Moral Education at Japanese elementary school

Sam Bamkin
Churchill Fellow 2015
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Overview

- Moral education permeates practice, supervision and all subjects in the Japanese context.
- It forms an explicit topic of professional discourse in addition to structure and time in the curriculum.
- Moral education is generally perceived by the teaching community to be equally as important as intellectual development or physical development.
- The core of moral education is structured through school activities, responsibilities and active supervision, featuring aspects of a little society.
- Moral education classtime encourages a pro-social approach to living together on a foundation of considering others through interpersonal empathy.
- Moral education is also a site for assimilation, promoting comportment and manners.
- The discourse, consistency and innovation in practice are maintained through joint professional development.

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Finally, thank you Ms Sakura Kobayashi for gentle encouragement to also enjoy recreational time.
1. Introduction

Moral education represents an important dimension of education in the Japanese context. It permeates practice in supervision and all subjects, forms an explicit topic of professional practice and finds structure and time in the curriculum. This report shares observations and research on practice in moral education in Japanese formal education to encourage deeper thinking on the possibilities for primary education in the UK. The report focuses on elementary education in consideration of progression on to junior high school.

This should not suggest that moral education is absent in the UK. SEAL/PSHE, Citizenship Education, religious education, additional provision and general supervision are areas of focus, amongst others, that contribute toward tacit education in values. However, UK practice is often implicit, unstructured and certainly not considered a coherent body of practice. Equally, the contours and purposes of moral education may differ.

Education practice occurs within a specific culture, a specific environment and often in response to policies seen to run counter to the wider aims of educating. Nonetheless, teachers, NGOs and special interest groups in primary education do, to an extent, have power to influence practice and policy, which will only grow as the movement to establish teaching as unambiguously professional work gains momentum in the UK. To this end, the findings and connections made during this Fellowship not only aim to inspire deeper thinking, but to also advance discussion and innovation. Since this aim relies on the interaction and action of educators, some possibilities for the organisation of teaching practice and joint professional development are also presented in the final section, with reference to moral education, but not exclusively relevant to moral education.

A journey in Japanese education.

The data are collected from 60 observations of teaching and over 100 informants, comprised of principals, vice-principals, teachers, members of Boards of Education and other educators, located in and around 18 elementary schools (ES) and junior high schools (JH) in 6 locations in Japan. Other activities and observations within the school provided further insight.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number of schools</th>
<th>Teaching observed</th>
<th>Informants: (of which observed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>1 ES 1 JH</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study in the National Education Library</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
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<td>29</td>
<td>23 (5)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Number 1</td>
<td>Number 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Tokyo ward. Big business, government offices, main transport hubs.</td>
<td>2 ES</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City in south-west Japan.</td>
<td>2 ES</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City on mainline rail in central Japan.</td>
<td>2 JH</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small city in west Japan</td>
<td>4 ES</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>32 (4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grey boxes in the body of this report provide primary sources or quotations translated from Japanese.

Yellow boxes provide primary observations.

Blue boxes provide reflections on possible implications for UK practice.
2. Moral education: Background and focus.

Defining moral education.
As used in the post-war Japanese context, moral education extends to values that might not be ‘moral’ in the ethical sense. Also referred to as ‘character education’ in the modern USA tradition or, perhaps more accurately, as ‘values education’ (Cummings et al, 1988), I use ‘moral education’ as a broad descriptor for education undertaken with aims explicitly related to values. This broad definition reflects its large role in the discourse of elementary education.

The Basic Act on Education 2006, Article 1
“Education shall aim for the full development of personality and strive to nurture the citizens, sound in mind and body, who are imbued with the qualities necessary for those who form a peaceful and democratic state and society”

The curriculum chapter on moral education provides both objectives for moral education and allocates one hour per week to moral education classtime. However, moral education is diffused through practice. For this reason, attempts to ‘locate’ moral education reveal a constellation of interconnected practices. Likewise, the curriculum states the objectives as applicable in all subjects and supervision.

Data from many specialists and experienced teachers suggests that, although the classtime may provide a framework and perhaps a force of standardisation, it underpins learning and application of morality elsewhere in teaching and curriculum. Otherwise stated, School Activities and general supervision (explained below) may provide the core of moral education, on which classtime provides an opportunity to reflect within its structured theoretical framework.

Teachers’ understandings of moral education represent implicit cultural beliefs (Tobin et al, 2009), transmitted through the community of education practitioners and informed by joint professional development.

Curriculum aims of moral education

“The aim of moral education is to cultivate morality in virtues such as feeling, judgement, attitude and the will to actively contribute.

This aim should be taken into account when planning all lesson content and School Activities to enrich it through deeply integrated, structured and developmental supervision to additionally deepen thinking on autonomous living and consciousness of moral values to underpin application in real
The curriculum provides 10-15 target values for each two grades, progressing in depth. In each case, these are grouped under four headings. An English translation of targets provided by the previous curriculum, divided by grade, can be found in Khan (1997, pp. 195-200). The list below presents a distillation, representative of the curriculum and its explanation, provided by one Education Centre.

