

The Japanese Education System

DESCRIPTION OF THE WORKSHOP:

A lecture-style workshop about the Japanese Education System which follows Kumako (Kumamon's young cousin) throughout her educational life from elementary school all the way to Kumako becoming a teacher herself. It covers what the students are expected to learn and do at each school as well as what the different types of teachers are expected to deal with on a daily basis.

TYPES OF TEACHERS:

◆ Hijoukin (非常勤)

A teacher who has received their diploma (also called a 'teaching certificate') but has not yet passed the teacher's licensing examination. Hijoukin teachers can be in any subject field, and only come to work for the hours they teach or are doing preparation or other clerical/administrative type work.

◆ Rinji Saiyou (臨時採用)

A teacher who has received their diploma (also called a 'teaching certificate') but has not yet passed the teacher's licensing examination. Unlike Hijoukin teachers, Rinji Saiyou teachers go to school just like regular teachers and do basically all the same duties as a regular teacher in terms of instruction. They cannot be a homeroom teacher nor be the main teacher responsible for a club, though they can play a supporting role in either one. There are other small differences between rinji saiyou and saiyou teachers depending on the school.

◆ Saiyou (採用)

A full-fledged, "real" teacher who has passed the teacher's licensing exam and can be a homeroom teacher (with all of the super fun times that comes with it!) or the head of a club or committee, though they usually do not get this kind of responsibility during the first few years. Their salary also increases every year, so by the time you're one of those grumpy old teachers with a jaded view on the future of education at least you're getting paid well enough to continue putting up with it.

◆ Shonin (初任)

A full-fledged teacher who just passed the teacher's licensing exam and is on their first year as a "real" teacher. Although some teachers in this "first year" have been Rinji or Hijoukin teachers for a few or more years, they must still fulfill the same on-the-job training requirements that were created for students who passed the test the first time around. Shonin teachers are appointed a supervisor within the same department (English teacher with English teacher, Math teacher with Math teacher etc.) and must fulfill a set of requirements set out by the BOE. Such things may include anything from hearing a lecture about the responsibilities of the disciplinary committee to having a one-hour chat with the ALT in English about how to improve classroom technique (this seriously happened to me). They also have to attend a few seminar/workshop type gatherings with all the other shonin teachers throughout the year.

THE TYPES OF SCHOOLS:

◆ Elementary Schools (小学校)

Private ones do exist, though they are pretty much for the children of the super rich and elite. Like most other elementary/primary schools around the world, the education goal is to provide students with a moral education for becoming good citizens as well as a strong foundation in all subject areas in preparation for middle school. Along with the usual math, science, and the arts, Japanese elementary school students take classes focused solely on morals– things like “bullying is bad, you guys” and “let’s not throw trash on the ground, k?” There are no Rinji Saiyou or Hijoukin teachers at elementary schools. Shonin teachers may have homeroom classes. There are some schools with club activities but they are much more relaxed and fun-oriented than middle or high schools.

Elementary School Course Requirements (from 2011)

Year Subject	1	2	3	4	5	6	TOTAL
Japanese	306 (9)	315 (9)	245 (7)	245 (7)	175 (5)	175 (5)	1461
Social Studies	-- --	-- --	70 (2)	90 (2.6)	100 (2.9)	105 (3)	365
Mathematics	136 (4)	175 (5)	175 (5)	175 (5)	175 (5)	175 (5)	1011
Science	-- --	-- --	90 (2.6)	105 (3)	105 (3)	105 (3)	405
Lifestyle	102 (3)	105 (3)	-- --	-- --	-- -	-- --	207
Music	68 (2)	70 (2)	60 (1.7)	60 (1.7)	50 (1.4)	50 (1.4)	358
Drawing and Manual Arts	68 (2)	70 (2)	60 (1.7)	60 (1.7)	50 (1.4)	50 (1.4)	358
Home Economics	-- --	-- --	-- --	-- --	60 (1.7)	55 (1.6)	115
Physical Education	102 (3)	105 (3)	105 (3)	105 (3)	90 (2.6)	90 (2.6)	597
Moral Education	34 (1)	35 (1)	35 (1)	35 (1)	35 (1)	35 (1)	209
Special Activities	34 (1)	35 (1)	35 (1)	35 (1)	35 (1)	35 (1)	209
Integrated Studies	-- --	-- --	70 (2)	70 (2)	70 (2)	70 (2)	280
Foreign Language	-- --	-- --	-- --	-- --	35 (1)	35 (1)	70
TOTAL	850 (25)	910 (26)	945 (27)	980 (28)	980 (28)	980 (28)	5645

