Education in the Asia-Pacific Region:
Issues, Concerns and Prospects 67

Akito Okada
Sam Bamkin *Editors*

Japan's School Curriculum for the 2020s

Politics, Policy, and Pedagogy

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Education in the Asia-Pacific Region: Issues, Concerns and Prospects

Volume 67

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Editors

Japan's School Curriculum for the 2020s

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Editors
Akito Okada
Graduate School of Global Studies
Tokyo University of Foreign Studies
Tokyo, Japan

Sam Bamkin
Graduate School of Education and Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia
University of Tokyo
Tokyo, Japan

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Foreword

The study of curriculum reform might be easy to dismiss as a rather dry topic but, as the chapters in this volume demonstrate, it can provide a fascinating window into not just a country's education system but also deeper issues such as what it means to be a member of that society and even the very nature of personhood.

The study of Japan's curriculum reform is particularly interesting for a number of reasons. First, the importance that is given to the education system. Japan has very few natural resources other than people and hence education has always been a primary concern. Second, Japan has an unusually regular cycle of reviewing its school curriculum once every ten years which allows observers to track debates and policies over time and demonstrate how they have reflected concerns and developments in broader society. Third, the underlying debates about education have remained remarkably consistent since the modern education system was brought into being in the mid-1880s: the curriculum has always focussed on standardisation and neutrality to ensure as far as possible that students at all levels of the compulsory system have a similar experience. This means that those who do well through the system are perceived to have done so on merit and not due to background. The system is conspicuous for its lack of religious or political interventions and its regulation of private schools (which make up almost 30% of senior high schools but are few in number at elementary and junior high levels) under the same system as public schools. Despite rhetoric to the contrary, there is still very little diversity or room for specialisation within the education system. Every student is still having a conspicuously similar educational experience even if curriculum reforms effect change to that experience.

Where the curriculum reforms have concentrated has been on the extent to which the education system should focus on testing knowledge as opposed to encouraging self-exploration and developing confidence in students to make their own decisions. Or, as Sasaki nicely puts it using the example of the history of curriculum, whether students are expected to focus on why an event happened and its subsequent impact or what event happened in which year. As the authors in this volume show, in the case of the particular area of education reform that they each write about, the pendulum seems to swing from one side to the other in each decadal reform: in the latest reforms which are being introduced into schools for the 2020s, the swing is back towards

encouraging students to solve puzzles by themselves. As Aspinall points out in his chapter, the voting age has been reduced to eighteen, which means that school leavers (and indeed some school students) are, for the first time, having a direct say in their country's future. This swing is a reaction to the previous reforms which mooted a greater focus on back-to-basics as a reaction to the 'poor' (actually still far above average) results that Japanese children received in internationally comparative PISA tests in the early 2000s in basic reading and mathematics in what was dubbed the 'PISA shock'. These results were put down to the previous reforms which focussed on a more 'relaxed education system' (*yutori kyōiku*) which was itself brought in to deal with the excessive pressure previously perceived to have been placed on school children, in turn leading to issues such as bullying, school refusal and even high rates of child suicide. Behind all of this is the assumption, as Kasai says in his chapter, that any problem that arises in society should be dealt with by the education system.

One of the most interesting points reflected in the chapters in this volume is that of the personnel involved in the curricula reform process—or rather, who is not involved. Two voices in particular are conspicuous by their absence: teachers and students. The conclusion one could draw from this is that they are simply the passive recipients of the curriculum reforms: one party has to teach it and the other has to learn it. This view is reinforced by a large OECD survey of lower secondary teachers on the extent to which they 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that they have control over determining course content in their classes. The results place Japanese teachers near the bottom in terms of their own sense of autonomy (Schleicher, 2018, p. 30). It is further reinforced by another survey of lower secondary school principals' views on whether their teachers have significant responsibility in a majority of tasks related to school policies, curriculum and instruction in which Japanese teachers are ranked even lower (Schleicher, 2018, p. 30). But are Japanese teachers and students actually so passive? Several of the authors in this volume call for studies 'on the ground' to examine this question and evidence suggests that they are right to do so.

The agency of both teachers and students can be seen in the context of the introduction of the new moral education curriculum which Bamkin discusses in detail in his chapter in this volume. As he explains, the ostensible explanations for the new moral education programme are rising rates of bullying, drop-outs and juvenile delinquency in Japanese schools. The growth of these issues are ascribed to the poor moral codes of young people, which some see as remediable by strengthening children's 'normative consciousness' (*kihan ishiki*) and awareness of their national identity. Whilst the evidence of a rising rate of bullying in particular is hard to measure and juvenile delinquency rates have actually gone down considerably in recent decades (as crime by the elderly has grown very rapidly), few commentators can disagree with the idea of policies to reduce bullying in schools and juvenile delinquency. Similarly, few could disagree with most of the moral curriculum with its focus on keywords such as 'gratitude', 'courtesy', 'public-mindedness', 'honesty' and 'sincerity' and topics such as 'information morality', 'sustainable development' and 'bioethics'. The contentious areas of the curriculum relate to expressions which could be perceived as nationalistic in tone—'love of one's country' and 'respect for

tradition and culture'—and the fact that textbooks might be imposed on teachers whereas previously they could, and did, develop their own materials.

As Bolton (2015, p. 7) points out, however, much of the negative reporting of the introduction of the new moral education curriculum has been based on at best a misunderstanding and at worse a wilful distortion of a number of important facts. For example, some of the supposedly contentious elements of the new curriculum which the Abe administration have been accused of introducing have actually been part of the school programme for more than thirty years since the era of Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro and his major educational reforms of the 1980s. Nakasone was of the view that, in an increasingly globalising world, it was more important than ever for children to have a strong sense of their national identity and cultural background. Much of the current issues around the new moral education agenda has been related to this tension between international and national identity and how to build a bridge between them. In this light, the moral education curriculum reforms looked considerably less threatening, not least when the goals of the new curriculum also clearly include the need for nurturing children who 'value freedom and act responsibly and autonomously' (Roesgaard, 2016, p. 153). Moreover, as Marie Roesgaard (2014) points out, many of the icons selected as exemplars for children to learn from were Japanese figures associated with international perspectives, such as the so-called 'Father of the Japanese Navy' Sakamoto Ryōma, the bacteriologist Noguchi Hideyo and even the marathon runner Takahashi Naoko. Many of the others were Western figures such as Abraham Lincoln, Marie Curie and Mother Teresa.

The most significant qualitative research question which needs to be answered, however, is 'How have the approved textbooks actually been used in schools?'. Both Bolton (2015) and Roesgaard (2016) seem to indicate that they may not be used in the ways the architects of the new curriculum perhaps expected. Bolton observed the use of the preceding generation of textbooks, which the Ministry of Education expected schools to use but were not legally mandated, in 32 classes in an elementary school accounting for all of the moral education delivered in that semester. Importantly, this was a school which had already publicly committed to taking a serious stance on moral education. Yet the teachers only used the officially expected textbook in 15 per cent of the lessons, preferring other non-mandated texts or simply their own materials. Bolton's (2015, p. 57) explanation is that '[m]edia framing has succeeded, to a certain degree, in labelling the coming reform as Abe's moral education, and the textbook is being treated as an extension of the Abe cabinet's will'. In short, teachers are not passive in Japan and the fact that, politically, they tend to be left-of-centre makes them reluctant (even in a school which is committed to moral education) to use the official textbooks which they view as overly ideological in their focus. Even when teachers did use the official textbook, they would, according to Bolton (2015, p. 59), 'contextualise it with personal stories or moral lessons of their own'. Perhaps most significantly, in this school as in many others, when teachers needed time for catch-up classes, it was the moral education classes which were dropped. Indeed, Bolton (2015, p. 60) estimated that in the school where he was researching only about half of the hours allotted to moral education classes were delivered even though it was the topic which already had the least hours assigned to it in the curriculum.