1. Relating mainly to the self
   - autonomous living, self-discipline, freedom and responsibility
   - (self-)moderation
   - ambition to improve oneself, self-improvement
   - aspiration and courage, self-control and strong will
   - pursuit of truth, creativity

2. Relating mainly to relationships with other people
   - omoiyari (interpersonal consideration for other humans), gratitude
   - comportment
   - friendship, reliance and trust
   - mutual understanding, accommodation

3. Relating mainly to relationships with nature and the sublime
   - reverence for life
   - care for nature
   - awe and reverence for the sublime
   - to enjoy life more

4. Relating mainly to relationships with groups and society
   - observance of laws, civic virtue
   - fairness justice and social justice
   - participation, public spirit
   - labour
   - love of family, enrichment of family life
   - respect for tradition and culture, love of the country and local area
   - understanding other countries and peace

It is argued below that, although teaching is shaped by the curriculum, the relative importances afforded to these elements differ in practice.

**The wider curriculum**

The curriculum is structured along 3 strands: knowledge, morality and body. The time allocation also facilitates moral education. School Activities are closely
related to achieving the objectives of moral education. Likewise, Social Studies is a typical focal point for civic education (Ikeno, 2013) and integrated studies has been used by Community schools to integrate further moral education. Although not discussed in this report, moral education is also practiced and discussed through other subjects, such as Japanese (Gerbert, 1993).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<td>315</td>
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<tr>
<td>Life and Living</td>
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<td>Music</td>
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<td>Drawing and Making</td>
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<td>70</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time allocated to Integrated Studies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>70</td>
<td>70</td>
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<tr>
<td>School Activities</td>
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<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
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<tr>
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<td>850</td>
<td>910</td>
<td>945</td>
<td>980</td>
<td>980</td>
<td>980</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Supervision in Japan.

Although it is difficult to separate the idea of supervision/teaching, broadly defined, from moral education, there are aspects of classroom teaching which can be described as prevalent in Japan. Many of these are well-documented, so are not analysed in depth. However, references are provided where accessible resources exist in English.

Preschool and elementary education in Japan encourages group orientation and identification (Cave, 2007; Lewis, 1995). The curriculum guidance assumes collaboration between the school, parents and community members. This reflects an extent of authority exerted by the school/curriculum to social life outside of school.

From first grade onward, or before for those children who have attended preschool, there are many practices and items to remember. Children have objects that stay at school, including a cloth to clean their desk. They bring personal items daily, such as a hand towel and drink. They bring the
correct school coursebooks and pens and pencils. Additionally, the timetable varies depending on day and week-of-the-month. For example, the third Saturday of each month may have classes and the Wednesday of that week finish early. Children and parents need to collaborate on these items (Hendry, 1999; Peak, 1991).

As early as 1951, draft guidance to teachers emphasised that moral education aimed to encourage a deep sense of democratic thinking, and that supervision should aim not to correct behaviour, but to encourage a desire to work with society through self-discipline, flexibility and persistence. Early guidance advised to search for reasons and motives, and to encourage positive motivations rather than discouraging the negative (Kimura, 2013).

Democratic thinking, in the sense of egalitarian orientation and participation, is engrained in educators’ culture of practice. Likewise, the will to mediate problems in class as a class community is fostered through supervision and class meetings (Tobin et al, 1989; Cave, 2007). Class problems or incidents are regularly discussed openly as a class group rather than remaining private affairs. The authority of the teacher often derives from an affectionate relationship (Lewis, 1989). Similarly, informants often discussed the importance of teachers as role models. Aware that teachers work in collaboration over long hours with careful preparation, children were seen to learn tacitly, as a process of enculturation.

The tight connection between the purpose of education, the curriculum and moral education facilitates practice, discussion and development. The narrow UK curriculum, operating in the confines of one of the world’s most regulated and test-oriented education systems (Alexander, 2010), generally presents a hurdle to education practice based on evidence and professional judgement. This is true of moral education practice.

Orienting educational aims around egalitarian values, democratic participation and other people, rather than mechanistic skills and resilient acceptance of obedience, is often assumed to entail deferring rapid progress in measurable knowledge. However, since moral education also provides a point of reference for values at school, it can also be framed as underpinning participation in learning, and by extension underpinning achievement in studies.

Models of moral education lessons

The pedagogy of moral education classtime is not prescribed. Practice is shared in professional development in interaction with optional textbooks, which are not followed strictly. Nonetheless, practice sharing often refines examples of good practice, which are adopted as a default structure (see section 5).

Features of these models may not be entirely unfamiliar to UK educators. Hopefully, these will serve as examples for deeper consideration of the aims and objectives of moral education in the context of Japanese elementary school.

*The ogre who cried.* Third grade moral education class.

The lesson opens with a story. The story is read by the teacher, except for a letter in the story, which children read themselves. Children have the story in front of them so can read ahead if they wish.

Leaving aside the details and rhetorical devices used in children’s stories, it about two ogres. They are best friends and both enjoy to watch the human children having fun and playing.* The ogres understand that human children are afraid of ogres. Nonetheless they wistfully wish to play. The blue ogre offers to frighten the children so that the red ogre can pretend to protect them and become friends with them.* They carry out the plan. As agreed, the red ogre hits the blue ogre.* The red ogre becomes very popular amongst the children. the red ogre and the children enjoy playing together. The red ogre decides to visit his friend the blue ogre one day, but only finds a letter from the blue ogre pinned to the door saying that the blue ogre has left the area so the red ogre can enjoy more time to play with the children.* The red ogre cried.

At each asterisk, children are asked to summarise what has happened, then reflect on why the characters act as they do and how each character is thinking or feeling. They understand friendship and the difficulties of making a sacrifice and the ongoing nature of friendship.
At the final asterisk, children roleplay the red ogre. Two children wear red and blue ogre masks on either side of a huge door prop. The red ogre is told that the blue ogre is actually still inside the house, so the red ogre can speak his/her feelings to the blue ogre.

