The Classroom Collapse Phenomenon

Kathryn Zidonis

Introduction

A teacher enters the classroom to find some male students in the middle of a fistfight. She stepped in to put an end to the fighting when the boys’ partners in crime joined in the battle. More boys jumped in the brawl, and the teacher completely lost control of the classroom. Claiming, “It doesn’t have anything to do with us,” the girls in the class refused to get involved, and thus provided no information. At last, the teacher temporarily regained control of the class, and the students scurried to take their seats. “Ok, class, let’s begin,” the teacher said in an attempt to start the lesson. Yet, as soon as she signaled to the class leader to start the opening greetings, a boy interrupted, shouting, “I want a drink of water!” Next, in succession, calling out, “Me too, me too,” every boy headed out of the classroom to the water fountain to get a drink.

The above scenario was adapted from a record written by sixth grade elementary school students recalling the events of their fifth grade class. Their memories depict a classroom situation typical of classroom collapse, or gakkyûhôkai. The catchphrase “classroom collapse” describes the phenomenon in which teachers are losing control of their classes and children are becoming more unruly. Currently, the trend is sweeping Japan’s educational institutions, alarming the Japanese by what they perceive as a growing sense of student rebellion against the educational institution. Due to the great deal of pressure in the schools, compounded by the changing social factors in Japan, an increasing number of students are reportedly demonstrating
behaviors associated with classroom collapse.

Exhausted by the pressures to succeed on entrance exams, the pressures to promote smooth human relations in the midst of bullying, and by the pressures to live up to the “good kid” label, children are revealing defiant attitudes and resisting the traditional schoolroom setting. As a result of feeling taxed beyond their level of tolerance, children may react violently, suddenly refuse to attend school, or isolate themselves from society. Anti-social behavior and violent outbursts attack the core values of Japanese culture: respect for authority, education and social harmony. All of these breaches against the system add up to classroom collapse. In this essay, I intend to set the social context of the translation piece that follows by defining characteristics of a classroom in disorder, explaining some of the contributing factors associated with the breakdown, as well as introducing several proposed solutions to remedy this “youth problem” sweeping Japan.

**Characteristics of Classroom Collapse**

As early as at the elementary school level, children are rebelling against the traditional classroom setting (typically where one teacher teaches every textbook-centered subject lecture-style from the classroom podium to a class of forty students). No longer tolerating this system of “mass spoon-fed” education, children are becoming unruly, storming out of class, and destroying school property. In his book regarding the recent turbulent trends of students on the verge of a breakdown, elementary school teacher Kuramoto Yorikazu outlines characteristics typical of a classroom in the mist of a breakdown.

1. Disorder in the classroom is so severe that the teacher cannot carry out the lesson. The following types of behavioral disruptions typify the commotion causing the classroom to breakdown:

   a. Students get up from their desks, walk around the classroom while talking to each other in loud voices, and in some cases they wander out of the classroom without permission.

   b. Students raise their voices in mocking tones, sing, and pick fights.

   c. Even when the teacher attempts to discipline the class troublemakers, students ignore the teacher, and shout, ‘Shut up!’ at each other and the teacher.
d. When the teacher distributes a test or worksheet, students crumble, rip or throw the handouts.

2. During compulsory events conducted outside of regular lessons (such as cleaning and school lunch), students refuse to cooperate, causing uproar.
   a. Rather than carry out their cleaning obligations during the scheduled time, students play and talk with their friends.
   b. They run from teachers or talk back to them when they are warned to “get back to work.”
   c. They skip their lunch duties, or serve themselves more than their allotted portion of food, walk around the classroom while eating, and initiate food fights.

3. They are unable to get “on task” and demonstrate restless behavior from the beginning of the school day. Moreover, when the slightest thing goes wrong for them, instead of calmly working through the glitch, they panic. Overreactions include knocking over desks, chairs, kicking bookshelves and tearing bulletins down from the classroom walls.

4. They defy school uniform rules by coming to school with colored hair, pierced ears, painted nails, and rub-on tattoos.

5. They react violently to any mishap at school. If they are scolded by a teacher, they demonstrate sinister attitudes by threatening, ‘Shut up bitch!’ Or, ‘I’ll kill you!’

6. In some cases, disgruntled students physically strike the teacher.

The ‘Good Kid’ Expectation

One of the main factors contributing to the current breakdown within the schools can be attributed to the pressure put on children to achieve the “good kid” standard of being a model student. To explain, parents and teachers label children good kids if they are obedient, study hard, listen to the teacher, excel at extra curricular activities, respect their elders, get along with other children, and contribute positively as a member of a group. Among these qualities outlining a model student, group work and cooperation are strongly emphasized, as these characteristics are culturally an integral part of the Japanese value system. For example, whether or not students learn to be productive group members, the group concept will continue to play key roles in children’s lives from early elementary school through retirement. To illustrate, in her study, “Persistence in Education,” Priscilla Blinco explains the significance of establishing
proper group work training from an early age:

When children enter the first grade in Japan, they also enter their kumi, or class group. This is the beginning of the formal part of their training as a member of the group with school ties established in first grade that will last a lifetime. From this day forward, harmony within the group will be emphasized repeatedly.\(^7\)

Furthermore, one noted prerequisite to being a “good kid” is contributing and promoting “social harmony,” as defined by the moral education curriculum of the Japanese Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture. Consistent with the “model student” theme, moral education plays a fundamental role from the elementary level in promoting the solid value system encouraged by Japanese society. The following guidelines of an elementary level moral education class outlined in Japanese Education Today, “Compulsory Education: Grades 1-6,” parallels the expectations society has for children to play a role in the promotion of social harmony both in group work as well as in cooperative activities. Traditionally, students who display respect for the following qualities are accepted as “good kids.”

1. Importance of order, regularity, cooperation, thoughtfulness, participation, manners, and respect for public property.
2. Endurance, hard work, and high aspirations.
3. Freedom, justice, fairness, rights, duties, trust, and conviction.
4. The individual’s place in groups such as the family, school, nation, and world.
5. Harmony with nature and its appreciation.
6. Need for rational and scientific attitudes toward human life.\(^8\)

However, if children fail to live up to these high expectations, they may feel as if they are in turn labeled “bad kids.” That is, because there is no middle ground to distinguish between “good” and “bad” within this value system, the only alternative to a “good kid,” is the extreme opposite, “bad kids.” Furthermore, many students feel that schools are intended exclusively for “good kids.” Consequently, if children fail to meet the above characteristics of a model student in their teachers’ and parents’ eyes, they suffer from a great deal of stress, and thus develop
negative attitudes toward going to school. For example, a survey of 1,722 sixth grade students in public elementary schools in Chiba Prefecture asked pupils both with and without “good kid” labels their feelings regarding going to school. According to the results, 60 percent of high-achieving students labeled “good kids” expressed they “loved going school,” while 25 percent indicated school was “kind of fun.” In sum, approximately 85 percent of so-called “good kids” have a positive attitude toward school. Only 15 percent of the model students surveyed indicated disaffection toward school. However, of those students who indicated that they do not wear the “good kid” label, 55 percent indicated that they do not enjoy school; more than 10 percent of those students strongly claimed they “hate” school. Considering the attitudes expressed in the survey, students are demonstrating a resistance to the black and white image of the “good kid” or “bad kid” labels. As a result, it seems students who feel that they are judged on the “good kid” standard may not believe that they are regarded as individuals. Therefore, they are showing a growing tendency to break out of the group, a characteristic conflicting with the qualities of a “good kid,” and thus are considered to be a contributing factor in the current breakdown in schools.

**Violent Acts of Rebellion**

Despite the emphasis on being positive and contributing group members in the midst of classroom collapse, children are rejecting the model student ideal. The outcomes of the rejection experienced are reflected in the recent increase in juvenile delinquency. As youths are growing more hostile and rebellious against parents, teachers, and society on the whole, the increase in cases of violent outbreaks among juveniles has become a focus of the media. For example, according to the article, “Violence in the Schools and in the Community,” in Japan Insight, the number of Japanese youths who were caught by police as of June 1998, surpassed 70,000, a marked increase from previous years. Furthermore, reports reveal a rise in violent incidents among minors involving a weapon. For instance, the article states, “Those acts of violence committed by a knife have increased significantly. The number of murders by young people between the ages of fourteen and twenty during the first sixth months of this year (1998) totaled 63, the largest number in 10 years.”

Generally, these trends indicate three categories of violence among youths in the school community: violence against teachers, violence against other students, and destruction of school
property. To cite a specific example of a crime against a teacher, in January 1998, a boy stabbed his teacher to death in the classroom because he was allegedly irritated with her for scolding him for being tardy. Among acts of violence against other students, perhaps the most villainous was the decapitation of an elementary school boy by a male junior high school student in Kobe City in 1997. In a recent case of a youth’s impulsive violence, a 17 year-old high school boy was arrested for killing a 64 year-old woman in Toyokawa, Aichi Prefecture in May 2000. What was alarming about this incident, according to an article in the Asahi Shimbun, was that the youth was reputed to be a model student and as a result of being tired of wearing the “good kid” mask, he aggressively rebelled against society. Additionally, according a related report in The Daily Yomiuri, he was “smart enough to answer the Tokyo University entrance examination questions without difficulty, although he never boasted about it.” Furthermore, his grandfather explained that the boy had never gone through a rebellious phase, and overall was known as a “good kid.”

The results of the above reports suggest that violent acts are no longer solely associated with low-achievers, rather, any student, labeled “good” or “bad,” is capable of perpetrating acts of violence. Concerning this increase in violent acts involving young people, what appears to be most alarming to the adult Japanese society is the remarkable increase in crimes committed by teens with no previous criminal or record or delinquent tendencies. Further supporting the notion that public concern over youth violence is on the rise, a recent nationwide survey of the adult community conducted by The Daily Yomiuri, found that 85 percent of the respondents indicated they believe “any child is capable of misbehavior such as bullying, acting violently toward schoolmates and disrupting classes.” The results reflect the growing concern in society regarding the “collapsing” environment in schools.

Schoolyard Bullying: *Ijime*

Because violence is regarded as an extreme deviation from the desirable habits outlined in school curriculums, such as showing respect for others and exercising self-control, extreme cases similar to the two described above have received extensive coverage in the media as they represent sources of public concern. However, more common than the extraordinary forms of violence committed by youths is the growth of the related “bullying,” or *ijime* predicament. As previously mentioned, attitudes that collide with societal norms, such as group accord, for
example, directly go against the fundamental Japanese values of respect for education and social harmony.

Therefore, because it signals that group behavior has gone bad or lost its harmony, school bullying is particularly upsetting to the Japanese. For example, as explained in a report by Japanese Education Today, entitled, “Education Reform,” the unwillingness of students who bully others to participate constructively in organized group activities represents more than their rejection of that classroom. Rather, the refusal to observe group norms is viewed “as a rejection of the larger social system which Japanese leaders and the public believe bode ill for the future. Ijime is a vexing problem for a society that prizes order, harmony and predictability.”

