



22

Education In Japan

This article shows how students in Japan work hard for long hours to prepare themselves for taking examinations for admission to reputed universities.

LIKE a soldier preparing for battle, Kensuke Suzuki leads a regimented life. He's up at 6.30 every morning. Gymnastics practice begins at 7.15. From 9 until 3 there's intensive class work, then four more hours of athletics. Dinner follows at 8 a.m. Three nights a week he attends an extra 80-minute academic session. Then comes homework and T.V. Exhausted, by midnight Kensuke collapses into bed. It's a demanding schedule—especially when you're only 13 years old. Yet Kensuke plunges into his days with a chipper, can-do spirit. He knows the grinding classroom work and the after-dinner sessions at the supplementary school, or juku, are part of the price for

success in Japan's educational system. "Some times I'm tired and I don't feel like going to Juku or gym practice," he concedes. "But if I don't go, I'll fall behind."

NEAR MANIA: Although his peers in most other countries would find Kensuke's schedule appalling, this is a typical day for Japanese junior-high-school students. Tokyo's Ministry of Education sets nationwide standards for achievement, measuring what pupils actually know, rather than their aptitude. High marks assure admission to a top-ranked university and a good career; poor grades and test scores can mean a second rate college and job with little promise. The result is a near mania on the part of Japanese kids for memorizing facts,

figures and formulas, which can be parroted back during exams.

To get an edge, more than half of Japan's urban junior-high students attend juku. Kensuke started going when he was just 11. "My grades weren't so hot," he confides. His mother Junko Suzuki, concedes the special help is a good idea.

"What high school he gets into depends entirely on his grade point average, so if he doesn't get the extra tutoring his whole future is at risk," she says. The classes, which cost about \$ 100 a month, concentrate on one subject per session, including Japanese, Math and English. Unlike the lockstep pace of the regular classroom, there's time at juku for detailed explanations if a student has trouble with a concept.

"It's more fun to study there," says Kensuke. "I understand the material better."

Kensuke has already decided he wants to attend Waseda University, a prestigious private school in Tokyo, from which his father, a civil engineer and construction-company executive, graduated. He hopes to win admission to the high school affiliated with Waseda, which should make getting into the university a bit easier. After that, he wants to become a company president. "If I can get into Waseda I think I'll be able to get a job with a good company" he says. For all the rigors of his schedule, Kensuke remains a happy, even cheerful, child. He genuinely enjoys gymnastics—

although sports prowess will do him no good when it comes to getting into university. He's an avid fan of Duran Duran and Madonna. Kensuke has even exchanged puppy-love notes with a girl in his class. They haven't gone out on a date yet, though. After all, they see each other all the time at school. (Courtesy: NEWSWEEK)