This is largely because these classes were not tested and hence not important for the students' career prospects.

Although this is not mentioned by Bolton, one suspects that in those moral education classes which do take place in junior and senior high school, the level of student focus is likely to be less than in the subjects they need to master in order to get into a good university. Japanese pupils are sensitised from a very early age to invest time and effort at school in an extremely instrumental manner. As the famous sociologist of education, R. K. Merton (1938), pointed out in a classic article almost a hundred years ago, students are not passive when it comes to subscribing to either the school (cultural) goals or the (institutionalised) means of achieving those goals. Students make conscious and unconscious decisions about how they deal with both: some accept both the goals and the means (the conformists); some accept the school goals but not the means it sets out to achieve them (the innovators); some are indifferent or ambivalent about both (the colonisers); some accept the means but reject the goals (the ritualists); some reject or substitute their own practice for both (the retreatists); some are indifferent about the goals but reject the means (the intransigents); and some reject both the goals and the means (the rebels). Every teacher will recognise these Weberian 'ideal type' responses from their own experience in the classroom.

The authors of this volume have done a great service in explaining how the new reforms have been debated, negotiated and introduced into schools in Japan over the past two to three years. I now look forward to their analyses of both how effective on a micro level these reforms have been in practice with both teachers and students and, as Okada cautions, the possible negative impact they may have on equality of educational opportunity at a macro level. At the same time, of course, they will need to keep an eye on the next round of curriculum revisions which will already be in progress.

March 2022

Roger Goodman
Nissan Professor of Japanese Studies
University of Oxford
Oxford, UK

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Series Editor's Introduction

This cutting-edge book, edited by Akito Okada and Sam Bamkin, on *Japan's School Curriculum for the 2020s: Politics, Policy, and Pedagogy*, is the 67th volume to be published in the Springer Book Series 'Education in the Asia-Pacific Region: Issues, Concerns and Prospects', which has now continued for twenty years.

The Asia-Pacific region is a particularly challenging and dynamic region, renowned for its size, diversity and complexity, whether it be geographical, socio-economic, cultural, political or developmental. Education and schooling in countries throughout the region impact on every aspect of people's lives, including employment, labour force considerations, education and training, cultural orientation, and attitudes and values. Asia and the Pacific is home to some 63% of the world's population of 7 Billion. Countries with the largest populations (China, 1.4 Billion; India, 1.3 Billion) and the most rapidly growing mega-cities are to be found in the region, as are countries with relatively small populations (Bhutan, 755,000; the Island of Niue, 1600).

Levels of economic and socio-political development vary widely, with some of the richest countries (such as Japan) and some of the poorest countries on earth (such as Bangladesh). Asia contains the largest number of poor of any region in the world, the incidence of those living below the poverty line remaining as high as 40% in some countries in Asia. At the same time, many countries in Asia are experiencing a period of great economic growth and social development. However, inclusive growth remains elusive, as does growth that is sustainable and does not destroy the quality of the environment. The growing prominence of Asian economies and corporations, together with globalisation and technological innovation, are leading to long-term changes in trade, business and labour markets, to the sociology of populations within (and between) countries. There is a rebalancing of power, centred on Asia and the Pacific region, with the Asian Development Bank in Manila declaring that the twenty-first century will be 'the Century of Asia-Pacific'.

Topics examined in the series include: environmental education and education for sustainable development; the interaction between technology and education; the reform of primary, secondary and teacher education; innovative approaches to education assessment; alternative education; most effective ways to achieve quality and

highly relevant education for all; active ageing through active learning; case studies of education and schooling systems in various countries in the region; cross-country and cross-cultural studies of education and schooling; and the sociology of teachers as an occupational group, to mention just a few. More information about the book series is available at http://www.springer.com/series/5888.

All volumes in this series aim to meet the interests and priorities of a diverse education audience including researchers, policymakers and practitioners; tertiary students; teachers at all levels within education systems; and members of the public who are interested in better understanding cutting-edge developments in education and schooling in Asia-Pacific.

It is in this context that Japan has revised its school curriculum for the 2020s, introducing new subjects and, perhaps more importantly, a new vision for teaching referred to as 'active learning'. This book examines the social and political realities that provided space for this unprecedented curriculum reform; the policymaking process through which it was refined; its envisaged pedagogy, and the intended and unintended outcomes of the new requirements, both on the ground in each school subject and across the education system. Finally, the book steps back to consider the possible future of 'active learning' and direction of the course of study in this decade and the next. This book will be of interest to those researching contemporary Japanese education, education policy, curriculum studies and equality of educational opportunity.

The twelve chapters in the book have been written by leading researchers, policymakers and practitioners, each of whom have extensive, in-depth knowledge and experience of education policy and practice in the Japanese education system.

January 2022

Rupert Maclean
Schools of Education
University of Tasmania
Hobart, Australia

RMIT University
Melbourne, Australia

Glossary and Abbreviations

AHCE	Ad Hoc Council on Education	臨時教育審議会. Supra-cabinet council under Prime Minister Nakasone (1984–1987).
CCE	Central Council for Education	中央教育審議会. The policymaking council that sits at the apex of the Ministry of Education. Officially an advisory council of experts to the Minister of Education.
COS	Course of Study	学習指導要領. The national curriculum for elementary, junior and senior high schools in Japan. Legally binding minimum standard.
	Curriculum Guidance	学習指導要領解説. Explanation and expansion of the course of study.
ES	Elementary School	小学校. Ages 6–12 for six grades.
JHS	Junior High School	中学校. Ages 12–15 for three grades.
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party	自由民主党. Political party.
MEXT	Ministry of Education (2001 Onward)	文部科学省. Officially the 'Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology'. Created through mergers during central government restructuring in 2001.
MOE	Ministry of Education (Before 2001)	文部省. Merged during restructuring in 2001.
	Second Education Rebuilding Council	教育再生実行会議 (2013-2021). Lit: 'Education Rebuilding Implementation Council'. Supra-cabinet policymaking council. Officially an advisory council of experts and ministers to the prime minister.
SHS	Senior High School	高等学校. Ages 15–18 for three grades.

Recent Revisions to the Course of Study

Each course of study is referred to by its earliest year of publication. The table below provides details of recent curriculum revisions and the year designated for their mandatory implementation.