Furthermore, research indicates that due to the introverted nature of the victims and bystanders, Japanese students tend to ignore incidents of bullying, and at the same time, parents of the victims themselves are often ignorant to the fact that their child is agonizing due to schoolyard harassment. For example, Takeuchi Takaaki, father of a 14 year-old victim of an $8,000 extortion bullying case, explained his personal disappointment in being kept on the outside of his own child’s suffering in a Los Angeles Times World Report article: “Half of me is furious with my son for not telling me the truth and half of me wants to apologize to him for not being the kind of father he could confide in.” Harboring incidents of bullying further compounds the problem for the victims. That is, victims of ijime suffer not only from the acts of bullying, but also from the loneliness and isolation as they go unnoticed and untreated.

In a related example, a study conducted in 1997 of 7,000 students, parents and teachers further supports the theory that bullying incidents tend to go unnoticed. For example, while 15 percent of parents surveyed discovered that their children were bullied and attempted to remedy the problem, 50 percent of the parents of bully victims were unaware that their children had experienced bullying at all. According to the survey, of those youths who were bullied, 37.8 percent kept their experience a secret and tried to cope on their own, and 14 percent of the victims complained, “Nobody cared and their teachers did nothing.” However, at the same time, 96 percent of teachers claimed that they took action against the bullies. The absence of teacher-initiated intervention indicates a severe communication gap regarding the reality of the bullying epidemic in Japan’s schools.

Furthermore, according to the results of a report of 16,000 public school students, teachers and parents around the nation compiled by an international research group for the Ministry of
Education, Science, Sports and Culture, rather than a multitude of isolated incidents of bullying, “the figures suggest a tendency in Japan for the same victims are repeatedly bullied over an extended period.”\(^{18}\) If this data is accurate and bullies continually harass the same victims over an extended period of time, than this further brings about suspicion concerning the effectiveness of student-teacher communication in the classroom due to the previously reported data where 96 percent of teachers claimed that they took action against the bullies.

**Social Withdrawal: Refusal to Attend School and Hikikomori**

As a result of the bullying crisis being disregarded, instead of seeking consultation or advice, many victims become reclusive and enter a state of social withdrawal. The first sign of a child suffering from social withdrawal is reflected by his or her tendency to stop attending school. In the eyes of the parent, the pattern of a child’s refusal to go to school is inconsistent and puzzling. For example, a parent sees a child come home from school on any given day suddenly decide that he or she does not want to return. Something happens that triggers the sudden reaction to no longer attend school. Although parents cannot at first understand what has triggered their children’s seemingly sudden refusal to return to school, a study published by *Japan Insight, “Students Who Refuse to Go to School or Tōkō Kyōhi,”*\(^{19}\) reported a number of possible causes. They can generally be explained by one of several reasons associated with social and academic pressures.

The most common cause of students suddenly deciding not to return to school can be attributed to bullying. For example, the children on both sides of bullying cases reported suffering from recurrent depression. In other cases, students complained that they felt pressured to succeed academically and keep up with others in the class, while others claimed that their parents constantly compared them to their siblings or other children in the neighborhood. Moreover, many children complained that their parents failed to offer them any support when they confided in them. Other students did not like their teachers, while others suffered because they were unable to establish solid friendships.\(^{19}\) In summary, all of the above factors can cause children to withdrawal from society and retreat into their own worlds.

Although parents and school officials want these children to return to school, the reality is that children should not be forced to return if they are not ready due to the increase in the number of student-sufferers. For example, studies show that the more parents urge their children to return to
school, the more likely children will be to develop symptoms of illness. For example, one
parent reported that her normally healthy child was suffering from physical ailments such as
headache, stomachache, nausea, and balding due to the fear of being forced to return to school.19)

Moreover, many of the children suffering from this form of social withdrawal not only refuse
to go to school, but also refuse to leave their homes. Additionally, in severe cases, students even
refuse to leave the solitude of their own bedrooms. Psychiatrist Machizawa Shizuo explains the
lifestyle of the victims of this recent trend of social withdrawal, or hikikomori, in which young
Japanese drop out of society and recoil into their own worlds: “Typically, as the sun and most of
the nation rises, hikikomori sufferers slip into a deep sleep after a night of TV-watching, radio-
listening, video game-playing, on-line chatting or ceiling-staring.” 20) Machizawa believes the fear
of failure in a competitive society is to blame for young people to close their doors to the
outside world: “Failure is the trigger. Whether it is failure to fit in, failure to pass school exams,
or failure to satisfy Mommy, the ability to cope with failure in Japan’s highly competitive
society is the self-locking door to hikikomori.” 20)

In addition to the intense pressure to succeed academically, psychiatrist Kuramoto Hidehiko of
the Mental Health Center for Young People in Tokyo explains that the changing structure of the
traditional Japanese family to the nuclear family, in which couples are having fewer children and
are living independently from their extended families, is also to blame for the hikikomori
phenomenon. For example, as a result of having fewer offspring, parents tend to lavish all their
attention on their one or two children and at the same time, put intense educational expectations
on them. When a spoiled child cannot live up to the parents’ high hopes, it is easy for him or
her to escape academic pressure and retreat to the comforts of his or her own room. In an
interview with The Daily Yomiuri, Kuramoto explains the potential dangers of pressuring
children and forcing them to stay in school in the context of the age of the nuclear family: “If
children who are at once indulged and expected to succeed buckle, it is easy for them to stay
home-boys especially. What is more, if the mother tries to force her son to attend school, he
will often react violently.” 20)

Transformation of the Japanese Family

As Kuramoto introduced above, the structure of the Japanese family has undergone significant
transformation, changing from the traditional (extended family or several generations living
together) to the modern, nuclear family (known in Japanese as *kakukazoku*, defined as a couple living with their children as one small family). For example, according to the “Household Survey Report” compiled by the Management and Coordination Agency, in 1955, the average number of people per Japanese household was approximately five. However, over the four decades that have followed, the birth rate plunged and the number of nuclear families increased. As a result, the average number of people per household decreased by nearly two persons by 1994. \(^{21}\) The size of the family continued to decrease and by the end of the nineties, the average household size stood at less than three members. \(^{22}\) To emphasize the rapid change in the Japanese family structure, by comparison, in the United States, it took one hundred years leading up to 1960 for the average household size to drop from 5.3 to 3.3 members. In comparison, the same drastic decline took Japan less than half that time, at 45 years.

The rapid drop in the number of people per household in contemporary Japan can be attributed to several social factors. Some of these include the increase in career opportunities for women, a fear of the financial burdens associated with raising children, and a recent trend seen in the younger generation to be unwilling to forfeit a carefree lifestyle. First, since the 1970s, more women have been pursuing a higher level of education, graduating from junior and four year colleges. A higher academic status enabled them to enter the workforce and pursue careers more easily than in the past. As a result of their involvement in the workforce, more women are choosing to marry later in life, consequently, postponing having children. In addition, the rise in the cost of living during recent decades in Japan, and the cost of raising and educating children has been further discouraging couples from having many children. Finally, some young working couples report that because they would rather not lower their standard of living or sacrifice their lifestyles, they either postpone having children or choose not to have children at all. \(^{23}\)

Consequently, the transformation from the traditional family to the nuclear family can be regarded as another factor contributing to the classroom collapse phenomenon. Children who grow up in smaller families with few siblings are exempt from sharing their parents’ time and money with others. Congruently, in a household with only one child, parents are more likely to spoil children by granting them what they wish materialistically as well as by focusing more attention on them. Due to the spread of both prosperity and permissiveness on the part of the parents, disciplining children and teaching them to exhibit self-control has suffered. As a result, children who are unaccustomed to being told “no,” or children who are rarely encouraged to
reflect on their actions when they misbehave, go to school expecting the same loose management that they receive at home. To illustrate, University of Tokyo Professor Fujita Hidenori explains the link between the increase in the number of spoiled children and the increase in the number of those contributing to classroom collapse:

A tendency towards unconditional tolerance of expression of individualistic desires and the emphasis on self-assertion has grown stronger, and there are fewer chances for self-control and fewer opportunities to be considerate of other people and of specific situations. It can be argued that this situation also is part of the increase in the numbers of children who “lose control.”

In addition to Kuramoto’s emphasis on the problem of modern parents’ tendency to lavish their attention on children, and Fujita’s suggestion that children no longer have the ability to exhibit self-control, members of society are beginning to fault parents’ lack of discipline skills as playing a leading role in the classroom collapse phenomenon. For example, according to a survey conducted in April 2000, when asked, “What parental steps do you think are necessary to stop juvenile crime and delinquency?” over 70 percent of the respondents indicated that parents need to “Teach children to distinguish between right and wrong.” Many respondents also argued that parents should “Not spoil or pamper children,” and parents need to “Teach children to look after themselves.” These results bring to light increased attention on parents’ role in children’s behavior at school, and at the same time imply dissatisfaction in parental roles as both disciplinarians and educators.

Academic Pressures

Furthermore, as a result of fewer children per household, rather than dividing their energies among several children, there is a growing tendency for parents to focus all of their attention on one or two children. However, one third of the respondents to the survey conducted by the The Daily Yomiuri reveals that the increased amount of attention parents are giving their children tends to be wrongly transferred into negative pressure to succeed academically. Specifically, the survey respondents believe, “parents should pay more attention to children’s good points, rather than just their school records.” The recommendation to decrease the amount of attention
placed on children’s grades and to increase positive reinforcement in the home supports the assumption that fewer children per household increases the amount of pressure placed on each child, and at the same time, the opinions voiced indicate a rejection of the trend.

However, the pressure to succeed academically is deep-rooted in Japan and begins as early as preschool. For example, since the schools attended from kindergarten through university directly affect the prospect of finding a good job, success or failure on an entrance examination can influence a student’s entire future. To explain, many accept as true that those who do not graduate from a well-known university are more limited in their employment options and may have little chance of being quickly promoted once they enter a company. As a result, the emphasis at home and in school on high educational achievement is intense. Students typically begin their academic lifetime of entrance exam preparation at the junior high level and continue until they finally pass the entrance exam into a prestigious company. Because separate tracks for those with elite educational backgrounds and those with mediocre educational achievements dictate the possibilities of a student’s future, rigorous study and academic competition are encouraged from an early age.

For example, even though elementary school students are not required to pass a national examination in order to advance to the junior high level, many parents are eager to send their children to kindergartens affiliated with well-known universities in order to heighten their chances of admission to the next level. As a result, parents emphasize the importance of exam preparation while their children are very young. However, a successful admission to prestigious primary and secondary schools does not necessarily benefit the child exclusively. To explain, a report in *Japanese Education Today: ‘Compulsory Education’* explains how the emphasis put on children to succeed academically is not only to secure the future of the individual, but the pressure carries over to have an effect on the whole family.