Finally, the teacher finds copies of letters about falling out and making up with friends from senior students (grades 4-6) and reads them out for the class. Children then have the opportunity to share experiences about when they made up with friends.

The story model is relatively well established. Around half of the lessons I observed included children empathising with characters in a story. At times, the setting is students in class/school and children are asked ‘what would you do’, rather than the thinking and feeling of the character. Often, toward the end, the teacher shares a carefully planned personal story which is planned beforehand. Children almost always have the opportunity to share stories on the theme. Usually, the topic is discussed briefly before the story: e.g. ‘who has told a lie?’ or ‘how often do we borrow items from our classmates?’

In relation to interpersonal relationships, stories and scenarios can be designed to encourage complexity. For example, one 3rd or 4th grade story involves a boy who has promised to take a book for his friend who is recovering from being unwell in hospital. She is bored and really wants to read the book that everybody in the class has read. When the boy gets home, his grandmother has arrived and the family are going straight out to eat together.

In these ‘dilemma’-model stories, children discuss the most appropriate
response. All students have a name-card to magnet onto a continuum on the board, for example between 'go to the hospital’ or ‘go to dinner with the family’. There is often variation. The class then discusses the permeations and their reasonings, then finally have the chance to move their name-card. Some teachers ask students to draw an arrow to indicate the movement.

Another model for moral education classtime examines a great person, a design imported from the UK and the USA pre-war (Wray, 2000; Roesgaard, 2011).

**Mukai Chiaki. Sixth grade moral education class.**

Students have a biography of Mukai Chiaki, a medical doctor and cardiovascular surgeon who then became an astronaut for the space agency now called JAXA. She trained for many years to excel in one field, and then changed to another profession, in which she excelled.

Students have time to speak in groups considering why she became an astronaut. Themes of curiosity, interest, competition, ambition, etc emerged. These are written on the board and the teacher underlines those that arise a second or third time.

Students think about, then discuss, what qualities she needed to achieve this goal; at which points she was building on current strengths and at which points she was finding new strengths. The class share ideas.

Finally, students write who they are and who they wish to become; how this will build on current strengths and at where new strengths might be needed. They discuss the qualities and decisions they may require to achieve their aspirations.

Moral education classes often include opportunities, mildly related to lesson content, to share emotive experiences. This promotes class community in sharing intimate things through active listening, minimal responses and active questioning, but also provides reflection on positive aspects of everyday life. For example, on multiple occasions I observed children from first grade to fifth grade (and presumably higher) expressing gratitude for things they have received from absent or present people. Children shared stories of family, teachers in other classes, friends in the class. Gratitude is one of many affective practices that can increase wellbeing (e.g. McCullough *et al*, 2001; Emmons *et al*, 2003).

These understandings are humanitarian rather than scientific, but constitute important practices in moral education in Japan.
School Activities

The curriculum provides for Special Activities, usually called School Activities within elementary schools. These include assemblies, cleaning and individual or group responsibilities (*kakari*), which:

“aim for holistic development and the expansion of individuality through desirable group activities, to develop an independent, practical attitude of wanting to build a better life through relationships between the self and the group and between the self and society, to deepen self-awareness of living as a human and to cultivate the ability of self-fulfilment”.

Generally, every student has a role within the class or, less frequently, the year or school. These are displayed on the walls in the class. Roles are allocated in class committee with the teacher as chair. Some examples of *kakari* are:

- **Class**
  - Cleaning. All children participate in cleaning the class and space outside the class once per day. This is learned in first grade with a set procedure which is more nuanced than first impressions may suggest.
  - Identifying absentees. The teacher asks children to be aware of who is away. This is easier since children have their own seat with name-tag and personal desk-cloth, earthquake hood, and personal work and materials left in the drawer.

- **Rotating class duties**
  - *Nicchoku*: Two students lead greetings at the start/end of the day, start/end of class, start/end of lunch, and undertake tasks such as clearing the blackboard, writing the day’s date on the board, etc.
  - Lunchtime duty: 3-5 children collect and serve lunch to classmates in white aprons and hats. They announce the lunch menu.
  - PE sports team leader. Two students.

- **Example class committees - allocated at the beginning of the year or rotating.**
  - Newsletter
  - Friends. Playing with anybody who is playing alone
  - Recycling
  - Rainy day games / class games. To organise games that include everybody.
  - lights committee.
  - Greeting junior students at the start of the day.
  - Wall displays. Usually changing messages, displaying student work and responding to the seasons or events in the school.
Classes agree additional *kakari* to respond to local needs. For example, there may be animals or plants in the class which need feeding/cleaning supervision. One class had a ‘lights on/off committee’. The principal humorously commented that there must be some history which led to this responsibility being established.

When discussing moral education, I asked about the practice, or application, of studies. The main consensus amongst teachers, senior teachers, principals and Board of Education members was that moral education is practiced through School Activities and ‘everyday life’, which is supported by the framework developed in moral education classtime. A continuum from the classroom, through School Activities, to life outside school was implicit in these discussions. When respondents said ‘real life’ this could well refer to the school, or time in the family or wider society.

> **“Cleaning the classroom is like cleaning the heart”**
> - Junior high school arts teacher

School Activities and real life were seen as more genuine. Learning was perceived as tacit, through practice. Indeed, some discussion considered the hypothetical idea of removing moral education classes. The informants who entertained this idea did not see it as entirely problematic: ‘we could still teach moral education’, although this was never expressed as a preference. The idea of the school (a little society) living as a model of wider society is reminiscent of Dewey (1916).

