

Some American School Practices worth adopting in Japan from Educational Administration View

Takeaki Nakadome

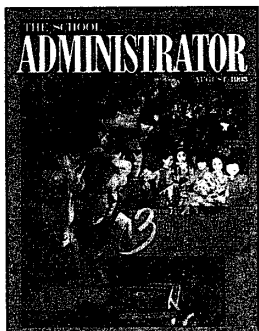
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LEADERS IN
JAPAN,
RUSSIA,
ENGLAND
DESCRIBE
THE
REDEEMING
QUALITIES
THEY SEE
IN U.S.
SCHOOLS



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A JAPANESE PERSPECTIVE



BY TAKEAKI NAKADOME
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During a year-long study comparing educational administration in Japan and the United States for my country's Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, I visited dozens of elementary and secondary schools and sat in with school district committees in Wisconsin, Florida, and Washington.

My research took me to 25 educational administrative agencies, including state offices and local/county school districts, and to 89 elementary and secondary schools in urban and rural areas. I met a total of 142 school administrators, including 22 superintendents, and more than 100 teachers.

In addition, I participated in 12 leadership training seminars for school administrators in three states. I also had the opportunity to observe an external team of educators evaluate programs in school districts and schools.

As a result, I was able to see various facets of American educational administration. I learned much from the excellent practice of American educational administration and collected some thought-provoking suggestions for Japanese educational administration.

Because American schools are full of diversity, while, as is often pointed out, Japanese schools maintain uniformity in their educational programs and management styles, I find it difficult to make simple comparisons between Japanese and American educational

administration. Therefore, I will comment on characteristics commonly found in educational administration in the school districts of Milwaukee and Madison, Wisc.; Sarasota and Hillsborough County, Fla.; and Seattle and Bellevue, Wash. Then I will identify some lessons that need to be re-examined in the practice of Japanese educational administration in these fields:

- the relationship between the administration of local school districts and schools;
- pre-service and in-service training for school administrators; and
- within-school administration.

Leadership Connections

After World War II, Japan adopted the American school board system and while this system formally exists today, in reality it functions in sharply different ways. For example, the election of board of education members by local citizens doesn't exist in Japan any more.

During my U.S. fieldwork in local districts, I saw widespread participation of school board members in decision-making. Their involvement is based on the principle of lay control, which is said to be a traditional grassroots style of education. For example, the Madison, Wisc., school board has 10 standing committees. Of these, six committees (such as the school program development committee and the long-term planning committee) reflect the opinions of the general public by including volunteers who represent local cit-

izens in addition to elected committee members.

In addition, students representing the district's four high schools participate as members of the program development committee where they can express their opinions. This is a good example of the principle of lay control.

Furthermore, various measures ensure public involvement, such as the open-door policy of school board meetings and the establishment of codes of ethics to govern behavior of committee members. These are useful lessons that should cause us in Japan to re-examine the closed-door policy of the school board system.

During the second wave of American educational reforms (the deregulation of restrictions starting in the mid-1980s), the authority relationships between boards of local school districts and the schools themselves were re-examined. Under the federal government's Chapter I and Chapter II programs, school boards transferred much of their authority to individual schools. As a result, a school-based style of management enjoys growing acceptance in many communities throughout the United States.

Each school using the school-based management approach had a school committee (operating under various names) that included parents, local residents, representative teachers (including members of the teachers' union), and the principal. In the case of high schools, the committee also had student representatives.

Having shared its authority with the school board, especially in the areas of personnel, curriculum, and school budgets, this type of school committee functioned as a decision-making body. Of course there were some cases, such as one in Milwaukee, in which the adoption of school-based management depended on a majority vote by the full staff at each school.

Generally, however, I was under the strong impression that a good relationship of mutual trust existed between a school district with the school-

based management and its schools.

When a school district practiced school-based management, the school board and individual schools often exchanged memoranda of agreements that specified the scope of each party's



Photo courtesy of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tokyo, Japan

"... the Japanese school board is involved in many fewer political disputes ..."

authority. In fields in which authority has not been transferred from the board to a principal, neither the principal nor the teachers dared ask for new authority. Thus even in school-based management I found complete observance of the principle of unity of command between the school board and the school.

However, the two parties are characterized not by a top-down relationship but rather a shared or bottom-up relationship in which the school board supports the school's management activities.