The mother-child bond provides strong emotional support for the child, particularly in the upper grades, as the child becomes progressively more aware of the importance of academic achievement and the severity of education competition. The mother reinforces this awareness by encouraging the child to study and inducing the child to realize that academic success is important to her and of great concern to the family. 

![Image](image-url)
Such pressure, continually reinforced throughout a child’s academic career, serves as a strong contributing factor as to why students feel overwhelmed with their school workload. As a result, students begin to understand that the reality of falling behind in school lessens their chances of being labeled a “good kid.” This in turn increases the chance that they will rebel against the classroom setting.

Students are coming to school carrying the burden of the pressure to succeed academically from home and at school. However, the pressure is further compounded by the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture, which dictates and rigidly controls a national unified curriculum. For instance, the standards designated by the ministry clearly define what content is to be taught in schools, as well when it is to be taught, regardless of the student’s level of comprehension. Consequently, students who require more individual attention or more thorough instruction in one subject are apt to fall behind their classmates. As the governmental lesson plan advances, students who are unable to keep up are susceptible to anxiety and fear of failure.

Moreover, under such a controlled system, teachers are aware of which topics will be addressed on national entrance exams; therefore, they further emphasize the importance of passing by teaching towards the test in the classroom. Yet, as little remedial attention is given to students who are unable to keep up with the set standards, children who do not demonstrate subject mastery may feel ignored or robbed of the individual educational attention necessary to assure their academic success. The added stress of keeping up with such a regimented core curriculum can contribute to more students “losing control,” and thus may be considered a contributing factor leading students to a classroom rebellion.

Cram School: Juku

In addition to the academic anxieties children are under at home and at school, they are further pressured to subscribe to the belief that their daily eight-hour school session is not sufficient in order to secure academic success. To explain, as a result of the widely accepted notion that only the students who have succeeded in mastering the full range of subjects of the standardized government-controlled curriculum have a chance at passing entrance exams at each level of education, the majority of Japanese students attend cram school, or juku, to supplement the regular school day. Juku are predominately private, for profit schools that students attend after the regular school day to study the subjects outlined by the Ministry of Education, Science,
Sports and Culture in order to master extracurricular subjects such as abacus, art, and calligraphy, as well as to prepare for specific entrance examinations.\textsuperscript{25} A great deal of parents feel that without the extra “cram session,” students would fall behind their classmates academically or be limited in their choices of the next level of schooling due to the difficulty of succeeding on the entrance exams.

Therefore, the fact that the majority, at more than 60 percent of elementary and junior high students in Japan, is enrolled in \textit{juku}, some even from the age of four, is a direct reflection of the stress placed on academic achievement, as well as the emphasis placed on competition in education by parents and teachers.\textsuperscript{26} However, because \textit{juku} increases student workloads and decreases students’ free time, attending cram school intensifies student anxiety, and thus may negatively affect young students. For example, the added burden of \textit{juku} tacked on to an already busy schedule takes away from time potentially spent participating in recreational or stress-relieving activities outside of the school curriculum.

For instance, on average, a junior high school student attends \textit{juku} approximately three times per week for about two hours of lessons per session. The averages indicate that students today have longer lessons and heavier class loads that their predecessors did a decade ago.\textsuperscript{8} Furthermore, the increase implies that attending cram schools serve as a prerequisite to academic success, compounding the message sent to young people that academic achievement should take precedence over everything else. The added pressure to attend \textit{juku}, along with the loss of free time to exercise constructive outlets outside of their academic lives, make students more likely to withdraw socially, fall victim to \textit{ijime}, stop attending school, or in extreme cases, react violently against the system.

\textbf{Proposed Solutions}

As described, several social and societal factors such as an increase in cases of school yard bullying, violent outbreaks and social withdrawal among youths, a transformation from a traditional family to a smaller nuclear family, and heightened academic pressures have played a part in bringing the state of affairs in the schools in contemporary Japan to its current state of so-called collapse. Government officials, educators, psychiatrists, parents, and alarmed citizens have voiced concerns over the disorder in schools. For example, reports, surveys, and comments from teachers and parents focus on the growth of disorder in school classrooms, the recent rise in
juvenile delinquency, the continued problem of schoolyard bullying, as well as the rise in the number of cases of social withdrawal and school dropouts among youths in contemporary Japan.

Furthermore, the media has closely followed the youth problem and has coined numerous phrases depicting the current breakdown, such as ‘out of control children,’ ‘schools are sick,’ ‘children have closed themselves off,’ ‘children in distress,’ ‘classrooms in disorder,’ and what has now become a household term, classroom collapse. Everyone seems to acknowledge the existence of a problem among today’s youth: the growing tendency toward impulsive behavior among children and the growing number of classrooms in disorder is undeniable. Yet what are the proposed solutions to improve children’s defiant attitudes and behaviors, and to finally put the schools back in order?

First, the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture announced its intention to confront the classroom collapse problem encompassing Japan’s schools. According to Nakasone Hirofumi, reigning Education Minister at the time of the onset of the phenomenon, the ministry plans to reduce class sizes, increase the number of teachers, and increase government subsidies in order to tackle the classroom breakdown. For example, according the results of a study conducted by a team from the National Educational Research of 150 cases of dysfunctional classes reported in The Japan Times, oversized classrooms account for a great deal of the chaos in schools: “Out of 41 cases in which the class numbered more than 36 children, eight classes experienced a sudden rise in numbers—such as from 21 children to 40.” As a result, the ministry is considering reducing the current legal maximum class size of 40 students by increasing the number of teachers and the amount of governmental funding in order to create smaller, more manageable classrooms.

Specifically, according to the article, “Ministry to Promote Cuts in Class Sizes,” in The Daily Yomiuri, “The ministry plans to increase the number of teachers by more than 20,000 over a five-year period and will post more teachers to prefectures that promote smaller classes than to those that do not.” Furthermore, although a plan to uniformly cut class sizes by five or ten students is financially impossible, Nakasone announced that the ministry would incorporate expenses for the plan to reduce classroom sizes in its budgetary request in fiscal 2001. Also, officials explained their intention to increase the number of teachers while maintaining the current budget. To do so, they agreed to allow state subsidies, currently used only to hire full-time teachers to be spent to hire part-time teachers in order to reduce the current student-to-
teacher ratio in the classroom.\textsuperscript{29}

In addition to reducing the class sizes in public schools, the ministry is also beginning to show support of alternative schools. For the students who have problems fitting in at school or for those who refuse to attend school, the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture launched an alternative school system aimed at improving student social skills by training students to learn adequate behavior as well as acceptable social manners. For example, 25 model schools, dubbed “research and development schools” opened in April 2000. According to a ministry official quoted in The Daily Yomiuri, “By providing pupils with alternative school systems, we think we can offer opportunities for each of them to develop their individuality.”\textsuperscript{30}

Through the medium of the alternative schools, the ministry intends to provide a place to allow teachers to understand each student’s stage in development, family background, and problems such as delinquency or truancy. Similarly, a recent symposium held in Osaka addressed the problem of students refusing to go to school. Educators, counselors, parents and concerned citizens discussed the alternative or “free schools” to encourage troubled children to continue their educations. The panel addressed issues such as, “Can the refusal to attend school be considered an illness,” and “How are and should these children be handled?”\textsuperscript{31} Therefore, considering the efforts of the ministry, along with the professional opinions of the panelists, all parties involved in the mission to create alternative schools reiterate the necessity of improving communication lines among teachers and students, parents and children. Finally, those concerned with improving the school environment for students concur that educators, parents need to \textit{listen} to all children, regardless of any “good” or “bad kid” status, in order to send them a message of encouragement and acceptance.

\textbf{Listening to Children}

Social Psychologist Sawaya Takafumi specializes in social issues and current problems in Japanese society. According to his research, he proposes that all “youth problems” directly relate to communication problems. In his first book of an intended series on the classroom collapse phenomenon, \textit{Mō ‘ii ko’ niwa narenai: Hôkai suru gakkyû} (I Can’t Be a “Good Kid!”: The Collapse of Schools), Sayawa attempts to get to the root of the predicament by examining several possible origins such as the influence of violence in the media on children, the changes in the family structure in modern Japan, the current situation in Japanese schools, the parent-
child relationship, and finally, the power of effective communication in relationships.

In order to defend his philosophy, Sawaya consulted specialists in fields directly related to youth issues in contemporary Japan, such as both private and public sectors of education, psychiatry, and counseling. For example, Toriyama Toshiko, founder of the private alternative Kenji School in Japan,\(^{32}\) specializes in working with students who encountered social difficulties in the public school system, provided insights regarding children with special needs and offered advice as to how to give vulnerable children the attention they crave. Also, specialists on the influence of the media on children, Professor Sasaki Terumi of Dokkyo University and Associate Professor Sakamoto Akira of Ochanomizu Women’s University,\(^{33}\) are active in researching the effect the media has on children and its relation to the communicative environment in the home. Therefore, Sasaki and Sakamoto’s research offers a direct and timely reflection of the link between children and the media. Next, clinical specialist Fujii Kazuko of the National Center of Neurology and Psychiatry specializes in issues directly associated with the parent-child relationship. Fujii presented theories on enhancing the parent-child relationship through positive reinforcement in communication. Finally, specialist in educational research and journalist Akagi Shoichi, directly assisted Sawaya by conducting research, interviews, as well as collecting significant analytical data to write the text.

In each of the five chapters of *Mô ’ii ko’ niwa narenai: Hôkai suru gakkyû*, Sawaya advocates that effective communication is the first step to resolving the deteriorating situation in contemporary Japanese society. Furthermore, he argues that simply through the effort of listening to children, and providing them with a place where they feel comfortable expressing themselves, much of the tribulations associated with classroom collapse could be prevented. For example, he believes that empathetic listening could bring an end to such problems among youths as juvenile delinquency, bullying, reluctance to attend school, and social withdrawal. Throughout each issue addressed in text, the author returns to the importance of effective communication with young people. The following is a full translation of Chapter Four of the book, *Mô ’ii ko’ niwa narenai: Hôkai suru gakkyû* entitled, ‘Kodomo no koe ni mimi o sumaseru,’ (I Can’t Be a “Good Kid !” The Collapse of Schools, ‘Listen to Children’).
Notes

1) Formal greetings are an integral part of each lesson. Students stand to greet the teacher before class in unison, and a similar custom is performed to close each class. Generally, students are assigned to lead the greetings in monthly rotations as a classroom duty. Similar “greeting” rituals are performed before and after eating lunch.


4) Generally, there are no custodians employed by Japanese schools. Rather, it is considered an integral part of the school curriculum for the students to clean the building. A fixed period or approximately 30 minutes a day is set aside where the entire student body sweeps and dusts the classrooms and hallways. Teachers and principals strictly administer the process, as the ritual is regarded as character building and group cooperation is emphasized.