Publication year	Due for implementation			SHS publication and ES/JHS partial revisions
	Elementary	Junior high	Senior high	
1989	1992	1993	1994	
1998	2002	2002	2003–2005 staggered	1999 (SHS) 2000, 2002, 2003
2008	2011 (mostly)	2012 (mostly)	2013–2015 staggered	2009 (SHS) 2011, 2015
2017	2020	2021 (mostly)	2022–2024 staggered	2018 (SHS)

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Editors and Contributors

About the Editors

Akito Okada is Professor at the Graduate School of Global Studies, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, where he coordinates the International Students' Education Program (ISEP TUFS), and is responsible for the supervision of students from undergraduate to doctoral level. An alumnus of the Department of Education, Oxford University, he completed his D.Phil. in Comparative and International Education in 1998 under the supervision of Professors David Phillips and Roger Goodman. His research interests include: education policy and reform; comparative and international school education; intercultural communication; education for international understanding; and international student education.

Sam Bamkin is MEXT Research Scholar, currently based at the University of Tokyo Graduate School of Education and Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia. He is a Churchill Fellow; Adjunct Research Fellow, Research and Clinical Center for Child Development, Hokkaido University; and Visiting Lecturer in Intercultural Communication, Leicester Castle Business School, De Montfort University. He was formerly Senior Lecturer in Education at De Montfort University. His research interests include: the enactment of curriculum reform; changes in the policymaking process; moral education policy and practice; and intercultural communication.

Contributors

Robert W. Aspinall Center for Global Education, Doshisha University, Kyoto, Japan

Sam Bamkin Graduate School of Education and Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia, University of Tokyo, Tokyo, Japan

Kaeko Chiba Faculty of International Liberal Arts, Akita International University, Akita, Japan

Roger Goodman Nissan Institute of Japanese Studies, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK

Viveka Ichikawa Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada

Naohiro Iida Institute for the Advancement of Higher Education and Graduate School of Education, Hokkaido University, Sapporo, Japan

Kosuke Kasai School of Education and Welfare, Aichi Prefectural University, Nagakute, Japan

Asuka Ohagi Directorate for Education and Skills, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Paris, France

Akito Okada Graduate School of Global Studies, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Tokyo, Japan

Mamoru Onuki School of Education and Welfare, Aichi Prefectural University, Nagakute, Japan

Ryo Sasaki Department of International Studies, University of the Sacred Heart, Tokyo, Japan

Chapter 1
Revising the Course of Study for the New Knowledge Society

Akito Okada

Abstract The new course of study, set for implementation from 2020 onward, introduces new subjects and, perhaps more importantly, a new vision for teaching generally referred to as 'active learning' and a reorientation of assessment towards growth. It aims to equip children with the thinking skills and competencies required in the 'new knowledge society' of the present and near future. This book examines the new course of study, from the debates and socio-political realities that provided space for such unprecedented reform, to the intended and unintended outcomes of the new requirements, both in each school subject and across the education system, against the context of education policy debates and reform in Japan over the past 30 years. The book also follows policy into the school and classroom to provide case studies of the potential and the challenges of the new course of study on the ground. Finally, the book draws on theory to consider the possible future of active learning and the direction of change for the next course of study.

Keywords Course of study · Active learning · Japanese education · Education reform

Japan's school curriculum has traditionally had great influence on school and classroom practice. The course of study provides a framework of teaching and learning expectations for all regular schools in Japan. It provides a complete and relatively coherent framework of course content, assessment approaches, and pedagogical expectations, each revision of which is based on almost a decade of deliberation. The course of study is drafted by elite policymakers, with a degree of consultation with educators, select sectoral interests and civic society. It is also increasingly influenced by global policy. Its prominence in practice and its completeness as a vision statement from the Ministry of Education makes the course of study an important centrepoint from which to begin studies of education policy and practice. Its content,

A. Okada (✉)
Graduate School of Global Studies, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 3-1-1 Asahicho, Fuchu, Tokyo 183-8534, Japan
e-mail: aokada@tufs.ac.jp

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drafting and implementation processes also prompt important questions. First and foremost is the political context in which it is produced—who is educated, by whom and for whom. Moreover, the course of study enters the school alongside countless other policies, where existing practices and professional understandings are institutionalised. And again, the school exists in social, economic, and technological realities.

The chapters in this book examine the new course of study, from the debates and socio-political realities that provided space for such unprecedented reform, to the intended and unintended outcomes of the new requirements, both in each school subject and across the education system, against the context of the education policy debates and reform in Japan over the past 30 years. The book also follows policy into the school and classroom to provide case studies of the potential and challenges of the new course of study on the ground. Finally, the book draws on theory to consider the possible future of active learning and the direction of the course of study.

The book will examine:

1. The reasons for reform and prescriptions of the 2017 course of study.
2. The implications of its call for 'active learning' pedagogy for schools and classroom teaching in a range of subjects.
3. The main debates arising from the revised course of study against the broader context of Japanese education, including:
    a. Its suitability for learning in the new knowledge society
    b. New insights into the policymaking process
    c. Implications for inequality.

1.1 What Is the Course of Study?

The course of study (COS; *gakushūshidōyōryō*) is the national curriculum determined by the Ministry of Education (MEXT; *Monbukagakushō*), with the aim of providing a standard of education throughout Japan. The COS is used to determine the contents required of teaching, and thus of textbooks. The general direction of education policy has been overseen by the Central Council for Education (CCE; *Chūō kyōiku shingikai*) since the establishment of the post-war political system. It also oversees subcommittees which debate and determine the contents of the COS. The CCE is an important body that sits at the apex of MEXT. Responsible directly to the Minister, it solicits opinions from select experts and interest groups and, to a lesser extent, from the general public (see Chap. 2). The new COS will take effect in 2020 for elementary schools, 2021 for junior high schools, and from 2022 for high schools. These revisions, promulgated (mostly) in 2017, mark a new departure for education, which will continue through the 2020s.

The COS is revised approximately once every ten years. This is the eighth revision of the COS since the end of the Pacific War. As in the past, the COS has been amended

in response to social, political, and economic conditions alongside the perception of issues and problems faced by and towards schools. The direction of change has seen the pendulum swing, in simple terms, between cramming and relaxation orientations, and in more nuanced directions, in terms of the expectations of school, teachers, and students and in the vision of the kind of person and society that underpins the revisions (see Chap. 3).

The 1971 revision introduced an overcrowded 'modernised curriculum' in response to the appetite for growth aligned to the 'economic miracle' of the 1960s, but this led to problems such as students being allowed to progress to the next grade without fully completing their textbooks, and increased dropout rates. In the 1980s, Japanese politicians heralded an 'end of catch-up' (with the West) and sought to enhance quality of life. Other changes were prompted by the background of technological change, such as the advent of digital technology in the 1990s, alongside internationalisation, the diversification of values and, domestically, a media frenzy on issues in the school environment such as bullying, truancy, and exam pressure. As a result of this, during the 1990s the COS introduced a 'relaxed education' (*yutori kyōiku*). It drastically reduced the number of class hours and trimmed the content to be learned. This was intended to provide children and students 'room to grow', to not only learn but to find practical applications of knowledge in a more fulfilling life. This was a major turning point in Japanese education, as the trend prior to this revision was increasing hours of academic study. However, this would be ultimately the COS's lowest ebb in volume.