The Board's Role

After analyzing school-based management in the United States, I believe Japanese school management should consider the following:

- active participation by a wide variety of people in the school board's policy-making and the management of each individual school; and
- a re-examination of the policy of school administration by the school board, especially democratization of various processes needed for agreements between school boards and schools.

Japanese school boards and Japanese schools need to maintain a more open partnership by adopting the principle of lay control. An open partnership in Japanese school management can be made possible by adopting various strategies from school-based management in the United States.

The partnership between the school board and the superintendent in the United States generally was believed to be a dichotomous and yet harmonious relationship in that the former engaged in policy-making and decision-making based on lay control, while the latter exercised policies by professional control. In reality, however, until the 1960s the superintendent's control was so influential that he or she controlled school board decisions and board members tried to explain their intentions.

To correct this imbalance, participation on the school board by local residents was reinforced in the 1970s, and shared decision-making by lay and professional representation was achieved by transferring certain authority from the school board to schools. This was typical of school-based management in the late 1980s.

In Japan, on the other hand, the partnership between board members and the superintendent of schools in cities or villages has been maintained without distinctive division of duties. While the superintendent leads the former, more or less, the two parties perform their responsibilities together.

Unlike the American superintendent, the Japanese superintendency

does not require professional training and background. A superintendent may be appointed by a governor, a mayor, or a city assembly, even though these officials have no educational background. Under these circumstances, a prerequisite of professional background for the superintendent, as well as the system of appointment and approval by a governor or a mayor, should be considered from the viewpoint of the successful practice of American educational management.

In its general relationship with schools, the Japanese school board is involved in many fewer political disputes compared with its American counterpart, and accordingly, it is easier to maintain a more stable relationship with schools. On the other hand, the stable relationship between the Japanese board and schools makes it more difficult for schools to undertake educational reforms.

In this respect, even today Japan can learn much from the American school board system. In Japan's endeavor to respond to various changes in contemporary society, the nation can benefit from lay control and the fully qualified superintendentship.

Leadership Training

In striving for school improvement, both the United States and Japan share a common problem: how administrators exercise appropriate leadership in their schools. In the United States, this problem is discussed in light of the relationship between pre-service training for administrators and the reality of training at graduate schools.

In Japan, the problem is discussed in terms of the relationship between the in-service training for school administrators and the attainment of their eligibility, since there is no pre-service training for them.

In the United States, graduate programs at universities have served as "one best model" to train superintendents, principals, supervisors, and curriculum coordinators. Based on behavioral science, American training programs for school administrators have developed to a high level. Americans believe profoundly in the need for professionalism, credentials, and an advanced educational background. Yet in spite of this, no sufficient evidence exists to prove American

schools with their system of trained administrators are superior to Japanese schools. This comparison will continue to be difficult in the future.

During my research, I recognized the need to re-examine the American idea of graduate education as one best model to train school administrators. This usually is a problem in programs for training school administrators and school operation, and the direction of reform perhaps can be seen in training programs that better reflect the reality of school administration and result from partnerships among schools, school boards, and graduate schools. An example is the University of Washington's Danforth Principal Preparation Program, which provides on-the-job training in the practice of fulfilling administrator's duties. New programs linking management practice to a doctoral degree in educational administration will be established.

Although the license for American school administrators is granted according to administrative position (e.g., superintendent, principal, or supervisor), I had a strong impression that actual training programs are not divided distinctively according to those positions. Rather, various programs are offered inclusively as electives. Master's and doctoral programs are quite similar. The difference between the two seems to exist not in their scope but in their degree of sequence.

Having participated in various seminars for administrators sponsored by universities, state offices, local school districts, and professional organizations, I found these seminars to be oriented toward solving problems. Similar seminars for administrators in Japan, however, are short-term and limited. They also are lecture-oriented and do not provide participants with problem-solving opportunities.

At the University of South Florida, for instance, I participated in a month-long training seminar for principals entitled "Managing a Productive School." By integrating the seminar's purpose into the contents, method, and style in each problem-solving step, this excellent seminar enabled participants to improve their leadership abilities. Such programs could provide Japanese administrators with many constructive strategies.

I suggest Japan consider the following actions, based on American training for school administrators:

- *To introduce American-style pre-service training for school administrators in the near future.*

This, however, would be difficult at present. This is why we have had a traditional belief that teachers should be promoted to administrators after 20 to 30 years of teaching experience.