5) Most elementary and junior high schools in Japan have a mandatory school lunch program. Students eat in their classrooms and take turns serving their classrooms in groups. The classroom teacher strictly supervises rigid guidelines of the procedure, from washing hands properly to correctly holding utensils to eating with good posture.


12) Tokyo University is reputed to be the most prestigious university in Japan with a highly competitive entrance exam.


31) Asahi Shimbun, ‘Iryô yori kyôyô kodomo no hanashi o kikô,’ p.25, 4/14/00.
33) Dokkyo University is located northeast of Tokyo in Saitama Prefecture. Ochanomizu Women’s University is situated in Tokyo.
I Can’t Be a “Good Kid !” The Collapse of Schools, ‘Listen to Children’ 1)

The Key Word is Communication

“I’m going to explode !”
“The teacher makes me sick !”
“All the bullying !”
“School classrooms are falling apart...”

The stories behind each of these complaints vary greatly; furthermore, exactly how each problem came about could be one of a million possible reasons. Therefore, how can we get to the bottom of the root of the “youth problem” in contemporary Japan? In order to investigate the fundamental problem with today’s youth, several experts representing a variety of professions from different backgrounds were consulted. First, from the private sector, active in promoting theories on alternative education is Toriyama Toshiko. Fujii Kazuko deals with children within the national system of education, while Taki Mitsuru represents the guidance counseling side of education. Finally, Associate Professor Sasaki Terumi and Associate Professor Emeritus Sakamoto Akira contribute their views as theorists on how video games influence communication. However, regarding the cause of the problem leading to the feelings expressed above, surprisingly everyone’s conclusion pinpointed the problem in one common key word: communication.

According to our research, we confirmed one thing for certain. That is, the biggest fundamental problem in any relationship goes back to a lack of effective communication. Whether the case is within relationships such as among children, between parents and children, within families, between teachers and students, among fellow teachers or colleagues, the researchers concluded that the root of a conflict in any relationship is that no one understands the true meaning or the proper method of communication. All relationships (such as among parents and children, among siblings, couples, or office employees) undergo communication gaps. Therefore, “communication gaps” are no longer problems simply confined to the school or home arenas. Rather, communication gaps have spread to become a problem of society as a whole.

At first, trouble in a relationship may appear to be unrelated to a lack of communication.
However, as illustrated in Chapter Two concerning violence and the media, effective communication plays an extremely influential role in relationships. For example, until recently very little factual information has been available in Japan regarding the influence of violence in the media on children. As a result, most of the theories on the issue have been based on guesswork. However, two professional researchers in the field provided some surprisingly unforeseen data. Regarding the relationship between the media and violent behavior in children, they discovered that the effect of violent media coverage on communication immediately following the broadcast was neither good nor bad.

The classroom collapse phenomenon occurs when children fail to get their points across to their teachers, and at the same time, teachers fall short of getting through to the students. As a result, both sides are distraught-teachers are upset because their students won’t pay attention to them, while children argue that they are frustrated because the teachers won’t listen to them at all, let alone appear even to want to listen. Therefore, the relationship between students and teachers is completely lacking in mutual understanding and sympathy. The same holds true in child-parent relationships. For example, a parent imposes his or her personal opinions on a child by saying something such as, “Now I’m telling you this for your own good,” and at the same time won’t even attempt to listen to what the child might say in response.

In this book, communication is defined as the process of two minds reaching out to one another in order to reach an understanding. Yet, when neither party is willing to understand the other and feelings clash, a communication gap develops. To illustrate, a school classroom provides the setting for the development of such a communication breakdown between children and adults. Children do not listen to what the teacher in front of the classroom is saying, and at the same time, adults are not open to the children’s cries of protest. The result is classroom collapse.

Although a collapsed class fatally damages the teacher-student relationship, classroom collapse goes beyond a breakdown in communication. That is, there have been cases where the damage has been much more serious than a communication gap. Take, for example, the case of a junior high school that drove his rookie teacher to death. In another incident, a junior high student murdered his own father. Perhaps if these youths had someone in whom they could have somehow confided their dark thoughts beforehand, there would have been someone who could have caught the problem in advance. As a result of communication, the situation would not
have led to the students being hunted down for criminal charges in the end.11) In another case, a teacher who was murdered by a student had the reputation of being “an eager guidance teacher.”e) However, what kind of guidance did he practice? The teacher probably was keen on drawing kids, or forcing them, into his idea of what they should be like. Yet, I wonder if he could say that he was equally eager to go deep into his students’ ways of thinking? For example, it was easy for him to command the frequently absent student to, “Get back to class!”12) Yet, for that student, the classroom was a hard place to return. In this case, shouldn’t the question, ‘Why was the classroom such a hard place to return to?’ have been asked? That way, the teacher could have listened to the way he felt going to class. Furthermore, if the student and teacher had developed a relationship where they could have openly discussed his feelings, the situation could have been completely different. It’s not going too far to say that all youth problems today can be linked to communication barriers between children and adults.

**People Speak to Make Themselves Understood**

On the other hand, we cannot simply say that all problems of classroom collapse are based solely on communication. After all, stress occurs whether communication exists in a relationship or not.13) Yet, having read and heard about children’s painful experiences of being hurt through their relationships with adults, I realized just how important it is for people to have someone they can relate to in life. For example, consider the question, “on what occasions do we verbally express ourselves?” The answer is, “when we want others to understand us.” We use words to convey our most basic desires, such as, “I’m hungry,” or “I’m tired.” In short, anytime we want to make ourselves understood, we speak out. Furthermore, if someone listens to what we have to say and sympathizes with our opinions, then our thoughts have been acknowledged, and thus we feel accepted. As previously mentioned, satisfying our desire to “fit in” grants us a feeling of security. Furthermore, satisfying the “I fit in here” feeling is one of our basic desires as human beings. Therefore, if that desire is fulfilled, people will naturally be happy in life.

Again, listening sensitively to what kids have to say gives them a sense of security and acceptance.14) On the other hand, however, no matter how sweet your delivery, if you simply respond to children’s ideas by commenting, “Oh, you’re so cute, you’re just adorable,” instead of listening to the content of their thoughts and ideas, you are in fact ignoring their feelings.
Moreover, if you force your ideas on children, they will feel as though they have been criticized, and thus undergo the bitter experience of loosing their feeling of acceptance. As a result, they will end up feeling hurt and rejected.

Therefore, in order to successfully convey your acceptance to a child, you must keep in mind the idea, “This child really wants me to understand what he or she saying,” when he or she initiates a conversation. Children’s willingness to talk about a variety of topics is evidence that they believe adults are listening. However, if children reach the point where they think that adults don’t pay attention to them, then it could be too late. Once children feel rejected, getting them to open up again and express themselves freely is almost an impossible task.

**Negative Reinforcement Rejects Children**

One day, a boy who had just entered elementary school was playing with a toy train. Geared up, he excitedly declared his dream to his mother: “When I grow up, I’m going to be a train conductor !”

“Well, not if you don’t study you won’t,” she replied.

“Fine,” he said, “then I’ll be a doctor !”

“You’re being silly, if you want to be a doctor, then you’ll have to study even harder,” his mother responded.

The mother in this sketch most likely meant well in her response by desperately trying to encourage her son to study. However, responding to his dreams with negative feedback only discourages him from sharing his dreams with her again. As a result, the child would be likely to distance himself and simply stare off blankly while his mother speaks to him in the future. This scenario represents one of many similar examples of how crucial it is to give children positive reinforcement. When a parent responds to a child with sensitivity, the two can envision dreams together. For example, consider that the mother had replied positively to her son: “Great! When you become a conductor, can I climb aboard, too ? ” In that case, the boy, reassured, may have thought, “Wow ! It’s cool talking to Mom ! She’ll let me be anything I want when I grow up !”

Even from simple everyday conversation, such as in the exchange above, children can understand what adults are really feeling. No matter how hard you try to verbally encourage a child’s individuality or wish a child to become independent, children will quickly recognize if
their feelings are being ignored or if their desires are being suppressed. Therefore, in what cases do children feel that they are not effectively communicating with their parents? Tsurumaki Keiko provides some answers in her study regarding their relationship with their parents, entitled, “From the Children’s Point of View.” The following responses to the survey explain why children indicated that they disliked their fathers:

“Outside of whether or not I’m able to do my homework, he doesn’t pay any attention to me.”

“If I tell him about a bad grade on a test he scolds me right away, but when I talk about school, my friends, or what’s on my mind, he won’t listen.”

“He says things like, ‘if you study, your grades will improve, but you don’t study, so that’s why you get bad grades!’”

Similarly, when asked to explain the reasons for disliking their mothers, the most common reasons expressed by the children surveyed included the following:

“She’s concerned about my health, but she never listens when I talk about my problems with friends.”

“She never plays with me, even on her days off.”

“She says things like,’Kids shouldn’t do that...’ but she does it herself.”

In addition, if we combine all the children’s responses, they seem to feel something along the following lines: “If a topic interests them, then they won’t stop asking about it. But when I want them to listen to something that’s important to me, they don’t seem to care at all.” Certainly these complaints come as no surprise to a great deal of parents out there who have heard all of this before, and perhaps many of them have grown tired of hearing such comments.

However, even though communication exists between parents and children, in many cases it is only a one-way process of commands, channeled from parent to child.

Furthermore, according to Toriyama:

Parents don’t make an effort to learn about the pains and struggles their children are hiding behind their bright and active appearances. For example, they assume,’If the child is healthy and gets good grades, then there’s no problem. ‘Or,’My kid has friends so everything’s just fine. ‘Parents only see what they want to see. Therefore, parents are in effect blind to what’s going on in their children’s’ lives. Yet, concerning how their
children feel, or what the children believe, parents just haven’t listened.

Because parents believe that health and grades contribute to a child’s happiness, such issues obviously concern them. But when you think about it, a child can talk about general topics such as health and grades with any gentleman in the neighborhood, or even the lady next door. Although health and grades are a big part of a child’s life, there are certainly more important subjects that probe deeper into his or her life that a parent could address. Even in their eyes, children have a lot more topics of conversation to offer that go beyond standard greetings or pleasantries.

However, when they start to talk about a subject of interest to them, parents’ first reaction is often to interrupt with, “Have you finished your homework yet?” “Stop complaining so much about little things...” Or, “Aren’t you at fault too?” Perhaps adults believe that quickly bringing the conversation to an end is best for their children. However, in doing so, children lose the desire to open up to their parents. Therefore, during the course of simple everyday conversations, as parents you should try to focus on asking your children about what is going on in their lives. Through this method of communication, learning something new about your own children is not out of reach.