The release of the results of the 2003 PISA exams created a widespread perception that Japan had fallen in its world rankings, providing ammunition for sceptics to fan discontent about the move towards relaxed education. As a result, the 2008 COS increased the number of class hours to their highest for about 30 years and adopted a 'reverse course on relaxed education' (*datsu-yutori*). This brought complexity to the strapline of the COS: 'zest for living'(*ikiru-chikara*), confirming its status as a container term, created by MEXT to house a vision of education, not free of internal contradictions and open to modification. It emphasised the need to strike a balance between the acquisition of basic knowledge and skills by students and the development of their ability to think, judge, and express themselves. This plan now aims to build a 'solid academic basics and key competencies' by

- escaping from binary oppositions such as 'relaxed education' and 'education for cramming';
- reconsidering core subjects; and
- introducing 'active learning'for fostering new student competencies and abilities.

In part, the 'escape from binary oppositions' was a semantic fudge: calling for more rigour in academic basics whilst denying the 'cramming', and calling for more development in thinking skills without providing the time to achieve it alongside the increased amount of content. It also opened the door to further challenges discussed in later chapters.

1.2 The Advent of the Knowledge-based Society and the Perceived Need for Revision

The twenty-first century is said to hail the advent of a new knowledge society, in which new learning is essential to all forms of production and active engagement with society, including politics, economics, and culture. A knowledge-based society is one in which change is rapid, and in which we are constantly required to respond to new and unknown challenges. To be able to survive in such a society, children in Japan are required to improve their ability to think, make decisions, and express themselves. It is a society in which new knowledge, information, and technology are becoming increasingly important as the basis for activities in all areas of society, including politics, economics, and culture. Following the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) group of advanced economies, such knowledge is placed within a global order of ever-present competition and innovation, which requires shifts in old paradigms and decisive action based on 'flexible thinking' with greater participation by all genders and ages.

Japan's policymaking community and the Ministry of Education has responded to this challenge by revising the course of study and reinterpreting its aim to foster a 'zest for living' (to use the Ministry's English-language term). In order for children to thrive in such a society, the Japanese government insists on the importance of cognitive skills, such as knowledge and memorisation, as well as non-cognitive and social skills, such as human compassion, the ability to encourage and empathise with others, and in organisations, cooperation and dialogue. In addition, the Japanese government and MEXT want children to have the ability to communicate in a questioning and interactive way, to discover issues from their own point of view and to solve these issues by involving others in the process. In a world where all information is quickly becoming obsolete, children must also be able to learn to constantly update their knowledge and information. It is against this background that the COS was revised.

Japanese government officials and educational researchers have pointed out that the current educational activities in Japanese schools do not provide a clear link between the acquisition of knowledge and skills in each subject, and the problem-solving learning and inquiry activities in the school period called integrated studies; that thinking, judgement, and expression skills are not sufficiently nurtured. As such, MEXT provides detailed descriptions of 'what skills students will develop through learning' and 'how these skills will be used', in a COS drafted 'for students' rather than 'for teachers', and in which 'thinking skills' and other key competences receive prominence. MEXT has elevated the expectations of the COS by reviving from the 1980s the notion of a 'third great education reform' commensurate in magnitude to those during the Meiji period and during the post-war period.

The new course of study will form the basis of school education for approximately the decade beginning in 2020. The revision of the COS states that the curriculum should be 'open to society'. This is based on the idea of 'sharing the goal of creating a better society through better school education and fostering the qualities and abilities necessary to become the creators of the future in cooperation and collaboration with

society at large'. The revised COS aims to nurture the qualities and abilities that will enable students to play an active role as members of a rapidly changing society, in cooperation and collaboration with society. The new course of study introduces new subjects and, perhaps more importantly, a new vision for teaching generally referred to as 'active learning' and a reorientation of assessment towards growth. It aims to equip children with the thinking skills and competencies required in the 'new knowledge society' of the present and near future.

1.3 New Content

The new curriculum aims to enhance aspects of learning, partly through revisions to its content. The main tenets, paraphrased from the intentions of MEXT, are listed in this section.

1. Ensuring the development of language skills
    - The development of the ability to accurately understand and appropriately express information (in Japanese), including the reliable acquisition of vocabulary and the ability to think in terms of opinions and evidence, concrete and abstract, according to the stage of development.
    - Enrichment of language activities in each subject as a basis for learning, including writing reports on experiments, and discussing issues with a clear position and evidence.
2. Enrichment of science and mathematics education
    - In addition to maintaining the content of the previous revision, which was enriched by increasing the curriculum content, the quality of learning will be further improved through activities such as finding (mathematical) problems in everyday life and observing and experimenting with a scientific outlook.
    - Improving provision in statistics (maths) and content on natural disasters (science) to enable students to collect and analyse necessary data and solve problems.
3. Enriching education about tradition and culture
    - Enhancing content on Japanese language and culture, including the classics (Japanese), understanding of major cultural assets and annual events in the prefecture (social studies), Japanese and local music, Japanese musical instruments (music), and Japanese food and clothing (home economics).
4. Enhancing moral education
    - To enhance moral education to enable students to understand moral values in relation to their own lives, to think deeply and to discuss them from multiple

angles and multiple perspectives, making full use of moral education as a 'special subject'.

5. Enrichment of Experiential Activities

    - Enrichment of experiential activities to realise the fragility of life, the importance of nature, the importance of rising to challenges and cooperation with others, and emphasis on (group) overnight field trips in nature and work experience (special activities).

6. Enrichment of foreign language education

    - The addition of learning time for 'foreign language activities', and the expansion of English (or foreign languages) as a subject to increasingly lower grades.
    - The integration of learning through elementary, junior, and senior high school to improve foreign language skills; the development of new materials; the systematisation of the recruitment and training of foreign language expert teachers; and utilising community human resources.

7. Infusing programming education into the curriculum

    - Emphasises the development of developing 'programmatic thinking' which is the ability to think logically in order to achieve one's objectives.
    - Infused through all subjects, programming is not a subject and does not require dedicated class time.

Chapters 6–10 explain in detail how the new course of study is likely to change the teaching of English (Chap. 6), moral education (Chap. 7), science (Chap. 8), Japanese (Chap. 9), and traditional culture (Chap. 10) in primary and secondary schools, with varying foci on history, policy and pedagogy.

1.4 New Pedagogy, New Assessment

Rather than specifying knowledge only, the requirements of the new COS are organised around three questions: 'what to learn about, in what way to learn, what can be done now?'. It aims to amend not only content, but also pedagogy and assessment. Pedagogy is largely addressed in debate under the rubric of active learning, which is expressed as 'proactive, interactive, and deep learning' in the final version of the COS. MEXT defines active learning that aims to develop general abilities, including cognitive, logical, and social skills, culture, knowledge, and experience' through students' voluntary and active learning. Therefore, the COS places particular emphasis on 'active learning', which enables students to learn independently and in depth. In the traditional classroom, the teacher gives a one-way lecture to the students. In contrast to this one-way lecture format, active learning is a general term

for teaching and learning methods that encourage the active participation of learners. Closely connected with the updated vision of pedagogy, assessment is envisaged as a pedagogic activity that supports the growth of each child and supports teachers to evaluate and improve syllabus and lesson planning. These underpinning concepts of pedagogy and assessment that run through the new course of study are discussed in Chaps. 4 and 5, respectively, providing a foundation for the following discussions of changes to the course of study in various subjects.