### Moral education: policy, practice and pedagogy

Isolating the aims, objectives and pedagogy of moral education is complex, particularly given the reliance on teachers to integrate moral content into lessons across the curriculum. The curriculum provides guidance, or even shapes the scope of moral education. The discourse of the curriculum likewise interacts with implicit cultural beliefs to construct conceptualisation (Izumi-Taylor & Scott, 2013). However, the relative importance afforded to these values differ in practice.

For these reasons, extensive discussions with informants were undertaken to understand the perspectives of educators. I was particularly interested in the perspectives of teachers and principals, but also took into account data from members of Boards of Education and other school educators.

Considering objectives, many informants, whilst perhaps downplaying their expertise, offered a clear conception of the aims or objectives of moral education. Those informants show ostensibly eschewed the idea of teaching specific characteristics, presenting an approach to children’s natural tendencies, discussed criteria through which the ‘depth of thinking’ on values might be evaluated. These criteria in themselves tended to foster certain values.
The main objectives expressed by informants can be discussed under the themes of consideration of others, persistence and comportment and manners. Finally, these are related to the aim of living with other people. In the case of many informants, it was not clear whether consider of others and comportment could also be considered as wider aims of moral education.

**Consideration of others (omoiyari)**

Consideration of others is proffered as one of the key objectives of moral education. Most commonly, the objective is expressed using the Japanese word *omoiyari*, a concept of interpersonal consideration for others’ desires. Omoiyari suggests an empathetic response that responds to the desires or needs of others (Hayashi *et al*, 2009). For that reason, it requires both compassion as a feeling and an intelligent understanding of the other’s wants, either by understanding human desire generally or knowing personal preferences of that particular person. This could be through giving, concession, or attention to detail to match another person’s preferences. Likewise, forgiveness or forbearance, even when one is ‘right’, is an expression of *omoiyari*.

> **“If we want to be more kind, are we not more human?”**
> - Junior high school vice-principal

Moral education classes through empathy and Social Studies lessons using similar teaching approaches (Yoshida, 2013) contribute to training in *omoiyari*. However, supervision is also paramount in promoting consideration of and orientation to others. This training in empathy, orientation to the other, is essential to form close interpersonal bonds that develops into peer regulation and group orientation. Lebra (1976) uses the term ‘interactional relativism’ as an interdependence arising from *omoiyari*.

**Persistence**

Persistence (*ganbari*) is a central concept of Japanese culture learned tacitly through early years and through supervision at school (Singleton, 1989). Lewis (1995) approached this topic considering occasions during which children set targets and returned to them later. There were many occasions at festivals and seasonal events. These challenges covered the walls of classrooms and were provided in assemblies each week. Likewise, persistence was a key drive characterising subjects of the ‘great person’ model lessons. In physical education and other lengthy activities, children are expected to continue even it becomes subjectively tough. However, encouragement during supervision to establish criteria for success appears to drive pedagogy. This is more than encouraging an incremental concept of learning (Dweck, 2010) but further cultivates the will to do.
Comportment and manners

A significant minority of responses framed objectives in terms of comportment or manners. This was most often expressed whilst unpacking the term reigi which includes a ceremonial feel, so includes etiquette and duty. Other informants directly alluded to manners (manā) or following societal rules or decisions.

Supported by discussions explaining the importance of these aspects, I interpreted the focus on comportment as a conservative entry point. From this perspective, society exists ‘before’ the individual, enculturating individuals into specific practices and routines. In this sense, moral education is envisaged initially as top-down. Individuals assimilate to moral practice, rather than acquiring virtues to create moral practice. However, this entry point should not necessarily suggest mutual incompatibility with the interpersonal framework of omoiyari.

This perception may simply look further ahead, in encouraging individuals to consider the ‘requests’, or rules, of society. Implicit in learners’ progress through of moral education and everyday life is a process of abstraction whereby friendships and interpersonal relationships between student and teacher are extended to an orientation of belonging to and caring for a group. This is again extended to the position of the self in society, which fosters compassion for the people, institutions and requirements of society (see Lewis, 1989). This could well be public service, or could indulge society in compliance.

As a second example, expressions of gratitude practiced in class are often in consideration of parents, friends or teachers and often toward teachers or professionals in textbooks. Gratitude may develop affection into practices more akin to hierarchy or duty when fused with respect for elders, and respect for society (both of which are aspects of reigi).

Many informants who entered the discussion proffering more conservative objectives of comportment then also provided explanations for these objectives in terms of interpersonal consideration for others and development of the self. Likewise, observations demonstrated that, even when specific practices are explicated, explanations are framed in terms of affection.

In practice for example, during a discussion on what happens in the park, children might empathise with people who might be using the benches for rest or quiet enjoyment, leading to rules for not playing around benches and places to sit. Likewise, discussions of honesty may be seen as comportment, but is also discussed empathetically in the sense that people ‘naturally’ feel uneasy to harbour a lie, diverging from what it means to be human, or might hurt other people by doing so.
Fundamental life habits

Regardless of responses in discussions on the aims and objectives of moral education, fundamental life habits, basic aspects of comportment, are invariably taught in early elementary school moral education classtime. Cleaning procedures and greetings have been discussed in the context of School Activities. Other life skill values, that appear so fundamental that practitioners may not consider their enculturation as prescribing values, are invariably taught systematically.