*HOURS MARKED IN PARENTHESIS REPRESENT THE NUMBER OF HOURS/WEEK EACH CLASS IS HELD

◆ **Middle Schools (中学校)**

Run either privately or by the city's BOE. They will employ Saiyou, Rinji Saiyou, and Hijoukin teachers depending on their needs. All middle schools will have the same courses of study since it is compulsory education and thus dictated by MEXT. Which school a student will go to is decided based on where they live. Middle schools are the last bit of compulsory education for Japanese students, so there's a lot of focus on following rules and being a good member of society.

Middle School Course Requirements (from 2012)

Year Subject	1	2	3	TOTAL
Japanese	140 (4)	140 (4)	105 (3)	385
Social Studies	105 (3)	105 (3)	140 (4)	350
Math	140 (4)	105 (3)	140 (4)	385
Science	105 (3)	140 (4)	140 (4)	385
Music	45 (1.3)	35 (1)	35 (1)	115
Art	45 (1.3)	35 (1)	35 (1)	115
Health and PE	105 (3)	105 (3)	105 (3)	315
Crafts/Home Economics	70 (2)	70 (2)	35 (1)	175
Foreign Language	140 (4)	140 (4)	140 (4)	420
Moral Education	35 (1)	35 (1)	35 (1)	105
Special Activities	35 (1)	35 (1)	35 (1)	105
Integrated Studies	50 (1.4)	70 (2)	70 (2)	190
TOTAL	1015 (29)	1015 (29)	1015 (29)	3045

*HOURS MARKED IN PARENTHESIS REPRESENT THE NUMBER OF HOURS/WEEK EACH CLASS IS HELD

◆ **High Schools (高等学校)**

Regular High Schools: Run either privately or by the prefectural BOE. They will employ Saiyou, Rinji Saiyou, and Hijoukin teachers depending on their needs. Some regular high schools will have specialized courses (Business, English, etc) within them and thus those students will have a slightly different set of coursework and graduation requirements than the 'normal course' students.

Specialized High Schools: Specialize in a particular field such as agriculture or business with different courses of study offered depending on the school itself. For example, an agricultural high school may have courses in Food Science, Organic Biotechnology, Microbiology, Farm Management, etc. The types of courses they can offer and graduation requirements for those types of courses are set out by MEXT. An example of the differences is that Food Science students may have to take two

years of English, but Microbiology students don't have to take any English. Usually, specialized schools are set up to feed into the local industry. Other types of specialized schools are Commercial schools, Technical schools, and Business-Technical schools.

High School Course Requirements (from 2011)

SUBJECT	CLASS	CREDITS (hours/week)
Japanese	General Japanese	4
	Creative Writing	3
	Modern Literature A	2
	Modern Literature B	4
	Classics A	2
	Classics B	4
Geography/History	World History A	2
	World History B	4
	Japanese History A	2
	Japanese History B	4
	Geography A	2
	Geography B	4
Social Studies	Modern Society	2
	Philosophy	2
	Government/Economics	2
Math	Math I	3
	Math II	4
	Math III	5
	Math A	2
	Math B	2
	Practical Application	2
Science	Science in Everyday Life	2
	Basics of Physics	2
	Physics	4
	Basic of Chemistry	2
	Chemistry	4
	Basics of Biology	2
	Biology	4
	Basics of Earth Sciences	2
	Earth Sciences	4
Independent Research	1	
Health/Physical Education	Physical Education	7~8
	Health	2
Arts	Music I	2
	Music II	2
	Music III	2
	Art I	2
	Art II	2
	Art III	2
	Industrial Arts I	2
	Industrial Arts II	2
	Industrial Arts III	2
	Calligraphy I	2
	Calligraphy II	2
	Calligraphy III	2