Communicating with Children Begins with Listening

Simply being talkative around children is not communicating with them. Numerous parents claim that they wish to properly communicate with their children. Although many parents try to get involved in their children’s lives, often their interaction is limited to a hectic morning routine or to a “one-shot” spurt of quality time on a long-awaited holiday. Despite such efforts, most parents don’t really know their children. Furthermore, many children aren’t willing to open up to their parents. How did parents and children arrive at such crossroads?

One reason for the gap in the parent child relationship can be attributed to the parents’ tendency to talk too much. Also, parents seem to have a different interpretation of the meaning of the word communication. For example, a parent may think, “Hey, I had a meaningful conversation with my kid just awhile ago, didn’t I? Now, that’s communication!” However, the concept of communication is more than a one-way transmission from parent to child. Instead, in order for the communication to be classified as a valuable exchange, both parents and children
must contribute to the conversation equally.20) Furthermore, many parents too often order their children to, “Do this, do that.” However, commanding them is not communicating with them. Rather, such one-way conversations are classified as no more than mechanical transmissions. From the children’s standpoint, parents who constantly dictate their personal opinions are simply loud mouths. Children feel that these types of grown ups don’t listen. Instead, they are just pushing their own beliefs on others. As a result, it’s no wonder that children end up thinking, “I just don’t feel like talking.”21)

The first step to communicating with children is listening. For example, questions such as, “What is this child thinking? ” “What does this child want to do? ” “What is he or she trying to say? ” must be given serious attention. The counseling field emphasizes the importance of listening. It is said that the most important part of a counselor’s job is to listen to people’s problems. Also, the tendency for the listeners to offer unsolicited advice on life or to attempt to cheer up speakers is counterproductive. Therefore, even when counselors have something personal to contribute to a conversation, they choose to keep quiet in order to allow the speakers to work through their own thoughts and feelings.22) “Having someone who will listen no matter what,” is a desire reassuring to both children and adults alike.

On the other hand, adults who don’t listen to children often claim, “Parents don’t need words to communicate with their children.” However, often times the people subscribing to such theories are only firm about what they have to say.23) That is, these parents force their own opinions on their children, yet at the same time, they fail to listen to their children’s point of view. As a result, rather than giving and receiving communication, parents are only having orders obeyed. Therefore, the notion, “we don’t need words to communicate,” doesn’t work in this case.23) Frankly, believing that you can reach a child without verbal communication is simply arrogance on the part of the grown up. In short, without a two-way conversation, an adult accomplishes no more than forcing his or her own logic on a child.

At the same time, there are many relationships in which the speaker can successfully convey his or her thoughts without saying much. However, such cases are limited to relationships that are already well established, where both parties understand each other. For example, in a partnership, building a solid trusting relationship is the first step to being able to communicate nonverbally. When there is trust, each person understands what feelings lay behind the words, in which case the two can communicate effectively without words. Most parents are at the first
step toward a communicative relationship with their children. In order to get past this preliminary stage of building a trusting relationship, they must exercise verbal communication, at least for the time being. Also, when communicating with a child, the parent should keep the importance of keeping his or her personal opinions second to the child’s in mind. Finally, the adult must remain open to listening and understanding what the child has to say.

In addition, adults tend to fall into a trap when it comes to communicating with children. For example, they assume, “I got my message across.” However, according to Sasaki, the opposite holds true. “I tell my students that it’s impossible to be one hundred percent clear when conveying your thoughts. It will never happen. That goes for parents and children as well as among couples,” he explained. Furthermore, not everything can be conveyed verbally; rather, there are many situations in which we cannot express ourselves through words alone. Therefore, you really need to give the speaker your full attention to in order to understand what he or she trying to say. It is only when you are open to understanding and accepting one another that the verbal communication in a relationship will advance.

**When Children and Adults Collide**

In a sincere effort to make themselves understood by their parents, children will talk freely about their interests, what is going on at school, how things are with friends, what they like, and whatever is on their minds. However, on these occasions, when children start to open up and a parent cuts them off with interruptions such as those that follow, they will naturally feel dejected:

“*My your talkative !*”

“It’s nice to chat, but have you done your homework ? ”

“*Come on, now, don’t worry about that little spat, time heals all wounds, you know !*”

*More importantly, you have to get ready for your test tomorrow !”*

In such cases, children will likely dwell on negative thoughts such as, “My parents do not accept me. They only want to talk to me at their own convenience. They just want to be able to say they have a ‘good kid.’” What am I really worth to them ? ” Thus, it’s no surprise that children end up wanting to tell off their parents by telling them, “You do not know anything about me, so don’t carry on like you understand !”
Moreover, many parents are in the habit of saying, “Yes, I am concerned about my children.” However, at the same time, they don’t listen to them. Yet, because children are not open to parents who are unwilling to listen, they will eventually no longer be willing to share their feelings. As a result, a communication gap develops. For example, 70 percent of fathers responded to an opinion poll\(^\text{30}\) that they do not know “how their sons think.” Nevertheless, “matters concerning home life” ranked as fathers’ biggest worry, practically over-taking financial matters as the number one domestic concern.\(^\text{40}\) Therefore, one can conclude that parents certainly are concerned about their children, and that they are willing to put forth an effort for the sake of their children’s happiness. However, parents focus their energies on the child’s schoolwork and possibilities for the future, that is, what interests them about the child at that time. As a result, children get the impression that their parents only listen to them at their own convenience, and thus, they lose trust in their parents. This is the way the relationship between children and parents today has gone off course.

Although it seems communication gaps appear to be common in relationships between parents and children nowadays, examples of parents and children crossing paths are not at all new to society.\(^\text{30}\) To explain, Toriyama emphasizes, “Such a lack of communication within Japanese families has been going on for quite some time now.”\(^\text{31}\) For example, there is a long history of parents who tend to ignore their children’s feelings, as well of those parents who mistreat their children in the same way that they were unaccepted by their own parents when they were children. However, in the past, parents had absolute authority, and thus, complete control over the household.\(^\text{32}\) Under that system, even if there was not a great deal of exchange between parents and children, the family unit, even if only superficially, did not fall apart. However, in a home lacking in communication, adults inadvertently pass down their parenting style to their children. Naturally, those children who grow up without experiencing a communicative home environment recycle similar habits when they grow up and have children.

Whether or not parents truly want to avoid passing on the way they were treated as children, without even realizing it, as adults they inadvertently deal with their children the way they were handled by their own parents. For instance, cases of abusive parents who were abused as children are not at all uncommon.\(^\text{33}\) Consider the following parental rationalization: “My own parents didn’t accept me, so how am I expected to know how to accept my children?”\(^\text{31}\) To explain, during their childhood they were conscious suffering, yet as they grew up, they easily
forgot the pain, and as a result, adapted the same parental habits of their own mothers and fathers.  

As a result, they ignore their own children in the same way that they felt neglected by their parents during childhood. Such parents fail to realize that poor communication is a vicious cycle. As a result, communication in their homes never develops beyond one-way commands from parent to child, such as, “Do this, do that!” Compared to the parents in the past, parents in Japan today have lost their authoritative power. Therefore, in order to repair the lines of communication with children “authority” must be replaced with something else in the home. Since power has more or less disappeared within families today, parents can instead develop a mutual understanding and a trusting relationship with their children and bond with their kids.

Children Have no Opportunity to Express Themselves Freely

“There are very few situations where children today can openly express their true feelings,” Fujii emphasizes. For example, considering an average ratio of forty students to one teacher in the schools, the teacher has no room within the school day schedule to pay attention to what each student is thinking all the time. In addition, at cram school, or at cultural enrichment lessons, learning takes precedence over any other activity. Therefore, again, there is little opportunity for students to express themselves. As a result, children naturally believe that the most appropriate place for self-expression is at home. In that case, the first people who come to mind as listeners are their parents.

However, many parents exercise their personal judgment to decide what is worth listening to and what they choose to ignore. Therefore, children’s opinions also go unheard in the home. From the parents’ standpoint, issues such as grades and health are very important. However, from the children’s point of view, they simply want to have someone listen to them express their feelings and worries in times of need. As a result, it comes as no surprise that children, who are always changing, feel as if they have nobody to listen to them when it comes to subjects other than grades and health. As long as adults continue to remain limited in the topics of conversation they initiate with their children, communication will fail to develop unless adults at least try to catch something of what the children are trying to say when they are having a conversation. Then, they should try expanding the conversation from that point to demonstrate a positive attitude toward listening to their children, and also to insure valuable communication.
There was a case in Saitama Prefecture where a junior high school student stabbed a peer with a knife. The incident sparked discussions of searching children to check whether or not they carried knives. However, questions such as, “Should we confiscate knives from minors? Is this type of investigation a good or a bad idea?” are not addressing the primary issues. For example, teachers tell the class, “Knives are dangerous so if you have one, hand it over!” Similarly, parents ask their children, “Do you carry a knife?” Also, they warn, “Buying knives is off-limits!” Yet, in one interview, a student responded:

Parents and teachers won’t ask why we carry knives. Regardless of whether or not it is good to carry a knife, they aren’t asking us what situation led us to feel as if we had to carry a knife. Teachers say we can talk to them about anything, but the truth is we don’t think they want to listen.

In her book, *Children Who Are Neglected, Children Who Are Spoiled*, Fujii addresses the tendency parents have of turning to books for quick answers on child rearing. For example, parents of children who stop attending school will read a book about kids who quit school. As a result, the child remains desperate, claiming, “I am me, an individual wanting to be heard, not a textbook case!” Thus, it’s important to look beyond the child in the text, and to listen to the child in front of you. In one example, a child stopped going to school and became violent. Seeking answers, the child’s mother asked Fujii, “Are all school dropouts violent?” “It’s not all dropouts, but your child is violent in this case, right?” Fujii responded. The mother in this case associated children who stop attending school with violence; therefore, she feels that naturally her child would be violent, too. However, what the mother in this case lacks is the courage to face the essence of her problem by asking, “Why is my kid violent?”

Showing children acceptance goes beyond simply catering to their every whim. Instead, problems should be remedied through effective communication. Of course, if there is something wrong with the thoughts or ideas the child has expressed, you need to do something about it. But children will feel completely different depending on whether you correct them after having listened to what they have to say or reject them without listening to their side of the story.
Going ‘By the Book’ Doesn’t Work

The Asahi Shimbun special edition on the classroom collapse phenomenon featured a junior high school girl’s personal experience. In her letter, she described her disapproval of her homeroom teacher, a male in his late-20’s.

When students would talk among themselves during break time, for example, he would butt in. The girls, would wonder, ‘Why was he trying to join in our conversation? ’ Also, during class, he would call on all the students one at a time asking, ‘Is anything troubling you? Anything on your mind that you would like to talk about? ’ I wanted to say, ‘Shut up and mind your own business!’ But because he would just call on me again, I just responded in any old lame way, ’Yeah, do you know of any good restaurants around here? ’ And that would get rid of him.

