

## Creating Hope

- Kenichiro Ogawa (Osaka YMCA General Secretary & CEO)

International conferences are held frequently at the YMCA, which operates in 120 countries and territories worldwide. When the meetings are chaired by the Australian CEO, whether global or online, they began by saying, “We understand that the place where we are now is the land of the Indigenous people, and we begin the meeting by paying respect.” This saying seems to be common in Australia. It is meaningful for the people who have a history of domination not to forget the people who have been dominated and should imagine and respect the feelings of minority, not just in a particular country or region, and make it a habit to remember them.

According to a survey by the “Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT),” the number of people who did not attend elementary and junior high schools was approximately 300 000 in the year 2022, which was 1.7% in primary schools and 6% in junior high schools; an increasing trend. It is remarkable that young people are having pronounced difficulty in living. While it is true that the value of a person's life will always not change at any time, as the birthrate declines and the proportion of working-age people supporting the elderly decreases, society's expectations of each and every young person are increasing.

If you look into a classroom at a Japanese school, you will see that the desks and chairs for students are neatly lined up, and students are facing the blackboard. Students sit facing the blackboard, and the teacher faces the students with his or her back to the blackboard. Even when there are cases to do something in a group of students, the relationship between teachers and groups of students remains that teachers take leadership and teach students, and students are taught by teachers.

In the case where adults decide what students should learn, tell them how to study, and even imply that the students will become successful people by doing such and such kinds of work and living their lives in the future, young people will no longer have room to think for themselves. In the first place, the mental growth of young people who reach puberty cannot keep up with the unstoppable and rapid physical growth of their bodies. Young people going through puberty are more stressed and anxious than adults. What should we do to help so many young people who find difficulties in life?

One of the subsidiary organizations installed by Osaka YMCA is the Osaka YMCA School Organization which manages five schools. These are Osaka YMCA International College, YMCA

Gakuin High School (using the correspondence learning system), Osaka YMCA Gakuin (Japanese language school for international students), Osaka YMCA International School (international school accredited by the International Baccalaureate) and Osaka Prefectural Suito International Junior and Senior High School (public school prioritizing the Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) and accredited by the International Baccalaureate).

The Osaka YMCA International College offers the Expression and Communication Course as a high school education. 70% of the students have experienced being unable to attend classes at junior high school. At the entrance ceremony, the principal of the college declares the following promises. "Since this school does not have uniforms, we do not measure the length of your skirts. We do not check the color of your hair. What the teachers are looking at is the face of the students." "You may have a lot of anxieties right now. But your current worries will turn into relief and peace of mind through your school life." "Instead of blaming yourself for failing, let's start working on what you want to do and what is interesting, even if it is different from others. *We are here* to support you in making that dream a reality." These are messages from teachers also to parents who are worried that the parenting they have been believing in and done is not successful in raising their children. These parents ask themselves whether they have imposed any uniform values in which they have believed. These parents try to restore hope through these messages.

The Osaka YMCA is promoting initiatives in each class and each school to communicate that

there are diverse genders. For example, when calling students, teachers call their names with "san" which we use for any gender in Japan. Student activities are not divided by gender. Students can choose their own uniform, whether trousers or skirts. During events that involve overnight stays, the school is dialogue-oriented with students. Teachers listen to the voices of LGBTQ students and value diversity, including gender equality. Students themselves, as well as teachers, think and make suggestions about what they should be like.

Osaka YMCA International School once advertised worldwide for selecting a new principal. Then, a proposal was made that they would like to include parents and students as a part of the interview process for a new principal. I accepted the proposal timidly. Students asked questions like "How do you want to deal with students as a principal?" Parents asked questions not only about communication with parents and their views on education but also "What are your thoughts on how to exist as a school in the community?" During the interview to select a new principal, various questions were raised from diverse perspectives. This interview also became a process for candidates to take the principalship more seriously. It was also a good opportunity for us as recruiters to consider what the school should aim for.

As I am in a position responsible for an organization, I am faced with a decision on how to deal with proposals based on diverse values, including gender equality. It is important to set goals and establish rules and commitments to realize the goals. It is important to adhere to these rules

and commitments. However, our attitude of stepping away from the above routine and listening to diverse opinions with an open mind will create new perspectives and values to realize inclusiveness and diversity. I want to consider the future not only with the people currently living in the same community but also with the people we will welcome into our community in the future.



### 【Profile of Mr. Kenichiro Ogawa】

Graduated from Toyo University in 1994, with a degree in Business Administration from the Faculty of Business Administration of the Business Administration Department of the university. During his student days, he was engaged in the Terakoya (temple)-school establishment activity in Bangladesh to increase literacy rates in the country and visited Bangladesh twice in pursuit of this goal.

After graduation, he started working at the Tokyo YMCA. At the YMCA Hotel Vocational School, where he worked as a school management staff, he led overseas training programs visiting the United States and Europe and was also appointed as the head of the career guidance office of the school. From 2001, he has participated in the redevelopment project “Training and Accommodation Institution for Young Men” (Seishonen-no-ie) of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government by collaborating with a private company as a staff member of the Tokyo YMCA. At the same time, he was responsible for organizing outdoor activities for children with developmental disabilities and autism, and acquired knowledge about the joys and concerns of these children and their families.

In 2004, he moved to the Kitakyushu YMCA where he was given the responsibility for all operations of the Kitakyushu YMCA. He visited China, Vietnam, Mongolia, Nepal, and Sri Lanka frequently and repeatedly as principal of the Japanese language school of the Kitakyushu YMCA, for the purpose of recruiting students and planning the future with the applicant students and parents.

In the Moji-port area in Kitakyushu where aging is progressing, he ensured success in operating the new after-school childcare facilities by reinforcing conversations with the Kitakyushu City and the local autonomous federations. In 2008 he became General Secretary of the Kitakyushu YMCA and contributed to the internationalization of the area and the well-balanced development of children's minds and bodies.

In 2018, he was appointed as General Secretary of the Osaka YMCA. Since then, he has been working on social education operations, school education operations, and welfare project operations of the Osaka YMCA. The YMCA is committed to providing “Holistic Education”. To achieve this goal, the Osaka YMCA is challenging itself to solve the problem of school non-attendance by removing barriers between education and welfare. The Osaka YMCA is also facing challenges in developing its “Educational programs” that promote international perspectives by decreasing the barriers between school education and social education.

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