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SUBJECT	CLASS	CREDITS (hours/week)
Foreign Language	Basics of English Communication	2
	English Communication I	3
	English Communication II	4
	English Communication III	4
	English Composition I	2
	English Composition II	4
	Oral Communication	2
Home Economics	Basics of Home Economics	2
	General Home Economics	4
	Advanced Home Economics	4
Information	Computer Science	2
	Information Science	2
Integrated Studies		3~6

Although theoretically all of these classes are required to be considered by MEXT as a candidate for graduation, it seems that some schools choose not to offer certain ones. There is also a 300+ page publication available on MEXT's website (Japanese only) detailing what each and every class should cover, though I've been told by several teacher that they interpret those guidelines as freely as they please for certain subjects (Home Economics, Information Science, etc).

◆ Private Schools (私立)

There are many combinations of private elementary, junior high, and high school schools, the most common being a combination of junior and senior high where the junior high school division feeds directly into the senior high school, completely eliminating the need for entrance exams. Some of the fancier schools can cost a pretty penny, though given the sheer amount of private schools that doesn't seem to be too much of a problem for some parents. They usually have their exams earlier than public high schools and, unlike public schools, do not usually hold their exams all on the same day. Some lower level schools offer several exam days in the hopes of picking up students who failed the entrance exams at higher level schools.

HISTORY OF THE JAPANESE EDUCATION SYSTEM

(Taken quite shamelessly from Jason Shon's previous presentation on this topic and edited for publication)

◆ Edo Era

The Edo era or Tokugawa period was from 1603-1868 and was run by Tokugawa shogunate, or shoguns of the Tokugawa family. It was established by Tokugawa Ieyasu and effectively unified Japan, giving it a centralized government. After taking control however, they needed to pacify the country, so all land was taken and given to about 300 daimyo. Families of the daimyo lived in Edo, and the daimyo themselves had to live in Edo every other year so that they couldn't stay in their kingdom and plan rebellion. The strict social order of the time was based on heredity.

As a side note, some of the daimyo in Kyushu, were Christian, and this was a big problem for the shogunate. Christianity posed a threat; all shogunate's retainers and residents on government lands (which was everybody) had to forswear Christianity. This led to the Amakusa-Shimabara rebellion of 1637-38 by retainers and peasants. The face of the rebellion was 15-yr-old Amakusa Shiro, born in Kamiamakusa. The rebellion was brutally put down, but some Christians escaped and went underground, and are known as the Hidden Christians. The Amakusa City government has put a lot of effort into remembering this history, and there are museums and landmarks scattered throughout Amakusa.

The Edo period was marked by general stability, and stability meant economic development and urbanization, which led to rich merchants, which in turn helped literacy rates jump especially from the middle of the era.

◆ Past Types of Schools

FIEF SCHOOLS 藩校(はんこう): Like government schools. Fief schools were established by the feudal lord, or daimyo 大名, for their own personal cultivation and to maintain control of their fief governments. At the beginning of the Edo era fief lords had Confucian scholars and military specialists conduct lectures that chief vassals were required to attend, but toward the middle and especially the latter part of the Edo period the number of fief schools increased to about 270 schools. These schools were for the elite, the samurai, not commoners, and those who attended fief schools would often go on to serve in the administration of the government. Samurai families originally offered their services to Buddhist temples in return for an education, but in accordance with the Shogunate's policy, learning at fief schools became imbued with Confucian thought. Confucian scholars were often hired as instructors. By the end of the Shogunate those in the samurai class could receive a comprehensive education: it included studies in Confucian doctrine and the history and literature of China 漢学, National Learning 国学, and sometimes even Western Learning and medicine, and martial arts. One of the most prominent fief schools was Jishukan at Kumamoto, on the grounds of Kumamoto Castle. It taught literary and military arts.