The tone of the young girl’s criticisms was bitter. While reading about their experiences, it became evident from the girls’ opposition that the young teacher was making a great effort; that he was desperate to communicate with his students. He must have read an educational magazine, which advised teachers to make every attempt possible to communicate with students. Such articles often suggest sticking to topics of interest to the students. In addition, the advice often suggests that the timing of a conversation is another crucial point in successfully communicating with students. For example, it is possible that students are too nervous in a one-on-one situation with a teacher. Because they are more comfortable among friends, students tend to be more likely to loosen up and share their feelings in a group setting. Maybe the teacher had read education journals and diligently studied how to connect with students from them. Then, maybe he tried to put what he had learned into practice. I can’t say whether or not this was the case. But, if it were, it certainly would be a practical thing to do. What’s more, that it was a complete failure is slightly pathetic.

We can learn at least one thing from this case: it’s pointless to do things “by the book.” No doubt you’ll realize that yourselves if you think about the purpose of communication. Surely the purpose of communication is to find a means to bring students and teachers together, or, to put it another way, to build a relationship built on trust. Moreover, inquiring about one’s personal problems by commanding, “OK, talk about it,” will inevitably cause the individual to close up
and refuse to share. Only when people feel like there truly is trust in a relationship will they be open to revealing their inner thoughts, worries, or concerns.

Therefore, when it comes to encouraging children to express themselves, perhaps the best advise for parents and teachers is to repeatedly offer, “If there is anything you want to talk about, you can come to me anytime and I’ll listen. No matter what—I promise!” When children want to reach out, listen to them regardless of the time or topic. Adults can try to prepare themselves to be accepting to children’s ideas, but making the initial contact is really up to the children. Try to create an environment in which it’s easy for children to come to you by having an open mind and never turning a child away. Remember, children will not open up if they are forced.

**An Understanding Attitude is Vital:** Don’t Fear Confrontation

There are parents who only talk about trivial things and constantly nag. Meanwhile, there are parents who worry so much about every little detail in a child’s life but at the same time, they fail to voice any concern. For example, consider one case in which a child stopped going to school. The parents were hesitant, therefore, could not ask their own child, “Why can’t you go school?” Of course, as stated many times previously, parents that force their opinions on children are a problem. However, parents who cannot speak their minds when dealing with children also pose a problem. When parents can’t say what they are thinking, then there is no way children will be able to either. In such cases, a close parent-child connection fails to develop. Why are parents so afraid of conflict?

Currently, among parents of elementary school aged children, approximately 70 percent are in their 30s, while the younger parents are in their late 20s. What kind of problems do parents of elementary aged school children face today? According to Professor Shiomi Toshiyuki of The Education Research Center at Tokyo University Graduate School, “Parents who scold their children too much, as well as parents who do not discipline their children at all are among the problems in contemporary society.” There are several possible explanations as to the causes of such parenting problems. For example, from the early stages of having a baby, strong feelings of isolation and solitude create a great deal of stress on parents. Furthermore, a lack of stress-relieving outlets compounds their problems.

In addition, today’s families are made up of parents and children, as is summed up by the
phrase “nuclear family.” The tradition of extended families (children living with their parents, grandparents and relatives under the same roof) has become much more rare in contemporary society. Moreover, families are isolated and their links with the local community have weakened. Certainly, whether you consider the situation of the father or that of the mother, both have relationships with colleagues and friends. Or, in the least they are up on the neighborhood gossip. However, compared to the past, the younger generation of parents generally has superficial relationships with others. The result is society’s entrance in to the “Age of avoiding confrontation.” In his book, Sengoku Tamotsu explains, “In order to avoid having your preferences clash with the tastes of others, a new type of savvy needed to be developed. That is, people draw a line dividing themselves from others in order to avoid unnecessary conflict. As a result, human relations have taken an inevitable path and become more shallow.”

When people who are by nature extremely afraid of clashing with others become adults, they are unable to confront their own children as parents. For example, when conflict arises, they make excuses in order to escape the situation. Due to the development of individualism in society, each person holds his or her own ideas and principals as important. As a result, in order for personal relations to run as smoothly as possible and to avoid the risk of hurting each other, the process of “getting deep” with another is sacrificed. If they didn’t and if each speaker continued to insist on his or her individuality, friction could develop and someone would end up hurt. The best solution to avoid hurting each other in relationships is to in turn, avoid obstacles. Consequently, the only way to avoid conflict is to maintain shallow, or superficial, relationships. Thus, adults who have had carried the tendency to avoid conflict from their childhoods, become parents who are poor at communicating with their own children.

As previously mentioned, children have very few relationships in which they can express their true feelings. What this means is that there are even cases where parents don’t have the generosity to listen to what their children really feel. They even avoid finding out if their ideas and those of their children clash. For example, Fujii explains:

When parents allow their children to do anything they want for the sake of avoiding conflict, the children receive no feedback on their own ideas, and thus they have no real way of assessing their abilities. On the other hand, without any parental encouragement to open up and speak freely, children end up receiving only a one-way “absorption”
method of communication, which is meaningless.\textsuperscript{50} Parents who are secure with the fact that they are known to be on the strict side are more effective than those weaker parents who continue to claim that there is no communication problem with their children.\textsuperscript{51}

The problem is not a difference in opinion between parents and children. Whether or not adults have different opinions, ideas, or feelings than those of their children, the important question remains: Is the parent sending a message of acceptance to the child?\textsuperscript{52} Furthermore, those who fear conflict create another misunderstanding. That is, they believe that understanding entails having the exact same opinions as others. These types of people fear disagreeing with others’ opinions and thus desire obstacle-free relationships with others.

However, having the same opinions with another does not mean you understand him or her. Rather, understanding what the speaker is saying is a matter of trying to understand exactly what he or she is thinking, then accepting that way of thinking. This does not mean you have to subscribe to the same opinions as they do.\textsuperscript{53} In fact, it’s natural for parents and children to have different ideas. Though they live under the same roof, the environment and age in which they have grown up are different. They are not clones, rather, they are different people, so it should come as no surprise that their opinions would differ, too. A difference in opinion should not be considered a problem. For example, even when two people disagree, it is important to listen to one another. Listening demonstrates acceptance and respect for the opposing view and for each other.\textsuperscript{54} After all, with a respectful attitude, no matter to what degree views contrast; the speaker’s feelings are not ignored.

**Sympathy is the Key to the Heart’s Self-healing Power**

In recent years, we have heard a lot about our bodies’ “natural healing power.” To explain, the human body has the ability to cure itself. The body’s healing power is defined as its ability to prevent illness as well as relieve symptoms of sickness. According to one theory, all medicine does is create an environment for the body to heal itself; therefore, the body’s capacity for self-healing is considerable. In the course of this research process, I have been struck by one thought: that the mind might be able to heal itself, just like the body.\textsuperscript{55} While the body’s power heals with “medicine,” the heart heals with “sympathy.” For example, as adults, we experience hurt such as through fights, misunderstandings, acts of unkindness, failures, the death of a loved
one, and depression on a daily basis.54) Children are just the same. As a matter of fact, there are several cases in which children experience a degree of hurt unimaginable to adults.

For example, consider the following experience of an elementary school first grade teacher.55) During class, a certain boy eagerly tried to talk with the teacher. It was during the lesson, so the teacher told him, “I will listen to your story later.” However, because she was very busy, she forgot about the little boy before she knew it, and the school day had ended. After school, the teacher happened to come across the boy sobbing in the hallway. Realizing that she completely forgot about her promise to listen to his story “later that day,” she apologized.56)

To adults, this kind of story does not seem like a big deal. Rather, they may regard such situations as “nothing to cry about.” Yet that boy ended up hurting. He was upset over more than the fact that she said, “We’ll talk later,” and forgot. Rather, the fact that she broke her promise hurt him.57) In such cases, a child’s pain can either be cured or doubled depending on the reaction of those involved. For example, in this scenario, the teacher had the chance to apologize. However, what if she never realized what happened? He would have remained upset and returned home hurting.

Next, imagine that you were the boy’s parent. How would you respond to his story? After hearing about his experience at school, no doubt some parents would blame the teacher: “What? Who would do such a thing? What a horrible teacher!” Even with this attempt at sympathizing with the boy, he is not relieved of hurt. Instead, that reaction causes him to hold a grudge against his teacher, which compounds the bitterness he already feels. Another possible reaction is criticizing the boy for being upset.58) “What? What are you whining about? Teachers are busy you know. There’s no way she can listen to everyone. For a boy to be such a crybaby—how embarrassing!” When a parent responds in this way, the child will hesitate to open up to his parents when he feels sad in the future.59) In cases such as the above, what is the most appropriate response? The answer is to demonstrate an understanding toward a child’s sadness, and to sympathize with his or her feelings. For example, you could say, “Oh that’s upsetting, isn’t it?” Or, you could listen to his story and simply acknowledge his feelings, “Really? Is that so?” As a result of the parent reacting in a sympathetic and understanding manner, the boy will feel greatly comforted because his own feelings of sadness have been acknowledged.60)

Furthermore, the power of nonverbal communication should not go unmentioned. Even without saying anything, hugging a child tightly sends the child the message that he or she is
loved. Hugging is one way of demonstrating unconditional acceptance. Children feel uneasy that they will be hurt again, so they are reluctant to show affection. Therefore, when a parent or teacher shows them affection, they feel reassured and accepted. On the other hand, however, when an adult has even the slightest hesitation when demonstrating affection to a child, his or her body will clamp up. Even though the child is receiving a hug, because of the unnatural stiffness, he or she is able to sense the adult’s reluctance and as a result will not feel truly accepted. Thus, insincere demonstrations of affection are counterproductive: Body language does not lie.60)

Therefore, children’s pain can heal as long as they feel as though their sadness is shared. This is a healing process that is dependent on how the child’s hurt is acknowledged. In other words, sympathy acts as the heart’s “natural healing power.” Even though every child holds the power to cure his or her own pain, how well it works is dependent on the involvement of the parents, teachers, and all the adults in his or her life. In summary, when children receive sympathy, they feel accepted and reassured.61) As a result, they develop the power to positively overcome wounds of the heart.