Therefore, Japanese leaders believe it is more effective to develop a series of systematic and comprehensive new programs for in-service training for teachers with five to six years of teaching experience so that a management mind will be formed at early stages. These new programs are expected to include some successful aspects of the American training programs.

- *To develop in-service training programs for Japanese school administrators in an open partnership with school boards, schools, and universities, as in the United States.*

- *To establish some guidelines regarding competency necessary for administrators.*

This can be done under the leadership of the National Association of School Principals and the National Association of School Vice Principals in Japan. The American competency guidelines developed by AASA and the National Association of Secondary School Principals can serve as good references.

Site Administration

Based on my experiences in visiting 89 American schools, I have found these comparisons of within-school administration in Japan and the United States.

One major difference in school management is the within-school partnership system. In the United States, teaching duties by teachers clearly are distinguished from management duties by administrators. Although the management of administrators provides direction for teachers, this is not a vertical relationship but a division of roles related to the dichotomous practice of pre-service and in-service training for teachers and administrators. The partnership between the two is based on disputes and conflicts in their duties—that is to say, partnership means to make a clear distinction or division between teachers and administrators.

In Japan, by contrast, we believe administrators' work is made possible by many years of teaching experience, but we also consider the duties of teachers and administrators be processed harmoniously according to the ceremonial decisions made in staff meetings of the school.

Furthermore, traditional practice

and customs are emphasized to be repeated in Japanese schools. Since conflicting arguments or oral disputes are not productive in staff meetings, behind-the-scenes negotiations or persuasive efforts to reach a harmonious consensus play an important role prior to these staff meetings.

The idea of a clear distinction of administrators' roles does not work effectively even between a principal and a vice principal. Of course, the clear division of within-school roles between teachers and administrators is considered necessary to maintain harmony in a group and not for the sake of rational and efficient performance of duties between the two parties.

In Japanese schools a staff room is a common place where teachers and other personnel work together. This room usually is managed by a vice principal. Even if a teacher has an original idea for his or her classroom management, that teacher must balance individual initiative with the desires of other staff members for the sake of harmony.

Another difference between Japanese and American school management relates to the duties assigned to teachers. In American schools, teachers' work usually is limited to subject-specific teaching, while Japanese teachers play multiple roles to develop each student as a whole person, giving everyday guidance to students and even serving *in loco parentis*.

Accordingly, American schools have many more supporting staff members who supplement regular teachers. American school administrators, therefore, need to be capable of managing the support staff who have a wide variety of roles.

In Japanese schools, by contrast, teachers fulfill administrative duties outside the scope of teaching. As such, they have to manage both administrative and teaching affairs.

Related closely to these differences is the way schools in Japan and the United States are evaluated. Japanese schools are evaluated on the basis of teamwork, while American schools are assessed in terms of individual teachers' performance. Since the individual's work in Japan cannot be separated from the team, the evaluation of an individual teacher's performance doesn't count, even though a

personal evaluation system exists.

In contrast, the performance evaluation of an individual teacher in America functions properly. In Japanese schools, an open personnel evaluation based on an agreement between each teacher and the principal is necessary, considering the fact that even American performance evaluation by a principal is made possible by an agreement between each teacher and the principal.

Japanese school management can learn from the public nature of school management evident in American schools. U.S. schools benefit significantly when parents, local residents, and even high school students are allowed to participate actively in school management and curriculum planning.

Further, American schools intentionally accept many kinds of evaluations from visiting educators or external assessors to improve the quality of the school. Japanese schools should respect these strenuous efforts.

Shared Concern

Finally, American and Japanese schools commonly face another problem: the insufficient leadership of the principal directed toward teachers. American and Japanese principals are too busy taking care of routine administrative work and seem unable to find time to take the instructional leadership of teachers' educational activities and research. In schools that adopt the school-based management system, principals have more opportunities to extend instructional leadership toward shared decision-making with teachers.

To improve Japanese and American school management, I suggest strategies be deeply rooted in the unique characteristics or school culture (teacher sub-culture or student sub-culture) that each school possesses. My visits to American schools convince me that whether or not a school can create a new culture or change its systems depends largely upon its principal's leadership.

School improvement is one of the nuclei for educational reform in both Japan and the United States, and the principal's leadership is a key factor. The principal's creative decision-making ability and his or her ability to collaborate efforts within and outside the school are all the more necessary.

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