Shoheizaka Gakumonji 昌平坂学問所、aka Shoheiko 昌平校. The Shoheizaka Gakumonjo, alternately called the Shoheiko, under the direct control of the Shogunate at Edo, became the center of education for the tokugawa shogunate, and the highest seat of learning in Japan until the decline of the shogunate's power and development of western learning. The original institution was the training center of the Confucian temple (koshibyō), and the curriculum was very much Confucian-based. Fiefs often sent their brightest youths here for training, and upon completion were employed as Confucian scholars at fief schools. During the Edo period, this school acted as a model for other fief schools.

COUNTRY SCHOOLS 語学(ごがく): These country schools were established by fief lords as an extension of the small scale fief schools at appropriate locations within the fief domain. Certain high ranking retainers also established country schools in their own domains using the fief schools as a model. Some of these country schools were for samurai, some admitted both samurai and commoners, and still others were largely for commoners. Since they were under the control of fief lords, these "country schools" were required to teach Confucian philosophy in the same way as the top "fief school." Thus they served to both provide education for local people and enabled those in power to remain in control through the inculcation of moral education.

TERAKOYA 寺子屋(てらこや): Schools for commoners. It was from the middle of the Edo period that the number of these schools began to increase thanks to an increase in wealthy merchants and influential commoners who sent their sons and sometimes even their daughters to these schools. By the end of the Edo period they were quite common in the large cities of Edo and Osaka as well as in many smaller towns. Terakoya could be found even in the rural villages of the remote coastal and mountain regions and numbered in the tens of thousands. Terakoya focused on practical matters and elementary education important to the daily life of the common people. The bulk of instruction in the terakoya was in reading and writing. Toward the end of the Edo period terakoya offering abacus calculation along with reading and writing increased in number (before that abacus was usually taught at home or specialized schools). The curriculum began with calligraphy which the pupils practiced by imitating examples provided by the instructor, then later on copybooks (oraimono or oraihon) which had been compiled by Japanese men of letters. The copybooks date back to the Heian period (794-1192) and were chiefly used during the Middle Ages

for purposes of samurai education. In the early period they were composed in the Chinese classical epistolary style, but gradually some came to be written in the kana form to make them accessible to the common people. Most copybooks of the Edo period contained a treatise on household precepts (teikin orai), suggestions for daily conversation. Thus the main content of the material used in the terakoya tended to fulfill a direct need in the daily lives of the people. There were also textbooks for geography, commercial pursuits, and a collection of lessons on moral precepts for the common man. Teachers at "temple schools" included Buddhist and Shinto priests as well as doctors, samurai, masterless samurai (rōnin, 浪人), wealthy retired farmers, and some women.

PRIVATE ACADEMIES 私塾(しじゅく): Founded by individuals who wanted to elucidate and spread their own philosophy or scientific theories. "Private academies" were unofficial schools, and thus the headmaster could present his own, less orthodox interpretations. Numerous Confucian scholars, for example, founded schools for Chinese studies known as kangakujuku, and these flourished throughout the Edo period. Private schools for National Learning, known as kokugakujuku, also prospered, and toward the end of the Shogunate they became closely connected with the "Restore the Emperor" ideology. There were many schools where both National and Chinese studies were taught. With the introduction of Western civilization to Japan in the middle of the nineteenth century, other types of private schools were organized for Western learning known as yogakujuku. Ranging from elementary schools teaching simple literacy to more advanced instruction targeting graduates of prestigious universities, "private academies" accepted students from well-to-do families as well as bright sons of priests, farmers, and merchants. To some extent, "private academies" promoted rewards for merit and achievement and helped to offset the strong, traditional influence of class status