Notes

a) Bullying, or ijime, has been increasing in recent years thus has become the subject of serious concern and widespread media coverage and has been increasing in recent years in Japan. (Leestma, R.et al. ‘Compulsory Education, Lower Secondary Schools, Grades 7-9, Problem Areas,’ Japanese Education Today).


c) According to a report released by the Ministry of Education, children ignoring teachers, being unruly and destroying school property, typify classroom collapse. The most common cause of the breakdown is teacher inability, characterized by teachers dominating children and refusing to listen to them. (The Japan Times,’Classroom Collapse: Report Blames Adults for Kids’ Problems,’ 5/19/00).

d) Many recent investigations of incidents of juvenile crime have discovered that the youth acted out of rebellion because he or she had nobody who would listen to his or her problems. For example, recently, a 17 year-old youth was arrested for allegedly hijacking a bus in Fukuoka Prefecture, Japan. During the investigation, investigators recovered a memo that the boy had written, stating, “Nobody has tried to understand me.” Such expressions could be considered a cry for help for people to listen. Investigators concluded that the boy felt frustrated and alone, thus sought the attention of his parents and friends (The Daily Yomiuri,’Bus Hijacker Intended to Kill Passengers, Self,’ p.2, 5/14/00).

e) Guidance is an integral part of the Japanese school day. The homeroom teacher meets with the class several times throughout the day to conduct administrative matters as well as provide academic course
guidance and to some extent they perform counseling duties for the students. “Student guidance” refers to the direction provided by the classroom teacher to help students establish fundamental attitudes and behaviors necessary for successful school life. Its scope is broad, ranging from study habits to academic counseling, social behavior, character development and periodic visits to students’ homes. (Report: ‘Compulsory Education, Grades 1-6,’ Japanese Education Today).

g) The reasons behind why children are reluctant to return to their classrooms once they have stopped attending school is currently one of the foci in investigating the classroom phenomenon in Japan. Although there are no concrete answers, research has found that there are several types of students who refuse to go to school (or practice とこ kyohi). First, there are those that refuse to go to school but go to alternate social venues to meet their friends, while others set off for school, yet do not make it to school; rather, they head for a shopping center or arcade in town. Meanwhile, some students are reluctant to leave home or even their rooms. (Fujiwara, M.K.et al. (1998) ‘Students Who Refuse to go to School or とこ Kyohi,’ Focus 7, Japan Insight).

h) The pressure to study to succeed academically begins at a very early age in Japan. Parents encourage children to become aware of the importance of scholastic achievement and the severity of competition therein from elementary school as academic success is important to the entire family.


j) Toriyama, founder of the private alternative Kenji School in Japan, specializes in working with students with social difficulties because they have problems “fitting in” in the conventional public school system.

k) The concept of enryo, holding back or refraining from speaking out, is apparent in the Japanese culture. It is often considered good manners to demonstrate reserved behavior, as if not to put yourself first. However, concerning matters of communication, enryo could lead to misunderstandings. For example, it is said, “Japanese don’t express their true feelings entirely, but often put only twenty percent of what they want to say into words.” In addition to the cultural tendency to ‘hold back’ voicing opinions or feelings, “many Japanese believe that they can convey their thoughts through ishin-denshin, or non-verbal communication, and don’t need to explain things logically or systematically.” However, Sasaki believes that people rely too much on ishin denshin, and as a result, fail to properly communicate. (Kagawa, H. (1998) ‘The Modest But Proud Japanese,’ Chapter Two, The Inscrutable Japanese, Meridian Resources Associates, Kodansha International Ltd., Tokyo, pp.100-112).

l) Parents and teachers label a child a “good kid” label if he or she demonstrates, in general, the attitudes and habits consistent with the Japanese value system. For example, a “good kid” is obedient, studies diligently, cooperates with peers, and is overall a high academic achiever.


o) It is believed that cooperation and discipline played a significant role in the traditional families of the past, characterized by several generations were living together in the same home. In contrast, the recent
trend of the "nuclear family," with fewer children per household, each child is given more attention and freedom in the past. As a result, contemporary Japanese society is experiencing a change in traditional discipline in the home.

p) Psychiatrist Saito Satoru, president of the Institute for Family Functioning (IFF) in Tokyo believes many emotional and mental problems are linked to traumas rooted in dysfunctional or abusive family relations. Furthermore, he notes that adult survivors of abuse frequently go on to become abusers themselves. (Large, T. 'Supermarket Psychiatry,' The Daily Yomiuri, p.7, 5/13/00).


r) *Fujii, K. Kodomo o aisenai toki. Aishisugiru toki. (Children Who Are Neglected and Children Who are Spoiled).

s) The legal maximum class size at public schools is currently set at 40 students. According to the Ministry of Education, classes at about 20 percent of elementary schools and about 50 percent of junior high schools consist of more than 36 students to one teacher. (The Daily Yomiuri, ‘Ministry to Promote Cuts in Class Size,’ p.2, 5/20/00).

t) A majority of Japanese students attend private cram schools, or juku, after the regular school day in order to prepare for an academic lifetime of entrance exams. Success or failure on an entrance exam can dictate the caliber of school the student is able to attend. Since the schools attended often influence a child’s future job prospects, the pressure to do well on entrance exams often begins at the elementary level. Therefore many worried Japanese parents believe that cram school is necessary as to allow their children to surpass their classmates so that they can enter a reputable university.

u) In addition to cram school, which generally focuses on test preparation, many students practice a cultural activity to further enrich their education. Additional private lessons often include Japanese tea ceremony, flower arrangement, calligraphy, abacus and music lessons.

v) The example of the stabbing in Saitama Prefecture is one of several incidents involving students committing crimes with knives. According to a report released by Japan Insight, more and more younger children, even below age fourteen, were reported to have committed a crime by a knife every year since the study researched incidents of violence at public schools since 1985. Furthermore, in the first six months of 1998, individuals under age 20 committed 196 of reported crimes in which young people used a knife. The sudden increase of young people carrying weapons and feeling the need to protect or defend themselves is another area that Sawaya suggests can be remedied through effective communication between children and adults. (Fujiwara, M.K.et al. (1998) ‘Violence in the Schools and in the Community,’ Focus 7, Japan Insight, pp.1-2).

w) Incidents of acts of violence committed by young students with knives have continually increased throughout the 1990s. For example, in the first six months of 1998, young people under age twenty committed 196 of crimes committed by the use of a knife. To cite a specific case, in January 1998, a student stabbed his teacher to death in the classroom because he was irritated because she lectured him for being tardy. Furthermore, there are also reported incidents of students injuring their fellow students with knives. (Japan Insight).

x) According to a survey cited in Japan Insight, “Students Who Refuse to go to School or Tôkô Kyohi,” there are over 105,000 students who have been absent from school for more than 30 days despite being enrolled in an elementary or junior high school program. This figure accounts for one in sixty students junior high school students who stop attending school at some point.

y) The remarkable increase in cases that teens with no previous criminal record become involved in violent acts of crime for the first time worries a great deal of parents and teachers. The prevailing feeling is that any child is capable of committing criminal acts. (Fujiwara, M.K.et al. (1998) ‘Violence in the Schools and in the Community,’ Japan Insight).

z) The Asahi Shimbun is a nationally distributed leading Japanese daily newspaper with both a morning
and an evening edition.

aa) Each class in schools in Japan is assigned a homeroom teacher whose duties include academic advisor as well as social guidance counselor. In addition to handling general administrative matters, the homeroom teacher leads daily morning and afternoon class meetings, and oversees the class’ involvement in various school events and ceremonies.


d) *Sengoku, T. Masatsu kaihi no jidai—Wakamono no honne to shuchô, PHP Kenkyûjo. (The Age of Avoiding Conflict—Young People Speak Out, PHP Research Center).

e) *Sympathy is a valuable healing power valued in the same way as a therapist. First, the therapist must understand the client. To the client, the concept of understanding and shared feelings is reassuring. As a result of the parties sympathizing with each other’s feelings, healing is possible. (Ujihara, H.et al. Shinri rinshô dai jiten, Baitôkan), (The Encyclopedia of Clinical Psychology). Furthermore, Murayama Shiro agrees, “The sense or feeling of being accepted by those around you is comforting. As a result, children’s natural self-healing power can activate and spread throughout the body, repairing illness. (Murayama, S. Ijime no sekai ga miete kita, Ôtsuki shoten) (The Era of Bullying is Upon Us).

ff) *Mizuno, R. & Nakano, S. (Kyôyaku), Kodomo ga kite kureru hanashi kata to kodomo ga hanashite kureru kiki kata, Kikoshobô. (How to Listen to Children and Speak So That They Will Listen).
The Classroom Collapse Phenomenon

Translation Annotations

• Note on the language: This book is written in a semi-casual style. Sawaya chose an informal and overall conversational genre in his expression. His delivery is straightforward, and generally lacks transitional devices. I believe the writer employed a reader-friendly approach in order to cater to a wide reader market. In accordance with his style, I chose a natural equivalent in English, for example, allowing for contractions and informal expressions.

• Note on format: Throughout the chapter, the original text is divided into sub headings. I maintained the same style in translation. However, I strayed from the way the author separated his ideas within the sub sections by choosing the most logical and natural, usually longer, paragraph form in English.

• Note on footnotes in the body of the text: Following the footnote number at the foot of the page, an asterix (*) denotes that the footnote is a translation of a reference in the original text. Instead of including a separate translation of the reference section on pages 178-9 of the original text, I included them as footnotes as the appeared in the text in order to avoid confusion and make the piece more readable. As a result, the notations are sometimes inconsistent with the bibliographical format of this project. I tried to provide as much information as possible, and at the same time, maintain the author’s style.

1) This chapter, entitled, *Kodomo no koe ni mimi o sumaseru*, could be more literally translated as “Lend an ear (to the children), (to children’s voices...).” However, the message in the chapter is to encourage listening to children in order to promote effective communication and improve relations between adults and children. Therefore, I chose the concise, command style, “Listen to Children” as the chapter title.

2) *Mukatsuku* is a slang term often used by young Japanese. The expression translates as “disgusting” or “sickening,” for example. However, Chapter One of this text, ‘*Gakkyûhōkai o tsujite miete kita mono,*’ features a section entitled, ‘*Sensei ga mukatsuku,*’ (p.28). Therefore, in the context of the introduction to Chapter Four, I transferred the meaning behind the term as defined earlier in the book. The subsection investigated the reasons behind junior high school students’ most frequently expressed complaints regarding their teachers. For example, surveys found “playing favorites, making fun of slower students, and being scolded for no reason,” to be among the top reasons why students claimed...
their teachers “make them sick.”

3) *Gakkyûhôkai* is widely translated as “classroom collapse or class collapse” by the media. Specifically, *The DailyYomiuri*, a nationally distributed English Newspaper in Japan, defines classroom collapse as “the widespread phenomenon in which teachers lost control of their classes.” However, in the first sentence of the introduction to the chapter, the paraphrase “classroom collapse” does not carry adequate background or explanation to stand-alone. Therefore, as a direct quotation of a complaint, I chose to introduce the term in a conversational setting. Throughout the rest of this paper, *Gakkyûhôkai* translates as “classroom collapse.” Although both are accepted translations, I chose classroom over class in order to emphasize that the term refers to an academic setting, rather than a social class setting. (*The Daily Yomiuri*, ‘Ministry Plans Special Schools to Integrate Education Levels,’ p.2, 1/16/00).

4) Since the focus of classroom collapse is on the variety of problems young people in contemporary Japan face, I added “youth problem” to provide some background to the complaints cited.