Keeping things tidy. First grade moral education class

Children discuss the Japanese word for keeping things tidy and returning things to the correct place after using, suggesting easy explanations of the term.

Using the story model of moral education class, children learn about the character (a dog) who loves to play outside with his friend. However, today it is raining. He wants to invite his friend to play inside the house, but he cannot because his place is not tidy.* The story recounts details of how he is tidying, which reflects tidying in the classroom. He looks at the room*

At the asterisk, children consider what he is thinking (about the messy room and about the tidy room). Answers are wider than the idea that his friend can now visit.

Children then think about other ways they can keep things tidy and in order. There was a short discussion on ‘eating in the correct place’, where two children suggested they might eat whilst doing something else or without a table. The teacher is doubtful, and accept the majority idea that eating in the correct place is included.

Living with other people.

Many participants frame omoiyari, kindness or, less frequently, ideas connected to comportment as ultimate aims of moral education. It is possible that these perspectives are more aligned to elementary school.

When more general aims were proffered, many informants spoke about learning ‘how to live with other people’. Consistent with a continuum between school and society, this was also pressed as ‘learning about everyday life’ and ‘participating in school life’. Group identity was expressed in some responses on living with other people, particularly in reference to the class or school identity.

“Moral education is most connected to humanity, which is most important for life”
Informants at junior high schools expressed aims sometimes closer to conformity. Some principals and vice-principals suggested that children learn the school spirit, often expounded with characteristics such as learning, persistence (ganbaru) and health, often condensed into a school motto which informed practice as an aspect of moral education. For example, the school is a team that fosters an attitude of ‘one for all; all for one’. Sports and clubs, more consistently provided at junior high schools, were seen as important aspects of this theme.

Responses at elementary schools were almost invariably expressed in terms of interpersonal relationships. Teachers describe that children in a class learn that people cannot live alone and must rely on other people. This includes trust, collaboration and other prototypes of public service. School mottos at elementary schools often reflect either kindness or children growing with a balance of knowledge, morality and body.

The primacy of morality.

Although there is debate amongst teachers, policy makers and educationalists, particularly in Tokyo (Tsuneyoshi, 2013), teachers believe in a balance between academic ability, moral practice, physical practice, often using the phrase chi-toku-tai: knowledge-morality-body. Since 2008, this has been enshrined in the curriculum to establish the main themes of its contents. Informants believed the phrase chi-toku-tai to predate the current curriculum. Unfortunately, there is not space here to discuss relations with physical practice. However, data on the importance of both morality and knowledge provides a clear insight on implicit cultural beliefs on education.

One principal who clearly believed in the primacy of toku (morality), suggested that “if academic standards of a school slips, we should first question whether moral instruction could be improved”. Although in the minority, this was not the only principal who expressed unambiguously that character values, including persistence and proactiveness, underpin academic performance. In another location, I observed this principle in practice:

I attended a public lesson study at a junior high school known for low parental income, low parental employment and low aspirations in an area associated with nightwork and related organisations. Prior discussions at the Board of Education expressed concern for students who are not attracted to senior high school and do not pass the exam for the technical school. Academic ability was seen to be low.

The principal of this school initiated an in-school project, including the recruitment of two school supervisors, with the express intention of
encouraging pride in the school and collaboration between students. All members of the school are aware of the plan to promote collaboration, so supervision is adapted to these values. Over the previous year or two, this project had proven successful evaluated on its terms.

Based on the success of reducing tension between students and increasing collaboration and (indirectly) work ethic, the Board of Education has designated this a model school for promoting cooperation. The fact that the level of academic attainment remains below that of surrounding schools does not appear relevant.

The majority of educationalists perceive moral development and intellectual development as two loosely connected aims of education.

Opening discussions on what values might be learned through public education, rather than relying on an unreflective ‘hidden’ curriculum of values, would allow intelligent advocacy, consistency and a basis for reflection on practice. Most likely, the values perceived as important by the British community of teachers may differ from the particular example of Japan.

Although it is these values that educators perceive to be important will shape pedagogy, systems of enacted contribution or participation in a little society (Dewey, e.g. 1916) will likely be most effective, since values are learned tacitly. Further, designing learning which is primarily tacit does not prevent classes which reflect on this learning.

4. Community schools initiative

There is a current drive from central government to promote the model of Community schools across Japan. The Community School model aims primarily to increase the educational and social involvement of people and groups associated with schools.

In response, schools actively engage individual members of the community to interact educationally with children. One Board of Education sets the learning environment for children into two concentric circles, bringing community members into the ‘inner circle’ along with school staff and parents. Community Centres, public institutions such as museums, business and the Board of Education remain in the outer circle.

Volunteers take on increased roles and some responsibility in schools. One Board of Education uses the phrase:

“100% teachers + 20% community = 120%”.
This also endorses the recognition that teachers are undertaking their moral duty to the fullest (see section 5 below), whilst also recognising the value of more, and more varied human resource.

Community members involved mainly fall into two groups: visiting volunteers, who are generally retired and make up the vast majority of community members; and volunteers who support project-based work, often self-employed and integrating children into their place of work. The volunteer informants that I met were not family relations of children in the school, although they recognise that a minority are.
Visiting volunteers

The vast majority of volunteers are retired people, so are generally older. Each school has varying numbers and arrangements for volunteers to engage with children.