◆ National Learning

国学、古道 (the ancient way) 古学 (ancient learning) 本学 (true learning) 和学 (Japanese learning) 腹腔神道 (Restoration Shinto) was an intellectual movement that grew out of direct contrast to Chinese learning and confucianism. The most prominent scholar from this movement was Motoori Norinaga. He wrote Kojikiden, or Commentaries on the Kojiki. The Kojiki before Norinaga rewrote it, was a relatively obscure mytho-history compiled by scholars in the early eighth century by officials in western Japan. It was written in Chinese characters, but the claim was that it was meant to be read phonetically in Japanese. What Norinaga did was go beyond the claim that the Kojiki recorded the authentic ancient Japanese language: he asserted the Kojiki related in an unmediated form the events of the so-called "Divine Age" during which the Japanese islands were created and the Japanese imperial line created, that this narrative depicted the proper form of social relations and governance for "our country," that deciphering the language of the text would make possible the recovery not only these social relations, but also of an intrinsic "Japaneseness" that had existed in archaic times. The ancient Japanese language, according to Norinaga, was superior, and the Chinese language brought with it unnatural sounds and the Chinese mind that polluted the natural and harmonious language, perceptions, judgments, and values of the Japanese. The movement eventually helped play a part in the downfall of the Tokugawa shogunate. Later, in the 1930s and 40s, National Learning was seen as the intellectual origin for fascist and militaristic views in Japan.

◆ Girls' Education

Confucianism was the state-supported religion, and therefore Edo society was founded upon the lord-retainer relationship of the samurai class and this same relationship extended to the organization within individual families: the relation between parents and children; between husbands and wives; between masters and servants - all functioned in a similar fashion. For this reason girls' education, whether for samurai or commoners, was predicated on a concept of human relations quite distinct from that for boys. In those days it was not considered necessary for girls to receive the high level of education made available to boys. As befitted their station in life, girls

were trained in household matters and etiquette at their homes. Occasionally they were sent to other homes as maids, with the hope that the experience away from home would improve their homemaking and etiquette. A small number of girls from the samurai families studied classical literature and arts in addition to calligraphy and reading, but in general education for girls in the feudal society was oriented toward the making of better wives and mothers.

In the closing years of the Shogunate, the number of girls attending terakoya gradually increased and a certain number of private institutions devoted to the instruction of girls were established. In both these institutions, a special curriculum was offered heavily slanted toward the niceties of womanly virtue, etiquette and the like: the tea ceremony, flower arranging and other polite accomplishments were included. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that even during the Edo period, there was some training for girls outside of their homes.

The traditional concept that girls differed from boys and that there was little need to educate them influenced the development of modern education: In the early years of the modern system the ratio of girls to boys in elementary schools was low even though both sexes were, according to the Education System Order, required to attend.

◆ **Meiji Era (1868-1912)**

The government promoted nationalism and patriotism. Shinto was the state religion, seen as the purely Japanese. The movement was led by scholars of national learning, which was the ideological founding in the first place for the Imperial Restoration that brought about Meiji. This era was much more open to the West and western education as well. The educational goal was to modernize national education through the introduction of modern western civilization. This meant broadening the scope of the government's educational policy beyond the elite for everybody.

In 1871, fiefs were abolished and replaced by prefectures (originally 305). The government established the Department of Education as the central governing body of education throughout the nation. Regulations for elementary schools and middle schools were established and re-established (at first 8-15 for elementary, 16-22 for middle school divided into upper and lower, these were meant as preparation for entrance into the universities, which were often the highest centers of learning in the fiefdoms). More elementary schools were established for commoners and attendance rates were quite high. Given the situation of the country at the time, it was actually very difficult to modernize quickly, but the government managed to send many students abroad to study and brought foreign teachers to Japan. Experts from America were brought over to teach teachers, textbooks were taken directly from America as well. Values shifted away from Confucianism to individualism and towards the practical value of education and research. Elementary school was (slowly) made compulsory and tuition was eliminated, making it completely free. The seeds of a modern education system were planted during the Meiji era thanks to a policy modernizing education through western civilization. At times, though, they tried to do too much too quickly and were met with setbacks. One was that content taught in school was unrelated to daily life and many Japanese still held affinity for traditional teaching methods/customs.

◆ **Imperial Rescript on Education of the Emperor Meiji**

Though education during the Meiji period adopted western practices, the education system was still imbued with Confucian values and the government was concerned with cultivating loyalty to the emperor and government. The Imperial Rescript on Education issued in 1890 illustrates the enduring influence of Confucian values. It's important to keep in mind, however, that this rescript was directed to all citizens, not just the elite. Education was traditionally for the elite, but now the emperor was encouraging his ALL his citizens to pursue learning.