The call for active learning has generated the most discussion on the new course of study. Whilst the majority of commentators and researchers alike are enthusiastic about active learning, there is also cause for caution. The balance of enthusiasm and caution is a theme running through this book with no straightforward conclusion. The reasons for critique are rarely straightforward, involving discussions of social, political, economic, and technological factors.

1.5 The New Course of Study in Practice and in Wider Debates

This book is a study of Japan’s course of study for the 2020s, examining the recent revision of the course of study for implementation from 2020 onward. However, this inevitably has implications for a range of wider educational debates. On the level of practice in local schools, active learning and assessment for growth require teachers to reconsider previous practices and concepts of learning and teaching. This is a challenge. Educators are simultaneously involved in professional and civic research associations undertaking pedagogic research at local sites. Separately, the legal and political positions of all actors are undergoing realignment, empowering and disempowering certain actions by certain actors. Indeed, the central government ‘above’ the Ministry of Education and local governments ‘below’ it are far more involved in this course of study revision than they have been in previous cycles. MEXT has become more porous since the thawing of relations with the Japan Teachers’ Union in the 1990s. The active learning aspirations of the new COS are restrained by social factors, and the assessment aspirations of the COS partly conflict with the wider assessment context which includes political pressure to perform better in relation to international standardised tests, such as PISA. And the entire education system operates mutually in a society with increasing child poverty alongside great stratification in financial and learning resources (Chap. 11). Finally, the very concept of the new knowledge society on which the recent revisions to the course of study are predicated were developed by the OECD as ‘global education policy’, which creates new tensions and complications in their interpretation and adoption. These broader contexts will shape the implementation and outcomes of the new curriculum, introducing unintended consequences alongside the intended ones. Thus, the chapters in

this book connect policy aspirations for pedagogy and assessment in the wider political context and within changes in the policymaking process—considering politics, policy, and pedagogy.

A book of this size cannot hope to cover all dimensions, issues, and perspectives. The selection of content therefore aims for breadth and variety, taking a series of deep studies over a range of topics. The chapters discuss wider political shifts and the policy context, policy aspirations for active learning in the classroom and case studies on the ground, debates from both core academic and non-academic subjects, and focus on elementary, junior high, and senior high school levels. The chapters also range in their viewpoint and position.

1.6 The Chapters in This Volume

In Chap. 2, Kasai considers broad changes in the educational policymaking process in Japan, whilst providing an overview of the main actors involved in high-level policy formulation. This analysis elucidates the characteristics of the traditional policymaking process under the so-called '1955 System' to the newly fermented 'prime ministerial leadership' (*Kantei-shudō*). The features of contemporary education policy are set within this framework, before finally commenting on the top-down nature of Japanese education reform from the Meiji Restoration until today.

In Chap. 3, Sasaki overviews changes to the course of study over the past three decades. The chapter discusses the institutional framework in which the course of study operates and its legal and administrative status in relation to long-standing debates on its effect on schools and teachers. The contents of subsequent revisions over the past three decades are discussed, focusing on how ability and personality are conceptualised and envisioned in the discourse of each revision. These discussions provide a historical perspective against which to consider the latest (2017) revision.

In Chap. 4, Ichikawa introduces the history and development of active learning, examples in practice, and critique that arises from teachers on the ground. The umbrella term 'active learning' was formally introduced into the course of study for compulsory education in 2017. However, the concept has a long and complex history; and includes many ideas which are far from new in Japanese schools. This chapter traces the history of active learning from its unlikely origins in US higher education into compulsory education in Japan; overviews official policy on active learning as it was adopted and Japanised by the Ministry of Education; and discusses some challenges and examples of practice. Whilst active learning encourages innovation and creative collaboration between teachers and students, its demands on teacher time and the extent of cognitive adaptation required of teachers against the specific social and structural norms of the Japanese education system present significant challenges to the widespread adoption of active learning.

In Chap. 5, Iida describes the requirements of the Ministry of Education and what they have defined as the primary challenges Japanese schools must address in developing, implementing, and sustaining a comprehensive approach to assessing

and evaluating learning outcomes under the new course of study, and iterates some of the means by which MEXT envisages that schools might respond to these requirements. Whilst evaluation and assessment ensure accountability, the primary focus of assessment and evaluation, as written in the course of study, is on ensuring all actions improve student outcomes. The chapter is valuable to thoroughly understand the perspective of the Ministry of Education.

In Chap. 6, Aspinall discusses controversies surrounding revisions to the course of study for English (foreign language) from the late-1980s until today. The English language curriculum has been subjected to sustained criticism over both its relevance and effectiveness. Reforms throughout the period 1989–2020 were aimed at solving this problem. These reforms included introducing native-speaker Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs), introducing English language as a subject in elementary schools, and revising the university entrance exam system. Each of these reform efforts met with serious practical difficulties at the implementation stage as well as push-back from important stakeholders. However, efforts to add tests of spoken English have failed to bear fruit. Efforts to introduce English to elementary schools have been hampered by a lack of qualified teachers. Many students continue to see English as a very difficult subject with little relevance to their daily lives.

In Chap. 7, Bamkin discusses policy change in moral education, focusing not only on changes and their translation into practice, but also considering the implications for understanding the policymaking process. This significant reform was driven not by the Ministry of Education, as most curriculum matters have been, but by a policy council under the leadership of the prime minister. The reform changed the content of the course of study, but also exposed new tensions in the policymaking process and thus provides new insight into the role of the Ministry of Education. This chapter examines how policy unfolds both before and after its written form is promulgated. It considers how policy changes as it is interpreted by teachers, school administrators, members of the boards of education, and textbook publishers working through the Ministry to mediate policy. Rather than closing the discussion on how moral education is enacted in schools, this chapter aims to illustrate some of the complexities of policymaking, to question the perceived internal coherence and omnipotence of the Ministry of Education, and to encourage studies that look beyond written policy and towards the interaction between policy and practice.

In Chap. 8, Onuki discusses the 2017 revisions to the science course of study against historical and contemporary debates in Japan. Historically two points have attracted debate: (1) determining the objectives of the science courses, and how the educational content should be selected, prioritised, and ordered—the scope and sequence of curriculum; and (2) determining for whom the educational content is appropriate—the question of its relation to indigenous knowledge. Analysing from the former point of view will help to clarify the quality of excellence that has been pursued in science education in Japan. The latter will help to evaluate whether excellence is equally guaranteed to all children from a curriculum perspective. The background of these debates is discussed before examining the course of study in relation to these historic and domestic debates, alongside newer global debates of key competencies. The discussion is illustrated using examples from the new course of study to

keep the discussion grounded in school practice. The progressive agenda for Japan's science course of study is evaluated on its capacity to simultaneously ensure excellence and equality. This will provide suggestions that will facilitate science education reform for a knowledge-based society.