Almost every school outside Tokyo has joined the national drive to encourage greetings on the way to school, in addition to in-school. Like many schools around the world, the Principal or senior staff greeted children entering. Volunteers are also encouraged to greet children in the morning. Many schools had organised greeting days where all volunteers and parents are asked to line the street on the way to school and greet all children. Greetings are variously presented as a means to feel good, make other people feel happy, or integrate a community. The integration of communities has also been linked with preparation for disaster prevention/response.

In addition to volunteering of community members, Community Schools extend the social work of children out of the school to volunteer in the community. For example, children in one community school were engaged with a litter problem in the area. They decided to begin regularly volunteering to pick litter. This fosters pride in the community, allows community members to meet school children more often (as a means of engaging more community members), and makes the link between the civic virtues of proper waste disposal and the consequences for other people more explicit.

Various schools facilitated the teaching of traditional arts. Community members taught flower arrangement, traditional songs, sewing, embroidery, tea ceremony, and other activities, which was typical of activities outside Tokyo. These were conducted mainly at lunchtime and afterschool. The take-up was high in early elementary, although boys stopped attending in upper elementary. In another area, one school had a similar programme in some schools organised in collaboration with Community Centres. To increase involvement, Community Centre volunteers were invited to join the school for lunch anytime, particularly toward the beginning of the school year.

Community Centres

There are 137,000 Community Centres in Japan, at least one in every city, town and village. These provide organisation for clubs and communities of practice in any activity. Many respondents, externally and internally to the Community Centre characterised the majority of active members as retired, female and practicing traditional arts, dance, cooking, sharing, speaking, exchanging ideas and books and any other voluntary activity. This was largely supported in my observations visiting 4 Community Centres outside Tokyo.

Other responsibilities undertaken commonly and easily undertaken by volunteers included tending school gardens and flowers and playing with children before
school. More innovative responsibilities varied greatly from school-to-school. For example: regular bike maintenance session for/with children; morning reading before opening the school day; volunteers helping teachers with marking; running a homework club.

Project-based work
Project-based learning in the Integrated Studies curriculum allowed for Community Schools outside Tokyo to integrate visiting volunteer teaching into the curriculum and provide field trips. In one school, fifth graders were completing a year-long project on onion farming, visiting the same farm regularly to apprentice in each step of the agricultural season. The farmer community member speaks as a guest-teacher in the fourth grade, using photos of the previous year’s cohort to demonstrate.

Community schools tended to use field trips regularly to root experiential learning in the local community. This learning is undertaken in time allocated to Integrated Studies. Knowledge of the local produce, local export/import patterns, local public services and spaces, main employment types and infrastructure is acquired in lower elementary school in Social Studies. The coursebooks provide illustrations of relationships with adults. The pages contain a handful of activities outside the schools: around 5 in grades 1-2.

The example of themed study of the river
A fifth grade hometeacher and moral education specialist explained the thinking behind studying the river in Integrated Studies as one of community cohesion and maintenance. People tend to enjoy the river, so it appears kind to protect the wildlife, pick litter and appreciate its natural sublimity.

Students discussed the river to decide what is important in terms of study or action (volunteering). This provided teachers an opportunity to practice and reflect with students on group consensus and respect. The theme also allowed for studies from environmental sciences and some maths. However, the teacher emphasises that, as a group, all people can contribute: ‘people can be active in the community even if they are poor at Maths’. Older people told stories about their memories and shared or participated in outdoor games.

Finally, this provides a demonstration of how people affect each other through moral actions. The community organised for local residents to write to all students in the class expressing gratitude for their particular contributions to cleaning or collaborating on the river project.
Class / school newspaper

Much as community members wrote letters of thanks to children for volunteering, the tradition of the class newsletter finds new readership amongst community members. These can be distributed on websites or to the Community Centres, in addition to parents. Most schools in each city outside Tokyo produced class newspapers to report volunteering activities or project based work. In considering what content these readers might like to read, classes often decide upon topics dear to the older generations or local topics.

Project based learning will be familiar to UK educators. Collaborating with community members and businesses as volunteers may be widely seen as examples of good practice. Nonetheless, Japanese community schools may encourage British educators to question what pupils are contributing back to the community. Encouraging a willingness to serve by volunteering with children or by sharing responsibility may provide more challenging reflection for British educators. Engagement with parents may be necessary to overcome the steep learning curve.

5. Teacher professionalism and development.

Teaching in Japan.

Elementary teachers in Japan form strong family-like bonds with their class and invest a great amount of planning in creating class cohesion, particularly emotional and collaborative bonds between students. Teachers and students are together through the day, meeting in the morning, working together in class, available through 5-10 minute free time between classes, eating lunch in the classroom with students, and engaging in discussions at the end of the day.

Likewise, teachers collaborate as a group to prepare lessons, including curriculum development, subject integration, lesson plans and planning how notes on the blackboard will develop through each lesson. This ‘joint professional development’ provides space for discussion which creates or continues a discussion, or discourse, around specific areas of practice, such as moral education, both generally and for moral education classtime. Various practices and arrangements facilitate wider joint professional development.
**School space**

Classrooms generally line up along one face of the school building. Large windows usually face East or South. On the corridor side, classrooms have two sliding doors and windows along the length of the classroom. For this reason, classrooms are configured for permeability. School staff and other adults regularly enter, observe and leave classrooms. These adults may be colleagues observing teaching for new ideas or general interest, members of the Board of Education observing interesting practice, or occasionally parents or researchers. Children are familiar with class being observed. Teachers seem confident in their practice whilst teaching, but understandably often express nerves retrospectively where unfamiliar adults were observing. The culture of collaboration facilitates encouragement and constructive feedback.