Know ye, Our subjects:

Our Imperial Ancestors have founded Our Empire on a basis broad and everlasting and have deeply and firmly implanted virtue; Our subjects ever

united in loyalty and filial piety have from generation to generation illustrated the beauty thereof. This is the glory of the fundamental character of Our Empire, and herein also lies the source of Our education.

Ye, Our subjects, be filial to your parents, affectionate to your brothers and sisters; as husbands and wives be harmonious, as friends true; bear yourselves in modesty and moderation; extend your benevolence to all; pursue learning and cultivate arts, and thereby develop intellectual faculties and perfect moral powers; furthermore advance public good and promote common interests; always respect the Constitution and observe the laws; should emergency arise, offer yourselves courageously to the State; and thus guard and maintain the prosperity of Our Imperial Throne coeval with heaven and earth.

So shall ye not only be Our good and faithful subjects, but render illustrious the best traditions of your forefathers. The Way here set forth is indeed the teaching bequeathed by Our Imperial Ancestors, to be observed alike by Their Descendants and the subjects, infallible for all ages and true in all places. It is Our wish to lay it to heart in all reverence, in common with you, Our subjects, that we may thus attain to the same virtue.

*The 30th day of the 10th month of the 23rd year of Meiji.
(October 30, 1890)*

◆ Post WWII

Following the surrender to the Allied Forces in 1945, Japan adopted a democratic constitution modeled after that of the United States, and it went into effect May 3, 1947. Unlike the United States Constitution, however, the Constitution of Japan refers specifically to Japanese education, guaranteeing academic freedom, ensuring the right to an equal education, and establishing free, compulsory education.

School Education Law of March 29, 1947 This document outlines the basic structure of Japanese education that remains in effect to this day. Sometimes referred to as the “6-3-3-4 school ladder,” it includes six years of elementary education (grades 1-6), three years of lower secondary schooling (middle school, grades 7-9), three years of upper secondary school instruction (high school, grades 10-12), and four years or more of university education, though junior colleges offer two- and three-year vocational programs. Compulsory education extends from elementary until the end of lower secondary school. The School Education Law also includes provisions pertaining to kindergarten and education for the handicapped.

Fundamental Law of Education 1947: aka ‘The Education Constitution’ or ‘The Charter of Education’ replaced the Imperial Rescript on Education issued by the Meiji Emperor in 1890 that reflected heavy Confucian influence. The Fundamental Law of Education became the new official policy on education that set a basic outline for democratic education. Article one of the new policy articulates the aim of democratic education:

Education shall aim at the full development of personality, striving for the rearing of the people, sound in mind and body, who shall love truth and justice, esteem individual value, respect labor and have a deep sense of responsibility, and be imbued with the independent spirit, as builders of a peaceful state and society

The law also ensured respect of academic freedom, confirmed equal opportunity in education, specified that compulsory education lasts for nine years, recognized coeducation, and encouraged political knowledge and religious tolerance while prohibiting activities favoring a political party or religion. Compared to Meiji’s rescript on education, this was a big difference. The focus was on the

individual and left no trace of Confucian ideas. It was revised in 2006 to reflect changing circumstances in society and even has its own Facebook page.

◆ **The Monbukagakusho (MEXT)**

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (Mombukagakushō, 文部科学省) – often referred to simply as MEXT or Mombushō – is the government branch charged with the responsibility of overseeing all educational matters in Japan. In America, local school boards have a lot of the power to determine what gets taught in school, but in Japan it all has to go through this one government agency. MEXT even issues Courses of Study, which not only set specific objectives and clearly state the concepts each student should learn in each subject of every grade in elementary, middle, and high school, but also even stipulate the number of hours teachers should devote to each subject.

An example of something MEXT has done recently: In 2002 they reduced the number of days students attend class to five days – Monday through Friday – every week during the school year, which lasts from the beginning of April to March 31. Prior to 2002, schools also held sessions on Saturday mornings. The government first began limiting the number of Saturdays that schools were required to be in session in 1992, and in 2002, Saturday schooling completely disappeared from the required guidelines. It reduced stress and gave more time for the students and teachers to become more involved in community, develop better parent-child relationships, or perhaps participate in club activities or sports.