

Observations & Musings, in Education, from Tokyo



- *Pre-School and Primary Education in Japan: its Characteristics, Structure, Forthcoming Revisions, Quirks, & Trends*
- *Waves & Particles: Just What the Heck are We Trying to Accomplish?*

*Webinar Presentation for the **Institute for Strategy of Education Development of the Russian Academy of Education**, 04/18/2019*

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Part I: Pre-School & Primary Education in Japan: Characteristics, Structure, Forthcoming Revisions, Quirks, & Trends

VITAL FACTS AND FIGURES	
FACTS	FIGURES
Population:	127,417,244 (July 2005 est.)
Capital:	Tokyo
Age Structure:	0-14 Years: 14.3% (Male 9,328,584/Female 8,866,772) 15-64 Years: 66.2% (Male 42,462,533/Female 41,942,835) 65+ Years: 19.5% (Male 10,435,284/Female 14,381,236) (2005 est.)
Religions:	Observe both Shinto and Buddhist 84% Other 16% (Including Christian 0.7%)
Languages:	Japanese
Literacy:	(Age 15+ can read & write)
Compulsory Schooling	9 Years
# of Students Enrolled in Grades 1-9(2003)	10,975,220
# of Students Enrolled in Upper Secondary School (2003)	3,809,827
# of Students Enrolled in Higher Education (2003)	3,760,810

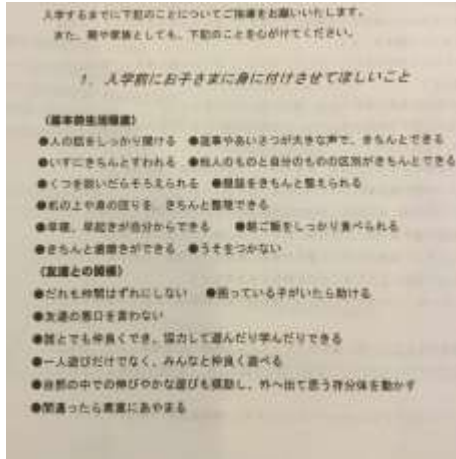
Source: CIA World Factbook, Ministry of Education

Pre-School & Primary School in Japan at a Glance



- School Year: April ~March
- Private Kindergartens: 80% of all students
- Primary Schools: vast majority public (2003: 98.4%)
- 100% enrollment in compulsory grades, zero illiteracy
- High school enrollment 96% nationwide, 100% in cities
- Pre-kindergarten classes available, popular, growing.
- 35,000 primary, junior high, & high schools (50K cram schools, *jukus*)
- Top 5 Annually in *Program for International Student Assessment (PISA)*
- 2002 TOEFL worst in Asia after North Korea.
- 2003: 1,753,396 kindergarten enrollment
- 2004: +/- 7,220,929 primary school students (1981: 11,925,000)
- The 18-point list for moral & social education... **YES, THERE IS!**

The 18 Moral & Social Commandments ;)



- Sit up properly in your chair.
 - Eat a proper breakfast.
 - Always brush your teeth.
 - Never tell lies.
 - Do not leave anyone feeling left out.
 - If someone has a problem, help them.
 - Do not badmouth your friends.
 - If you make a mistake, earnestly apologize.
- Attentively listen when someone is speaking.
 - Make sure your clothing is clean and unwrinkled.
 - Keep your desk and surroundings tidy and organized.
 - Greet others and respond to questions in a clear, easily audible voice.
 - Have a clear understanding that what belongs to others does not belong to you.
 - After taking off your shoes, arrange them neatly in the entryway.
 - Take responsibility to go to bed early and wake up early on your own.
 - Moving on to “Relationships with Friends,” the remaining criteria are:
 - Be able to get along with, play, and learn with anyone.
 - Don’t always just play by yourself, but be friendly in playing together with everyone.
 - Play outside, both to get plenty of exercise and also to relax in natural surroundings.

Primary School Curriculum (2006+)



Academic subjects include:

- Japanese Language (strongly emphasized subject due to the complexity of the written language and the diversity of its spoken forms in formal speech to seniors)
- Social Studies,
- Arithmetic
- At present, English is formally taught only in Junior and Senior High School

Primary School Curriculum (2006+)



Non-Academic subjects include:

- Art (including Japanese calligraphy) and
- Handicrafts, Music, Haiku and Japanese Traditional Poetry,
- Homemaking,
- Physical Education,
- and Moral Education.
- Children also take part in "Special Activities" each week to take care of class business, planning for field trips and ceremonies, and similar tasks.



Primary School Curriculum: Forthcoming Changes (2020)

To Be Included in 2020 Curricular Revisions:

- English from 5th Grade
- Information Technology,
- Coding

These initiatives have been deemed necessary in order to improve on the shortfalls in English ability, internationalization, and the predicted shortfalls in IT professionals in the years to come.



Pre-School Quirks & Trends

Likely the most “international pre-schools” per capita, in the world.
Small, private, community-based, nursery schools characterized by:

- a semi-bilingual Japanese staff,
- one foreign native English speaking teacher.
- the intention to capitalize on the perceived need for English,
- the desire for parents to provide that opportunity,
- effort to capitalize on universal need for childcare for working parents prior to Elementary School from the age of 6.
- Flourish of eclectic approaches & efforts to find unique (profitable?) propositions:
Forest Schools, Finnish curricula, Pre-PYP, Flexible Learning Environments,



Elementary School Quirks & Trends (cont.)

- Multiple occupancy “Kiddy Carts” for pre-school field trips and outings.
- Colorful caps and uniforms for each age group.
- Pre-School: open environments, art, music, crafts, and play.
- Elementary School: formal/strict standards (dress, behavior, structure), knowledge & memorization, national standards preparation and examinations.
- International Schools & Curricula available, by abandoning “normal path.”

The results? Very high in academic ability, but low in fostering international awareness, second language development, and problem-solving skills.

Part II:

Waves & Particles: Just What the Heck are We Trying to Accomplish?

A little introduction to a
forthcoming publication:

*Waves, Particles, Cats, and Captain Kirk: The
Quantum Impact on Social Thought in Education*

“To be nobody but
yourself in a world
which is doing its best day and night to make you like
everybody else means to fight the hardest battle
which any human being can fight and never stop fighting.”

— e.e. cummings



Waves & Particles



Waves and Particles is an essay in which I look at how current and growing (international) social trends have fed on modern scientific discoveries and applications of quantum theory. They have, and especially in the preceding 3 decades, changed the way human beings interact with one another and perceive the world around them.

Educators around the world struggle to define how people should learn to keep up with a rapidly changing world. My ultimate conclusion is simple: learn to do those things well that all else is founded on: to read, calculate, write, communicate, appreciate, and think. Beyond those elemental objectives, what remains are tools, techniques, technologies, trends, & a world of activity we'll be drawn into and find our way within through inspiration, aptitude, interest, and environmental factors.

The Mousetrap



*Related to this is a short piece I wrote on a memory from my very early childhood that remains with me in absolute clarity. **My question is:***

What made this simple experience so impactful on my life ever afterwards? The answer, I believe, contains the essence of what education should achieve anywhere, anytime.

<https://www.cross.education/crosstalk/2018/08/16/mousetraps/>

It begins: “Ok... here we are, 47 years ago, around the time this picture was taken. I believe that’s my brother. It’s raining. No matter.”

Thank You!



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