Schools are well-equipped for sports with the overwhelming majority of elementary schools having a stage, gymnasium, sport field and swimming pool, including in urban areas. Likewise, teachers are provided space for planning. The teachers’ office is arranged with two lines of desks facing inward, with the vice-principal or leader at the head. Schools generally have a conference room for discussions.

Classrooms have space for bags at the back, display boards, fans on the ceiling. Technology such as video playback, document projection, and interactive features are not used much, but are available in most schools. Many older schools have separate science rooms, design rooms and home economics rooms. Recently built schools show a trend, following the community schools model, to include office rooms for PTA activities and for volunteers to prepare.

**Time, holidays and professionalism**

Teachers across Japan consistently reported long working hours. Many arrive soon after 8:00 and stay in the office, as a matter of routine, until 19:00 or 20:00. This was more consistently 20:00 or 21:00 in high-performing schools in Tokyo. Although these hours, taken as a weekly average, may not be very much higher than those of teachers in the UK, working patterns vary. UK teachers tend to leave the school early and continue work or planning on their home PC in the evening, possibly after a break for dinner or family time. Teachers in Japan tend to stay in the office working alongside colleagues before finishing work for the day. In Japan, teachers reported working less at home or at weekends, although these trends are flexible, particularly weekends for teachers who are engaged in external communities and research.

Out of the 27-29 periods, most teachers report 23-27 periods teaching, with an average of 1 non-teaching period per week. Similarly to the UK, this depends largely on whether the school has a specialist music, home economics or science teacher. Teachers do not take a summer break as children continue to engage with the school on irregular programmes through summer.
Joint professional development and practice sharing

The office layout encourages group work. Homeroom teachers of one year-group work in collaboration on a daily basis. Lesson plans are negotiated as groups, led by one teacher, and implemented by all teachers in the yeargroup. Classes in each year are labelled with a letter or name, for example ‘Second Year chrysanthemums’ or ‘Third Year plumtrees’, with the potential to create ‘teams’. Much as the ‘plumtree’ students form a mixed-age team on Sports Day, many schools encourage all teachers of one team to meet to discuss the progress of their pupils and potentially teaching ideas each week.

A ‘subject lead’ for each subject provides a consultant who may have engaged in a few more conversations or reading in that subject. This subject lead may regularly (from once per month to once per year) meet with leads from other schools or attend a regional lesson study in this area. They also lead an in-school ‘lesson study’ once per year. Thus, in rotation of subjects, all staff might attend a lesson study once every one or two months. It is not uncommon for teachers to attend school lesson studies at other schools, particularly where the lead teacher is well-known. The ordinary school-based lesson studies I observed attracted about 40 parents and teachers, including a few of teachers from other schools.

Addition responsibilities run parallel to these: most teachers have responsibility for an agenda in the school (academic attainment, community involvement, sports (junior high), PTA, bullying, supporting absent students, etc). There is also mandatory training, which I observed to be less enthusiastically adopted, but is also far less frequent (once every 4 years in one city). More commonly, members of local government attend and speak at lesson studies where top-down messages are presented. Many community schools collaborate in elementary-junior high groups to allow junior high teachers to teach some sessions at elementary school as development - as many as two per week in some combined schools. As an innovation, one city encourages all principals of an area to meet once per month and, as a separate meeting, all deputy principals to meet once per month to develop school administration. This was seen to run counter to the cultural taboo of senior figures or ‘Heads’ undertaking development activities.

Presented as part of the community schools approach, all elementary schools in two areas visited produced lesson plan handbooks. Each school is assigned a subject and collate their best practice for dissemination through all other elementary schools in the municipality. This furthers the practice of gradual improvement to lessons whilst also aiming to reduce repetition in planning and new teacher training.

Some schools instead undertake year-long research projects to evaluate larger changes or pedagogical projects teaching staff have undertaken. Most projects follow a local or national agenda, providing an abundance of developmental materials for gradual improvement or adoption by schools which are slower to
implement. Others choose original or context-specific themes. This surge of start-up material – experiments, ways of thinking or addressing an issue, lesson plan, lesson study outcomes, training material plans, syllabi – builds into good practice, and eventually the kind of 'best practice' advocated by school supervisors. Textbooks also serve to support the reproduction of good practice by publishing materials to suit these pedagogies or approaches, tapered by the requirement for Ministry approval. Since moral education 'classtime' is not technically a subject, this requirement is far weaker in the case of textbooks for moral education classtime.

Lesson study

In brief, lesson study is a process of incremental improvement in teaching practice. A group meet to discuss plans for a lesson, considering reasons for choices and how its execution may unfold. The real life lesson implementation is observed by all participants, and possibly further observers. This is then discussed to consider good practice and possible improvements drawn from the experience and new ideas of all participants. These strengths and improvements feed into practice and into future lesson study. In the normal configuration, children are not participant in the development aspects, on experience a lesson only, albeit with the presence of observers. Lesson study might last 4 hours around a 50-minute lesson.

In the case of particular expertise or innovation in a subject, larger lesson study meetings may be arranged with the support of the Board of Education. Several schools I visited had series of public lesson studies arranged. The regional lesson study I attended attracted over 100 teachers. In this case, members of the school and invited experts discuss the lesson, whilst others external observers listen to the discussion.