In Chap. 9, Ohagi discusses the development of Japanese-language education in Japan over the preceding decades and under the second Abe administration (2012–2020), paying special attention to the 2017 revision of the junior high course of study for Japanese-language education. The primary source materials used include the relevant courses of study as well as a selection of MEXT-approved junior high textbooks. The chapter identifies three major flows that coalesced in the changes that can be observed in the revised course of study as well as in school textbooks published in the last few years. Firstly, whilst the revision in many ways was intended as a reversal of the earlier *yutori* (relaxed) style approaches, many of these aspects remain intact. Secondly, the so-called PISA shock motivated MEXT to stress the need for technical mastery of language and the pursuit of better functional reading literacy according to the PISA model. Thirdly, the reform drive of the second Abe administration motivated a greater emphasis on traditional language culture and classic literary works. Although the Japanese-language textbooks in use now may not have been approved based on criteria from the newest course of study revision, it is evident that they pre-empt and reflect similar policy intentions. The chapter concludes with some comments on both the value and the limitations of studies of the course of study and of textbook materials.

In Chap. 10, Chiba examines current issues surrounding traditional arts education in Japanese compulsory education. The historical background of traditional arts education is discussed to elucidate its interaction with issues of nationalism, gender, and social class. Rather than being offered as a regular subject in Japan, traditional arts tend to be taught in class time dedicated to non-subjects, particularly integrated studies (*sōgō gakushū),* moral education class (*dōtoku),* and special activities (*tokubetsu katsudō)*; and as curricular club activities (*kurabu katsudō)* or extracurricular club activities (*bukatsudō*). The chapter further analyses two case studies to consider regional variation. The chapter draws on interviews with teachers and administrators of traditional arts education in public schools. These case studies are then discussed in relation to issues of gender and class, before summarising the potential for traditional arts education in Japanese compulsory education and its future challenges.

Chapter 11 considers the extent to which the adoption of active learning might exacerbate disparities in educational achievement along class lines. The Ministry of Education constructed the new course of study for an education system fit to prepare children for the new knowledge society, but also making explicit reference to the need for the new curriculum to better provide 'equal opportunities' of education. The new course of study resulted in reinvigorated core subjects, active learning, and key competencies for the twenty-first century. Whilst many scholars welcomed the ideals underpinning active learning, the revision has raised questions over whether it is conceivable to require all students, without support from outside the school, to gain proficiency with both the knowledge required by the course of study and the competencies for applying knowledge that are now required. Analyses of the new

course of study must account for the increased weight of active learning. This chapter undertakes such an examination, from a sociological perspective, to question whether the new curriculum is likely to achieve the aim of equal opportunities of education. This is discussed in the context of specific changes promoted under the banner of active learning and the Ministry's slow recognition of disparities along class lines. Ultimately, for the new course of study to live up to expectations, it needs to provide a quality education to all children equally by mitigating social stratification along class lines.

In lieu of a conclusion, Bamkin's closing Chapter 12 expands some of the remaining questions surrounding the new course of study and their implications. Covered in particular is the fact that, despite enthusiasm for the new course of study and its potential to respond to a certain conception of the new knowledge society, uncertainty and the need for caution arise from the wider policy landscape and context of education. Evidence suggests that the new course of study was drafted in reference to well-established pedagogic principles and genuine aims for a child-centred education, building on numerous countless previous steps taken by the Ministry of Education in this direction. This trajectory of change is adjusted based on the global consensus of a shift towards a 'new knowledge society'. In doing so, MEXT tends towards a humanistic position on the new knowledge society. Simultaneously however, the curriculum operates in a broader policy context which has incorporated decentralisation and performativity mechanisms related to examination results, along with their potential to 'activate competition' between prefectures and perhaps at lower levels, informed by an 'economised' conception of education. Nonetheless, study of the course of study remains important as a signal of the intent of the Ministry of Education, and as a set of guidelines for teachers, school administrators, and educators in local settings. Further research is needed 'on the ground' in schools to better understand how these policies are being translated into practice.

Together, we believe that the chapters in this book constitute the most detailed self-contained account in English of the new course of study in the context of reform. Some aspects of the course of study remain incomplete or are subject to ongoing debate. The implications of the new assessment for university exams and English language provisions are two such areas. Some aspects will become ripe for reconsideration alongside the next course of study, due in the years leading up to 2030. Given the measured debate and widespread acknowledgement of uncertainty, active learning may benefit from a dignified longer-term evaluation (whether the concept is indeed 'new' or not). Other aspects will shift in relation to political, social, economic, technological, and medical circumstances. Indeed, little over a month before the new course of study was due to come into effect, the world entered its greatest shared crisis since the Second World War—the first truly global pandemic of the Information Age. Such social and economic upheaval is bound to ferment new ideas on education reform, not least in relation to technology. It is therefore valuable to emphasise that the perspectives brought together in this volume result from studies undertaken before the onset of the pandemic, and thus offer merely the groundwork for future research.

Chapter 2
Reform Impact and Underlying Factors: A Changing Policymaking Process and Changing Education Policies in Japan

Kosuke Kasai

Abstract This chapter charts political changes to the Japanese education policy making process, by analyzing the relative relations and power between four main actors: the ruling and opposition parties in the Diet, influential LDP Diet members with a special interest in the area (*zoku-giin*), civil servants, and lastly interest groups and social groups in civil society. This analysis elucidates the characteristics of the traditional policymaking process under the so-called '1955 System' to the newly fermented 'Prime Ministerial leadership' (*Kantei-shudō*). The features of contemporary education policy are set within this framework, before finally commenting on the top-down nature of Japanese education reform from the Meiji restoration until today.

Keywords Policy making process · Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) · Prime Ministerial leadership · Education reform · Education policy in Japan

2.1 Introduction

Since the 1980s, Japan has been shifting from a period of high economic growth to one of economic maturity as it has achieved a mass affluent society. As the country transitioned from a domestic demand-driven Keynesian economy to a foreign demand-driven neoliberal economy, the so-called '1955 System' of politics was gradually dismantled. Consequently, the way that political policies are formed has also changed. This chapter charts political changes to the Japanese education policy-making process, by analyzing the relative relations and power between four main actors. Sections 2.2 and 2.3 discusses the role of four key actors—the ruling and opposition parties in the Diet, influential LDP Diet members with a special interest in the area (*zoku-giin*), civil servants, and interest groups and social groups in civil

K. Kasai (✉)
School of Education and Welfare, Aichi Prefectural University, 1522-3 Ibaragabasama, Nagakute-shi, Aichi 480-1198, Japan
e-mail: k-kasai@ews.aichi-pu.ac.jp

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society—in the traditional 1955 System, and through the transition to the emerging 'Prime Ministerial leadership' (*Kantei-shudō*). Section 2.4 identifies the characteristics of the resultant education policymaking process, and Sect. 2.5 points out some characteristic patterns that can be observed in education reforms taking place in Japan.

2.2 The Policymaking Process Under the 1955 System

The traditional Japanese policymaking process can be analyzed by focusing on four main actors and their relations and relative power.[1] The first consists of the ruling and opposition parties in the Japanese Diet, the second comprises influential Diet members (*zoku-giin*), who are on committees and participate in debates within the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) with a special interest in their sector (education, in this case), the third includes officials in the bureaucracy, and the fourth is made up of interest groups and social groups in civil society.

