altered by my travels. I would like to wholeheartedly commend an initiative which provides the means to release the potential within so many of us who would otherwise never fully understand what we are capable of achieving.