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Violence in Japan's elementary schools

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24 September, 2005

THE ARTICLE

Violence in Japan's elementary schools

BNE: Japanese elementary schools are becoming ever more increasingly violent, according to government statistics. This is beginning to challenge the myth of Japan as an orderly society in which schoolchildren sit attentively, respond in unison and respect teachers. The number of reported cases of violence rose to a record 1,890 during the past school year. This broke the previous record of 1,600 cases set in 2003. A government spokesperson attributed the violence to children having "difficulties expressing their feelings" or lacking patience. Japan began surveying school violence in 1997 following a string of macabre and disturbing crimes committed by younger students. The most shocking crime was the decapitation of a ten-year-old by a classmate.

Attacks against teachers jumped nearly 33 per cent to 336 cases during the latest school year. The government report stated: "In many cases, children easily lost their tempers because of trivial things and quickly turned to violence." This has included record numbers of stabbings, assaults and vandalism of school property. One attempt at resolving the situation included dismayed parents keeping watch on their own children during classes. Teachers are under increasing strain and school officials have expressed an inability to cope. When they confront parents about a child's delinquent behavior, the matter is shrugged off with an explanation that the child behaves well in the home. Police statistics show juvenile delinquency is steadily increasing.

WARM-UPS

1. TEN AGAIN: In pair / groups, quickly write down a list of things ten-year-old children are interested in. Change partners. You are now ten again. Use your lists to talk about your life back at elementary school. Is there any violence or bullying at your school?

2. MISBEHAVIOR: Talk with your partner(s) about the following examples of misbehavior at elementary school. Did you see or experience any of these? What would you do if these happened at the school your child was attending?

- Bullying
- Attacks on teachers
- Graffiti
- Smoking
- Drink and drugs
- Stabbing
- Gun crime
- Vandalism

3. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words are most interesting and which are most boring.

Japan / elementary school / violence / government statistics / myths / schoolchildren / a lack of patience / losing one's temper / teachers / delinquency

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

4. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with elementary school. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

5. MY MEMORIES: What are your memories of elementary school? Talk with your partner(s) about the following:

- First day
- Uniform
- School lunches
- Favorite teacher
- Break time / Play time
- Best friends
- Homework
- Bad kids

6. SOLUTIONS: How far do you agree with these solutions to curbing violence in elementary schools? Talk about them with your partner(s).

- a. All classrooms should have web cameras so parents can monitor their children.
- b. Children who repeatedly misbehave should be automatically expelled.
- c. Parents of bullied children should be able to sue the bully's parents.
- d. Teachers should receive better training to cope with delinquency.
- e. Parents of delinquent children should be named and shamed in local newspapers.
- f. Parents must pay a fine for all incidents of their child's misbehavior.
- g. Well-behaved children can suggest punishments for badly behaved children.
- h. Teachers who cannot control their classrooms should be fired.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- | | |
|--|-------|
| a. A spate of violent crime occurred in Japan's schools this week. | T / F |
| b. Japanese elementary schoolchildren are usually orderly and attentive. | T / F |
| c. A government spokesman attributed the violence to video games. | T / F |
| d. An elementary schoolchild decapitated a classmate a while ago. | T / F |
| e. Many children lose their tempers over trivial things. | T / F |
| f. Dismayed parents have installed web cameras in classrooms. | T / F |
| g. Teachers say they are in control and can cope with the violence. | T / F |
| h. Police statistics show juvenile delinquency is steadily increasing. | T / F |

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| a. attentively | beheading |
| b. unison | manage |
| c. attributed | gruesome |
| d. macabre | destruction |
| e. decapitation | blamed |
| f. trivial | conscientiously |
| g. vandalism | misconduct |
| h. dismayed | unimportant |
| i. cope | harmony |
| j. delinquency | alarmed |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| a. ever more | attentively, respond in unison... |
| b. challenge the myth of | an inability to cope |
| c. schoolchildren sit | Japan as an orderly society |
| d. following a string of | off with an explanation |
| e. the decapitation of a | watch on their own children |
| f. children easily lost their tempers | is steadily increasing |
| g. dismayed parents keeping | ten-year-old by a classmate |
| h. officials have expressed | because of trivial things |
| i. the matter is shrugged | increasingly violent |
| j. juvenile delinquency | macabre and disturbing crimes |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

GAP FILL: Put the words in the column on the right into the gaps in the text.

Violence in Japan's elementary schools

BNE: Japanese elementary schools are becoming _____ more increasingly violent, according to government statistics. This is beginning to _____ the myth of Japan as an orderly society in which schoolchildren sit attentively, _____ in unison and respect teachers. The number of reported _____ of violence rose to a record 1,890 during the past school year. This broke the previous record of 1,600 cases _____ in 2003. A government spokesperson _____ the violence to children having "difficulties expressing their feelings" or lacking patience. Japan began surveying school violence in 1997 following a _____ of macabre and disturbing crimes committed by younger students. The most shocking crime was the _____ of a ten-year-old by a classmate.

