

Purpose of Education in Japan

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Why (Marcus) requested to do this presentation: *culture shock*
a little background:

“Ten years ago, I taught students who planned to attend the University of Tokyo, Waseda and other elite schools while working for Aeon Language School. This experience formed my original idea of what Japanese students were like. My opinion of students was not unlike that of western students when considering motivations and abilities.

After leaving Aeon, I worked for the University of Texas San Antonio as a recruiter and the San Antonio Education Partnership as a scholarship manager. Both jobs had me working with students of all abilities, but most students wanted to attend college. During this time, I researched the educational environment in Japan extensively for my Master's in Bicultural Bilingual Studies ESL (MA TESL) degree. So, when I came to Futamata, it didn't phase me that my students were low level.

However, I was surprised by their lack of motivation to learn or interest in gaining further (college) education. Didn't they want to move up the economic ladder? It turned out that my research and my experience omitted something very important and I could not put my finger on what it was. When test-time came around and many students told me their goal was to get a 38 (of 100) on a test, I cannot begin to explain the concerns that raced around in my head.

I did quite bit a research and finally came upon a book called Education in the Rising Sun (2001) by Kaoru Okamoto. Okamoto had been Deputy Director of International Affairs for the Japanese Ministry of Education, Science & Culture and provided some much needed insight to the Japanese perspective that was missing from the research journals I had read (such as the JALT journal). This was the “a-ha!” moment that helped me form some further questions for research.

This presentation is a brief surface level overview of the research. It is intended to elicit cultural views of education for the purpose of contrast and to set a mission statement for ALT's to better understand why they are here. Hopefully, they can shape their lesson plans and expectations of students and JTE's accordingly.”

What is the purpose of education?

Japan's Fundamental Law of Education

Article 1 (Purpose of Education)

Education must be carried out with the intention of aiming at the full character development of all people and at nurturing the citizens who, as the builders of a peaceful nation and society, will cherish truth and justice, respect the value of the individual, value hard work and responsibility, have independent minds, and be physically and mentally healthy.

Kaoru Okamoto

*former Deputy Director of International Affairs
Ministry of Education, Science & Culture*

- The purpose of education has traditionally been kokoro development. “Kokoro is a concept with a wide range of connotations including, heart, mind, soul, spirit, attitude, value system and humanity.”
- Education has a lofty status similar to that of religion in the west

MEXT Objectives for education

1. equal access to quality education
2. enhance career guidance
3. encourage life long learning
4. prepare students for hazards
5. ability to perform on nationwide tests
6. moral and physical health
7. to provide personalized guidance to problemmed students.
8. To engage students in the community

What's missing? From a western perspective:

- job training (hard practical skills)
- economic mobility
- economic development
- Expectations of Japanese students is different than that of the west

Why are students required to study English?

To be more international???? What does that really mean anyway?

Objective for foreign language studies:

To develop students' basic practical communication abilities such as listening and speaking, deepening the understanding of language and culture, and fostering a positive attitude toward communication through foreign language.

What are the responsibilities of JTE's to students?

(answers were provided by all participants, but key ones were those of the JTE's themselves. They are as follows:

1. "taking care of students' life, health, safety, family issues, future and academic achievement"
2. "club activities"
3. "as an English teacher, being a bridge between ALT and students"

What are the responsibilities of ALT's to students? (answers varied)

What are the responsibilities of the ALT's to JTE's? (answers varied)

The ALT's role

The ALT's main role "is to promote internationalization on a grass roots level throughout Japan... In essence, (the) role is similar to that of an ambassador."
(JET General Information Handbook 2008, pg 263.)

What are the expectations of students in education?

"The current Courses of Study aim to develop the academic ability of students to learn, to think for themselves, and a zest for living through rich humanity and health and strength."

The Sum Total

Theme throughout education in Japan includes promoting "kokoro." This means a greater focus on students' character than on performance of skills. If students enjoy education and value learning, they will teach themselves and continue this after school ends.

The product of a strong kokoro is a person who is a productive member of society.

Question:

Purpose guides objectives which in turn guide our responsibilities.

What can you, as an ALT or JTE, do to promote the objectives of education listed above?