

Letters from Abroad

Gertrude Hankamp Fitzwater

Developing Educational Leadership in Japan

During a visit with a German educator who recently left the Eastern Zone of Germany and spent some time in the Western Zone, the comment was made that one of the wisest actions of the American Occupation Forces would be to stop using the word "democracy" and in all matters actually practice it. Paul E. Webb, director of the Institute for Educational Leadership in Japan, describes how, through the work of the Institute, an attempt is being made to give to local educational leaders in Japan a real experience in democracy.—GHF.

JAPAN TODAY is engaged in the difficult task of becoming a democratic nation. Under the guidance of the American Occupation Forces, legislation is being enacted which is placing the controls of government in the hands of the people. An important phase of this process was the enactment by the Japanese Diet in July, 1948, of the Board of Education Law, which provided for the establishment of boards of education in the prefectures, cities, towns, and villages of Japan.

Legislation providing for the decentralization of control, however, is but a first step. Education in Japan has been a national function, controlled and administered through a powerful and autocratic Ministry of Education. Central planning and decision-making left no opportunity for the development of local initiative or responsibility. Now, as the transfer of control from the central government to local units is taking place, competent professional leadership and guidance in these units are necessary in order to assure the maintenance of sound programs of education.

With the centralized control of education there was no need for any position comparable to that of school superintendent. Control was exercised through school inspectors whose primary function was to see that orders from above were obeyed. Professional and specialized training for school administrators and supervisors was considered unnecessary. Any graduate of a national university was considered competent to hold any position. More than eighty-five percent of the top positions in the government service (including the Ministry of Education) were filled by law graduates of Tokyo University. Thus, when the legislative changes became effective there was lacking not only necessary educational leadership in the local units but also university staffs competent to train individuals for such leadership. To help meet this need the Institute for Educational Leadership was organized.

The Institute was a unique educational enterprise in which outstanding American and Japanese educators cooperated in a program designed to prepare Japan's first superintendents of education and teacher consultants. On the basis of population, each of the forty-six prefectures of Japan selected and sent to the Institute some of its most promising potential educational leaders. The sessions extended over a twelve-week period and were attended by 1084 Japanese educators.

The program followed a pattern of morning lectures and afternoon workshops. The lectures were designed to provide materials for an understanding of the basic concepts underlying democratic practices in education. The areas which were considered (time did not permit any thorough coverage) included: soci-

ological foundations of education, childhood and adolescent psychology, principles of elementary and secondary education, curriculum and methods of instruction, guidance, research and evaluation, the work of the teacher consultant, school organization and administration, personnel administration, buildings, and finance.

Lectures were prepared cooperatively by American and Japanese professors and delivered by the Japanese professor. Synopses of the lectures were mimeographed in Japanese for distribution to students and in English for the use of the American staff and military government education officers, who are responsible for aiding and encouraging the development of democratic practices in the schools.

The afternoon sessions were organized as workshops in which members of the American staff took a major responsibility for guidance and direction. Here the problems that were confronting and disturbing these potential and actual leaders (many of the students had been designated as superintendents by the newly elected boards of education) came up for consideration and afforded the American staff members the opportunity to make their most valuable contribution. Twelve weeks of direct and intimate contact with a small group of Japanese educators provided many occasions for demonstration of democratic techniques in operation and for personal guidance in democratic practices to a people who had been deprived of any opportunity to participate in the process of finding solutions to their problems. And in commendation of the American staff, it can be said that they carried

out this assignment with particular effectiveness.

Although at this writing the closing session of the Institute is but two months away, it is not too early to conclude that the participants of the Institute are making their influence felt in the reconstruction of education in Japan. Boards of education are adopting rules and regulations that are direct outgrowths of workshop activities. There is a growing realization that democratization in education means that local authorities must assume the responsibility for what takes place in their schools and that they can no longer look to Tokyo for the answers to all their questions. Problems must be worked out and solved in the areas in which they occur.

Reports that come in from many of the prefectures indicate that the participants of the Institute have returned to their homes inspired to carry on a program of education based upon democratic ideals. There is a new zeal for in-service training inspired by the enthusiasm of the new teacher consultants.

There is a growing recognition among the Japanese that professional and specialized training is a prerequisite for intelligent and enlightened educational leadership. The 1949-50 budget, approved by the National Diet, contains a substantial allotment for the continuation of the Institute program.

But most important of all, the visit of the American staff has created a bond of friendship between America and Japan that will be of lasting value—a practical demonstration of democracy at its best.

Paul E. Webb



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