Attacks against teachers _____ nearly 33 per cent to 336 cases during the latest school year. The government report stated: "In many cases, children easily _____ their tempers because of trivial things and quickly turned to violence." This has included record numbers of _____, assaults and vandalism of school property. One attempt at _____ the situation included dismayed parents keeping watch on their own children during classes. Teachers are under increasing _____ and school officials have expressed an inability to _____. When they _____ parents about a child's delinquent behavior, the matter is shrugged off with an explanation that the child behaves well in the home. Police statistics show _____ delinquency is steadily increasing.

respond
string
challenge
decapitation
set
ever
attributed
cases
strain
cope
stabblings
lost
juvenile
confront
resolving
jumped

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words '**elementary**' and '**school**'.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. GAP FILL: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the gap fill. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. STUDENT "SCHOOL VIOLENCE" SURVEY: In pairs / groups, write down questions about violence in schools.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

6. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- ever
- myth
- unison
- attributed
- macabre
- shocking
- jumped
- trivial
- record numbers
- dismayed
- inability
- juvenile

DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. What were your initial thoughts on this headline?
- b. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- c. What adjectives describe your feelings about this article?
- d. Are you surprised there is violence in Japan's elementary schools?
- e. What is your image of schools in Japan?
- f. Do elementary schoolchildren in your country sit attentively and respect teachers?
- g. What are the biggest problems facing elementary schools in your country?
- h. Did you witness or experience any violence at elementary school?
- i. Why do you think violence is increasing in schools?
- j. Do you think there is violence in all elementary schools worldwide?

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read?
- c. Would you like to be a schoolteacher?
- d. What do you think should happen to a child who attacks teachers?
- e. Should corporal punishment be allowed in elementary schools?
- f. What is the most effective measure to ensure discipline in schools?
- g. What can societies do about parents who refuse to believe their children display delinquent behavior?
- h. What would you do if your intelligent child could not learn because of disruptive students and bullies?
- i. Do you think teachers are too weak?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

AFTER DISCUSSION: Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What question would you like to ask about this topic?
- b. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- c. Was there a question you didn't like?
- d. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- e. What did you like talking about?
- f. Do you want to know how anyone else answered the questions?
- g. Which was the most difficult question?

SPEAKING

BAD BEHAVIOR: In pairs / groups, decide who should be punished in each of the following cases of ten-year-old students being violent. What should the punishments be?

CASE	CHILD	PARENT	TEACHER
A child throws a chair at a teacher. The chair misses.			
A child throws a chair at a teacher and fractures the teacher's skull.			
A child attacks a classmate with a hammer. No serious injuries.			
A bully's long-suffering victim attacks him with a hammer. The bully is seriously injured.			
A child sets his / her class on fire.			
A bully causes a classmate to commit suicide.			
Despite repeated letters home to parents, one child's behavior sets his/her classmates' learning back six months.			
A child kills a classmate with a knife.			

Change partners and tell each other your decisions. Do you all agree on who should be punished and what the punishments are?

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

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HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find more information on violence in elementary schools around the world. Share your findings with your class in the next lesson.

3. GOOD BEHAVIOR: Make a poster describing the responsibilities parents of elementary schoolchildren have in ensuring their child behaves correctly. Explain the actions parents should take for different cases of misconduct or violence. Show your posters to your classmates in your next lesson. Did you all write about similar things?

4. LETTER: You are an elementary school student. You want to learn but there are many bad kids stopping you with their violent behavior. Write a letter to the school head about your situation. Explain what you want done in your school. Read your letter to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all write about similar things?

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

- a. F b. T c. F d. T e. T f. F g. F h. T

SYNONYM MATCH:

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| a. attentively | conscientiously |
| b. unison | harmony |
| c. attributed | blamed |
| d. macabre | gruesome |
| e. decapitation | beheading |
| f. trivial | unimportant |
| g. vandalism | destruction |
| h. dismayed | alarmed |
| i. cope | manage |
| j. delinquency | misconduct |

PHRASE MATCH:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| a. ever more | increasingly violent |
| b. challenge the myth of | Japan as an orderly society |
| c. schoolchildren sit | attentively, respond in unison... |
| d. following a string of | macabre and disturbing crimes |
| e. the decapitation of a | ten-year-old by a classmate |
| f. children easily lost their tempers | because of trivial things |
| g. dismayed parents keeping | watch on their own children |
| h. officials have expressed | an inability to cope |
| i. the matter is shrugged | off with an explanation |
| j. juvenile delinquency | is steadily increasing |

GAP FILL:

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