The first actors involved in policymaking are the ruling and opposition parties in the Japanese Diet. Between 1955 and 1993, Japan operated under the so-called '1955 System'—a political system dominated by the LDP to the exclusion of other parties. Diet members in the 1955 system consisted of the ruling LDP, which maintained a majority, and the chief opposition party, the Japan Socialist Party (JSP), which held most of the remaining Diet seats. It was a system that reflected within Japan the ideological conflict that arose from the Cold War. Specifically, it was a conflict centring on the attitudes toward, on the one hand, the Japanese Constitution (1946), which prioritized freedom and the values of democracy, rejecting war and military might; and the Japan-US Security Treaty (1951; revised 1960), on the other hand, which allowed US military bases to be positioned within Japanese territory. The left wing placed importance on the Constitution, while the right wing placed importance on the Japan-US Security Treaty. Thus, the LDP emphasized the responsibility and service of each individual to the nation and society over individual freedoms and human rights.

Generally speaking, the LDP is a conservative party spanning the right-wing, while the JSP was a left-wing, progressive party. Interestingly, the left-right axis of opposition in Japanese politics differed from, for example, the opposition in the UK between the right-wing Conservative Party and the left-wing Labour Party, or the opposition in Germany between the right-wing Christian Democratic Party and the left-wing Social Democratic Party. In the case of Japan, the ideological basis of the right-wing LDP had almost no element of liberal (as in libertarian) thought, such as reliance on anti-nationalist liberalism and individualism, or vigilance against a centrally planned economy and welfare system. Instead, the LDP worked to ensure uniformity and equality among all individuals through the use of national authority,

[1] For further discussion on the Japanese policymaking system that existed from the end of the Pacific War until recent years, see, for example, Kohno (1997), Noble (2015), and Neary (2019).

actively striving for economic growth and national land development through the use of plans, and projected a US-friendly stance rather than nationalism. Conversely, the ideology of the left-wing JSP was firmly rooted in liberalism while at the same time it had only a tangential relationship to west-European social-democratic ideology, which emphasized the realization of a welfare system through the active intervention of the national government. Thus, it was the conservative LDP that represented and consolidated the interests of a wide range of players in the economic and occupational classes, including those on some margins, through the adoption of planned, egalitarian, government-driven economic policies and the distribution of subsidies to small businesses, micro-agriculture, and industries in decline. Through this type of national consolidation, Japan enjoyed a period of domestic demand-driven high economic growth from 1954 to 1974 and the long-term rule of the LDP. Policy-making needed a consensus only within the LDP block but not agreement from the opposition parties. As Schoppa (1991) states, the oppositions can play an indirect role only by breaking the consensus within the conservative bloc. As discussed later, this government-driven, egalitarian stance of the right-wing LDP is also reflected in its educational policies.

Second are the influential Diet members known as '*zoku-giin*.' They are experts in particular areas of policy, such as education, and work within powerful committees that inform the positions and policy aspirations of the ruling LDP, and thus of the government. The Japanese political system formally adopted a Westminster-style parliament and cabinet system of government rather than an American-style presidency. Under this 'fused-cabinet' system, the party that holds a majority of seats in the Diet selects the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister in turn appoints the Cabinet Ministers. Based on these constitutional provisions, the Prime Minister is both the leader of the ruling party and the head of the government's executive branch, which includes only a core of LDP members. Thus, the Prime Minister should be able to demonstrate powerful leadership in both capacities, as in the UK. However, under the 1955 System, both the party leadership capacity and the Cabinet leadership capacity of the Prime Minister was weak. The reason for this is the ruling LDP's 'preliminary vetting system' (*jizen-shinsasei*) of bills that creates a 'government & ruling party dual system.' Specifically, although bills are submitted to the Diet by the Cabinet—led by a Prime Minister who was, during the period in question, always from the ruling LDP—there is a convention in which the ruling LDP needs to internally examine and approve all bills prior to their submission to the Diet. In this process various interests represented by *zoku-giin* may reflect in the LDP policies.

A detailed explanation would be as follows: Under the 1955 system, a so-called 'medium-sized (3 to 5 seats) constituency system' (*chū-senkyokusei*) operated, in which between two to five Diet members were elected by voters in a single electoral district. As a result, multiple LDP Diet members from a single constituency who advocated different policies and were members of different factions within the LDP would be elected.[2] There is a 'Policy Study Group' (*seisaku chōsakai*) within

[2] In the LDP, the factions hold enormous power, and the Prime Minister tends to appoint Cabinet Ministers who were recommended by the factions. The public dissatisfaction with the LDP had

the LDP, which has its own subcommittees corresponding to each ministry. These subcommittees summon representatives of interest groups and social groups to meetings in which the officials of each of the ministries explain and decide upon bills. Influential Diet members (*zoku-giin*) who are on committees and have strong ties to industry groups, lobbyists, and bureaucratic agencies that are familiar with the issues taken up by each subcommittee are active in the process of formulating policy through the subcommittees in which they participate (Inoguchi & Iwai, 1987). The LDP Diet members debate bills within these subcommittees (rather than a system in which the Prime Minister, who is the ruling party president, determines policies). Therefore, it was only after an election that the Party could coordinate and decide upon policies. As a result, the actual leadership capabilities of the Prime Minister were weak within the party, and thus government under this system.

The third actor in the policymaking process is the bureaucracy. In fact, all government policies were formulated through a process of coordination within each ministry and among multiple ministries, rather than through meetings between influential Diet members (*zoku-giin*) from the ruling party. This is because Japan, which was a latecomer capitalist nation, engaged in nation-building following both the Meiji Restoration (1868) and the end of the Pacific War (1945) as a central government-driven effort rather than as a civil-society-driven effort. Thus, the bureaucracy took on enormous power in determining policies. To date, there is a network that investigates the trends taking place in all social sectors and social groups and, by assigning personnel to local civil service organizations and related industry groups, distributing subsidies and all manner of official notifications, the 'guidance' of the central ministries is communicated to each of these parties. There is certainly merit in a system that, instead of the Prime Minister and Cabinet Ministers who are liable to change over short periods of time, ensures administrative guidance provided by a continuous, stable, and expert bureaucracy which regulates private industry and competition and distributes benefits. Not the least of these merits is the fact that this developmental-state system facilitated Japan's period of high economic growth (Johnson, 1982).

It must also be added, however, that the ministries were separated by sectionalism and that the bureaucracy tended to represent the interests of the ministry for which they worked. Since in Japan, there is only weak control over the bureaucracy by the Cabinet, a system by which the voting public is represented through delegation of authority to the Diet was not manifest. Instead, there existed a system of 'representation by bureaucracy' (*shōchō daihyōsei*), in which each ministry represented the interests of industry groups under its arbitrary jurisdiction. Additionally, the Cabinet was part of what may be termed a 'bureaucratic cabinet system' (*kanryō naikakusei*) in which it functions as an organization that coordinates the interests of the ministries and did not actually fulfil the principle of a 'parliamentary cabinet system' in setting the direction of ministerial work (Iio, 2007, 2019). Thus, an undemocratic bureaucratic control of policy-related decision-making arose. The sectionalism that existed

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been not absorbed by the regime change that should occur as a result of elections, but by the LDP in the form of 'inter-faction regime changes'.

in the bureaucracy caused an expansion of the budget and many instances of collusion and corruption within so-called 'iron triangles' of overlapping interests between three parties: The bureaucracy, which had the power of licensing and authorization; industry groups, and the influential Diet members (*zoku-giin*) who acted as intermediaries between the other two. For example, the bureaucracy provides industry groups with subsidies for protection and development. *Zoku-giin* exert influence over who receives such subsidies and in what amount, obtaining cooperation from the recipient industry groups in the election. Finally, industry groups in return ensure that bureaucrats are given a post in that industry after they retire.