5) Japanese names: Throughout this translation, I introduced people Japanese style: last name, first name. However, when a name reappears in the document, I referred to the person by last name only.

6) I used professor emeritus rather than “former” or “retired” professor. Emeritus conveys the idea that he is still involved in the field. Also, the professors’ first names, Terumi and Akira, are additions here. For introductory purposes, I believe it is necessary to introduce them by their full names. Their names appear in full elsewhere in the book.

7) Although it is not standard in academic English writing to include people’s titles, I felt it was necessary to provide the reader with as much background as possible regarding the subject matter of the researchers involved in the project, especially in beginning of the translation.

8) I set this list of examples of relationships off in parenthesis because I found it repeating the same concept just introduced in defining communication gaps.

9) I changed the sentence order here to set the stage and describe the scene more clearly.

10) I inserted a slight addition here to provide explanation.

11) I inferred from the tone of the original text that students being “hunted down in the end” refers to a pursuit by police or arrest. Therefore, I added “criminal charges” to this sentence.

12) Due to the related issue of *tôkô kyohi*, I inferred that the reason why the teacher would say, “get back to class,” was because the student was “frequently absent,” or, refusing to go to school.

13) I added “relationship” on the assumption that “communication” in this case refers to the exchange of two people.

14) Although this sentence appears to be duplicating the previous thought, I chose to keep the author’s repetition (of his previous statement) because I believe he intended to reiterate the ideas of “acceptance” and “security” for effect.

15) A more literal translation of “*kodomo o kyozetsu suru kotoba*” would be “words that reject children;” however, this section of the text highlights examples of children suffering from a lack of positive
reinforcement. In addition, “negative reinforcement” is more descriptive and specific to this text than “words.”

16) “Kodomo wa nanimo kataranaku naru.” I varied this clause slightly because I felt that simply, “the child won’t talk,” or, “won’t say anything,” didn’t carry the nuance that positive feedback has a significant impact on (mother and child) relationships. “(However, responding to his dreams with negative feedback) only discourages him from sharing his dreams with her again,” carries a stronger tone and it directly links the boy’s experience of sharing his dream to the way his mother reacted, and ties in how this will affect their relationship from this point on.

17) I added, “how crucial it is to give children positive reinforcement” to convey the nuance from the original that this is a common example of the importance of communication.

18) I added the subject matter and title of Tsurumaki’s study here in order to provide the reader with some background into her specialty field.

19) As a concluding sentence to this sub section, I slightly deviated from the original and inserted some summarizing remarks to bring closure to the idea.

20) To translate the idea, kokoro ga tsûjiau koto, I felt it was appropriate to write, “contribute equally” as a counter measure to a “one way” conversation.

21) To convey a natural colloquial style conveying a child’s thought, I deviated from the original, “Dekireba amari hanashi o shitakunai to omou nowa murikaranu kotoda” by turning this line into a quote.

22) “...Even when counselors have something to personal to contribute to a conversation, they choose to keep quiet...” is an addition in order to emphasize the importance of listening over lecturing.

23) Here, “In this case, the concept of communicating ‘even without words’ doesn’t exist,” is in the original, however, due to its repetition, I omitted it here and maintained the same concept a few sentences later.

24) The original uses the verb “think” in this case. However, I feel “assume” more accurately conveys the writer’s tone in this situation.

25) The original refers to “Associate Professor Sasaki” here. However, I have already introduced him; therefore I omitted his title and only used his last name.

26) “Kodomo wa,” is a general subject and in this case, I don’t believe that the meaning would be altered if it were translated as the singular, “child,” or the plural, “children.” In this passage, writing “him or her” several times in one paragraph would distract the reader, so I elected to use the plural, “children.”

27) “Ningen kankei no nayami”: According to the contextual situation, I interpret this phrase, more literally, “human relation woes,” as a parent’s comment on a problem the child’s worries about an argument or misunderstanding with a friend or teacher at school. Therefore, “Come on, now, don’t worry about that little spat...” seems natural in this case.

28) I added “...to say that they have a good kid...” in order to express the idea that children sometimes worry that their parent’s close involvement in their lives is for the parents own personal “bragging rights” about the fact that they have a good kid.
29) I used “tell off” to convey in English the frustration in the child’s tone according to the word choice in the original: “Ore no koto nanka, koreppotchi mo shiranai kuse ni, wakattayōna kuchi o kikuna yo.”

30) I rearranged the order and moved the line, “…not at all new to society,” in front of the quote by Toriyama in order to introduce his idea with a smooth transition.

31) In the original this does not appear as a direct quote. However, it is written in the first person, and is not the personal experience of the author. That is, Sawaya is not describing his relationship with his parents. Therefore, I felt it was appropriate in English to put this line in quotations.

32) I chose “neglect” in this case as a synonym of “not listen to,” in order to convey the author’s relatively strong tone, and to avoid repetition.

33) I inserted this sentence because I felt that a better connection is needed between the concept of parents feeling neglected when they were children and the concept that those parents then transfer their negative experience onto their own children.

34) “Naraigoto,” in this context refers children’s hectic academic schedule that goes beyond the standard school day. I chose “cultural enrichment lessons” to encompass extra curricular private activities such as tea ceremony, flower arrangement, calligraphy and piano lessons.

35) As previously introduced, children do not have the opportunity to share their opinions at school, nor do their cram school and extra curricular lessons schedules allow for personal communication with teachers. In this case, “also” refers to “in addition to school, juku and naraigoto” children’s thoughts again go unheard in the home.

36) I added the book title to provide the reader with some background of Fujii’s field of study.

37) “Quit school,” is more extreme than the original; however, I wanted to convey the nuance that the mother in this situation feared the extreme case and reverted to a book rather than remedying the problem by directly communicating with her child.

38) I used the plural “children,” rather than “child” here since the corresponding “them” and “they,” which are repeated several times, distract the reader much less than “him or her,” and “he or she.”

39) In reference to the article, the original states notta, to explain the letter “was shown,” “appeared,” “published,” in the newspaper. However, as the author chose to highlight the girl’s letter to the editor as an example of dissatisfaction with the teacher’s method of communication, I believe “feature” is the best choice.

40) In the original, ellipses dots follow “hogureru,” the potential form of “to lighten up,” “to loosen up,” or “to relax.” However, in English it seems more appropriate to complete the speakers thought rather to let it hang. Therefore, I closed his idea by adding, “and share their feelings in a group setting.”

41) “Refuse to share” slightly deviates from the original text, which reads, “hanaseru mono dewa nai.” This idea in English is “won’t be able to talk,” or, “can’t talk.” However, as “mono” is a fairly strong word in this context, I felt that “refuse” carries the appropriate attitude.
42) I interpreted “contact” (written in katakana), to mean, “reach out” in this case.

43) I added “initial” for emphasis, as “contact” alone doesn’t seem to stress that the situation requires the child to initiate the conversation.

44) Vital is a stronger word than “taisetsu,” but I believe it is suitable as a subsection title in order to attract the reader and summarize the point concisely. Furthermore, Sawaya uses the Japanese equivalent of terms such as “important,” and “necessary” so often that often to the English reader, the word choice is repetitious and thus risks losing its meaning.

45) I added, “among the problems in contemporary society,” to make this thought more understandable and natural in English.

46) I added the phrase “extended family” to the description (of grandparents and relatives living together) in order to parallel the term, “nuclear family.”

47) In English, the direct translation of “idobata kaigi” is “housewives’ gossip.” The original, “tonari no okusan to mo, idobata kaigi gurai no tsukiai wa aru kamoshirenai,” refers to at least having “a relationship with the lady next door through keeping up on the neighborhood gossip.” The assumption through “the lady next door” is that this is a relationship of the mother. However, due to the potential stereotype which could be misunderstood by English readers, I omitted referring to “housewives,” or “the lady next door,” and simplified the translation by using a neutral, “neighborhood gossip.”

48) “Soshite, kono keikô o hikizutta mama oya ni natta hito wa, kodomo to komyunikêshon o toru koto no negaite shinmau no dewa nai darou ka.” This is an example of several cases in this text where the author states his opinion in a question. Whereas, in Japanese it is natural to present the information and end pose a question for the reader to draw his or her own conclusion, in English it is more natural to express the idea in sentence form.

49) In this passage, parents who are characterized as “monowakari ga yoi” or “monowakari ga warui” are addressed. The former describes parents who are somewhat lenient with their children, allowing them the freedom to discover things on their own. Usually “monowakari ga yoi” has a positive connotation. However, according to this selection, if parents allow their children to do anything they wish for the sake of avoiding conflict, the writer believes “monowakari ga yosugiru” is a poor quality.

50) The opposite of “monowakari ga yoi” is “monowakari ga warui.” In this selection, the latter refers to a stern parent who tends to do all the talking, not allowing the child to speak his or her mind. In this case, “monowakari ga warui” also carries a negative connotation.

51) The original, “Soredemo ukeireru toiu oya no shisei ga, kodomo ni tsutawaruka dôka darou,” includes “shisei,” meaning “posture,” or in this case, “attitude.” I chose to omit shisei because I believe in English it is implied in the following translation: “Is the parent sending a message of acceptance to the child?”

52) I used “subscribe” in this case because I feel as though it the idiomatic equivalent of, “nebaru,” which could be literally translated as “stick to.”

53) “Opposing view” is an addition that I inserted in order to convey the extent to which Sawaya stresses that differences in opinions should be considered natural and acceptable. For example, in this short
passage in the original (p.173), the writer uses the term, “chigau,” (different), at least five times.

54) “As adults” is an addition to set up the contrast with “children” that follows. Also, I omitted “in our daily lives” (mainichi no seikatsu ni oite) and instead chose to close the sentence with “on a daily basis.”

55) “...Sensei kara konna hanashi o kiita” suggests that the writer heard this story directly from the teacher. However, as he wrote the scenario in the third person with several quotes, I felt it was unnecessary to write something to the effect, “I heard this story from a first grade teacher...” in translation.

56) “Later that day” is in quotations to remind the reader of the conversation they had during class introduced earlier.

57) I chose to stress broke her promise with italics to remain true to the strong nuance of the original.

58) I inserted this sentence in order to introduce the direct quote from the parent.

59) “In the future” is an addition to make clear that the boy will hesitate opening up from now on as a result of his mother’s unsympathetic reaction to his pain.

60) “Insincere demonstrations of affection are counterproductive” is an addition in order to effectively introduce the impact of the closing statement, “Body language does not lie.” By itself, “body language does not lie” lacks some explanation. “Insincere demonstrations of affection” ties in the previous idea.

61) As previously introduced, the straightforward style of this piece omits transitions (such as therefore, as a result, furthermore, moreover). I chose to use “in summary” in these last few sentences not only because it is the closing of the chapter, but also because the ideas of “sympathy and acceptance” expressed in this sentence are highlighted and repeated throughout the chapter as key factors in communication.
References