Regularly, ‘supervisors’ are placed primarily in junior high schools to advise on a programme of change or, more commonly, advising pedagogy of new teachers or lesson study, most schools have a supervisor who might be a former principal or university researcher in education (or both) to visit one day per week. Interestingly, the dominant model (storytelling, great person, and role-playing extension) of moral education classes outlined above were condensed and advocated by school supervisors. Because supervisors may be perceived as relatively authoritative, this might be felt as prescriptive by new teachers. The rigour of good practice sharing is also perceived as a potential threat to innovation.

Nonetheless, the bottom-up element is strong and recognised by the Ministry of Education (MEXT), who have the option to implement relatively open curricula in new subjects, to build upon grassroots practice later. For example, early best practice in English has been built up from teachers at schools that implemented English early. Similarly, assessment for moral education will be introduced from 2018 onward. Practice in this area will be built from current practice and innovations that occur in early adoption of assessment or evaluation. In other areas, such as incorporating patriotism into moral education classtime, much to the dismay of teachers, the central government may provide little freedom.

Newly qualified teacher development

Teacher qualification is much shorter in Japan to the extent that, although competition for positions is tight, new teachers may have spent only a few weeks in the classroom. The school is responsible for recruiting and training new teachers.

New teachers have a reduced workload for the first year and a slightly reduced workload possibly for the first three years. They will undertake training more regularly with other teachers covering lessons. Likewise, a programme of lesson observations will be arranged whereby new teachers collaborate with experienced teachers to plan a lesson which may then be taught by either to inform a discussion on possible improvements.
In-service training is vital for new teachers, and continues strongly through the career as senior teachers are expected to undertake and lead development activities.

Teacher’s journals

In addition to resources produced by schools and Boards of Education, there is a wide range of practitioner journals available to share practice, resources and summaries of the application of theory, usually published monthly. Journal titles span the dimensions of school level, types of practitioner, subjects, cross-subject topics, policy influences and others. Normally the theory is drawn from well-established ideas, explained simply with practical examples and some explanation. Alternatively, articles are based phronetically on professional experience.

The two main journals in moral education included a general journal and one on moral education and School Activities. To present some topics of importance, I surveyed the special topics covered during a 12 month period:

Special topics covered by Moral Education

Listening to children, getting everybody working together, countering bullying, planning blackboard writing, developing self-determination,
lesson planning, group discussion, digital age teaching, planning an emotionally moving final class, planning the opening lesson of the year.

Special topics covered by *Moral Education and School Activities*

Children creating and observing rules independently, presenting materials, reviewing new textbooks, facilitating group discussions, working with smaller or larger groups, how to utilise a textbook, developing a planning committee for class meetings, what to observe when observing lessons, orientation [for first grade arrivals], recent curriculum amendments, expanding pupils' responsibilities.

Teacher quality is the greatest predictor of student success (Rowe, 2003; OECD, 2005; Hattie, 2008). Although structural changes, space and compensation are important, conceptual space needs to be created more broadly to initiate evidence-based change from within the profession. The OECD recommends “Developing and implementing teacher policy by engaging teachers in policy development and implementation; developing professional learning communities; and improving the knowledge base to support teacher policy” (2005).

Discussion amongst teachers may create a knowledge-base upon which further practice can be built. Although not the only model, there is a plethora of work in English on lesson study, both in general and as applied to the USA or UK context. Teachers are more effective in using (Carter, 2015) or producing (RSA, 2014) a research evidence-base. Lesson study can operate locally or more widely through government-sponsored systems or independent professional bodies.
6. Conclusions and implications

The strengths of moral education practice in Japan are underpinned by implicit cultural beliefs shared to an extent by the community of education practitioners. In particular, practitioners see as integral to education the equal contribution of knowledge, morality and body to educational development and importance of moral practice to success in education and life.

The aim of developing capacity to live with other people in society is addressed by promoting interpersonal consideration for other humans (omoiyari), persistence, and comportment. Moral education classtime provides a framework through which the core of moral education, in school activities, volunteering and general supervision, can be practiced.

The Japanese case may demonstrate the value in and possibility of discussing moral education as one dimension of thinking that can underpin education practice more deeply. Structured school activities or other approaches that allow school life to reflect society may promote tacit learning. The model of diffusing practice through the school with dedicated classtime to provide a framework for discussions in school could be instructive for UK practice, particularly considering suggestions that values may be learned tacitly, through practice or following examples.

However, education practice occurs within a specific culture and context of stakeholders. For that reason, it may be that specific aims and objectives that find consensus in Japan sit less comfortably with cultural beliefs and traditions of the UK. The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues (2013) in the UK, for example, defined a set of virtues, only partially overlapping, with a focus different from those discussed above. Although the objectives and structure for tacit learning may differ, an explicit discourse on moral education would underpin discussion on important values and suitable pedagogy.

Local special interest groups and grassroots programmes can contribute greatly toward innovation and convergence of practice. Likewise, as evidence builds to demonstrate the value of empowering teachers as research evidence-based using (Carter, 2015) or a research knowledge producing (RSA, 2014) profession, national organisations such as the naissant College of Teachers may widen opportunities for professional development and potentially joint professional development.

By sharing strong practice from Japan, this report aims to promote consideration, discussion and innovation in moral education at primary level.
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“Character may be manifested in the great moments, but it is made in the small ones”

- Sir Winston Churchill
Moral Education
at Japanese elementary school

Sam Bamkin
Winston Churchill Memorial Trust, 2016