The fourth actor in policymaking consists of interest groups and social groups from civil society. The methods used by interest groups to involve themselves in policymaking have been explained under the frameworks of American 'pluralism' and Northern European 'corporatism.' The former is a form of policy decision-making that stems from a tradition of individualism and voluntary association, while the latter is a style in which traditional groups compel individuals to join monopolies that represent the interests of each occupation when they participate in the formulation and implementation of public policy. In comparison to the former, which is more liable to achieve special interests, the latter has a high degree of inclusiveness, concentration of interest groups, and is designed to achieve the greater good for all.

The method used to integrate Japanese civil society has been either leadership by the central government and the bureaucracy ('partitioned' pluralism) or a corporate society comprising individual corporations competing with each other (corporatism 'without labor') (Pempel & Tsunekawa, 1979; Sasaki, 2012). Specifically, under the aforementioned 'representation by bureaucracy,' since each bureau (i.e., ministry) has a close relationship with a particular industry group, open pluralism does not arise.

On the other hand, unlike the Northern European style of corporatism, which is based on labor unions (which were the largest interest groups in their respective countries), in Japan, labor movements occur in each individual corporation and the government is not involved in national labor-management negotiations. As such labor movements in the private sector are depoliticized. Thus, in Japan—and particularly in the case of major corporations—a system that includes lifetime employment, a seniority wage scale, and company unions (each individual company engages in its own labor-management negotiations) was adopted and social order was based on individual corporations. That is, social security in Japan has relied on welfare provided by individual corporations rather than welfare provided by the national government. Generally, in Japan, each person works at a single company for the entire course of their career, performing different functions within that company via a system of internal transfers. This is in contrast to the US-European style in which an individual specializes in a single function while changing employers for promotion or to improve working conditions. Since loyalty to the company is fostered by this Japanese system, workers refrain from exerting their rights vis-à-vis the company they work for, and companies avoid having to fire employees. Any system that exists for the purpose of uniting the workers across an entire industry is weak. Instead, workers negotiate with the management of the company they work for, which

encourages competition with rival companies in the market. Thus, for example, the demands made by Toyota's workers are not simply an expression of the workers' interests, but rather reflect the relationship between the workers and management at Toyota as well as the interests of auto industry groups that act as interest groups. The demands of these movements are considered and consolidated by bureaucrats in relevant agencies within each ministry and through a variety of deliberative councils set up by said ministries. This also explains why labor unions demonstrate weak support for the JSP (in contrast to the usually high support enjoyed by social parties by labor unions) and instead support the LDP, a fact that has bolstered the long-standing dominance of the LDP. Moreover, interest groups and social groups excluded from this system by the 'partitioned pluralism' and 'corporatism without labor' phenomena (many of which are groups that are close to opposition parties) have had difficulty participating in the formation of policies.

2.3 The Shift to a Prime Minister Led Policymaking Process

The above characteristics of the four actors were formed under the 1955 System and represent the policymaking process that partly remains in place even today. However, this policymaking process underwent a major shift to a Prime Minister led style of policymaking from the 1980s and accelerated in development during the 1990s due to the inefficiency of resource allocation and the sluggishness of the policymaking process that existed under the 1955 System. Underlying this shift were changes such as the multinationalization of corporations and the globalization of the economic system. Japan also transformed into a country that could maintain, support, and create this type of economic system; in other words, it shifted from being a 'Keynesian state,' engaged in the production of goods and services, to a 'Schumpeter state' that is engaged in the production of new knowledge (Hirsch, 1995; Jessop, 2002).

Specifically, since the 1980s, Japan has entered a period of market maturity following the period of high economic growth, and budget deficits have become a permanent fixture. Consequently, a shift was observed from the 'big government' led by the LDP and the bureaucracy that allocated subsidies to small businesses, micro-agriculture operations, declining industries, and regions that were experiencing depopulation, to a 'small government' that imposes less tax burden and supports the accumulation of capital by multinational corporations to facilitate overseas development. As a result, there was a need for a government that could swiftly deal with the shift to the new economy and the new industrial organization. The new government needed to, for example, sort through and eliminate declining industries that had little relevance in the modern world. To achieve this, it was seen as necessary to change the 'preliminary vetting system' and the so-called 'bureaucratic cabinet system' run by the bureaucracy and factional LDP. Finally, there was increasing

pressure to reform school education to ensure that it trained the type of personnel who could be the driving force behind this new economic system.

The final report (1983) of the (Second) Ad Hoc Council on Administrative Reform, held during the Nakasone administration, called for the privatization of the Japanese National Railways, Nippon Telegraph, and Telephone Public Corporation, as well as administrative reforms and the consolidation of the ministries (which would be later implemented between 1997 and 2001). Unlike the bureaucracy-driven bottom-up system of policymaking, these neoliberal policies continued in the form of administrative reforms designed to create a politics-driven, top-down 'Prime Ministerial leadership' system of policymaking, under the more Presidential-like Hashimoto administration (1996–1998) and in the form of structural reforms and the privatization of the postal service under the Koizumi administration (2001–2006). Thus, the conventional method of unifying the public and integrating civil society, that was based on individual corporations, changed. This unfolded alongside the following changes in relations between the four actors involved in policymaking.

First, a two-party system emerged as a result of the establishment of a single-seat constituency system. Changes to the electoral system were aimed at creating a political system in which power would change hands between the ruling and opposition parties. In the conventional medium-sized constituency system electoral system, LDP Diet members competed to allocate subsidies to and guide public works projects to electoral districts in order to garner votes, placing the national budget under enormous strain. In addition, since the medium-sized constituency system gave rise to the intra-party factions, the LDP was unable to achieve full unification. In fact, regime changes were realized because of the 1993 political reforms that led to the adoption of the single-seat constituency system and, since then, there have been two periods during which the LDP has not been in power. As regime change had become possible and more realistic a prospect since 1993, a shift was made to political parties competing for votes based on policy issues. As for the left wing, the JSP mostly joined the DPJ, which was a moderate left-of-center political party. Then to gain political power, the DPJ did not maintain extreme ideological policies such as abrogating the Japan-US Security Treaty. As for the LDP, which had invested its energies into equality and regulation of the market, it has now changed and adopted competitive, neoliberal policies as a right-wing party.

Second, there was a shift from a policymaking process in which diverse interests are consolidated and reflected by influential Diet members to policymaking under prime ministerial leadership. It became possible for prime ministers to increase the duration of their tenure by obtaining support through direct contact with the public, and this reinforced the more presidential style of leadership, closely related to what is referred to here as 'Prime Ministerial leadership' (Mulgan, 2019). During this period, Prime Minister Blair in the UK, Chancellor Schröder in Germany, and Prime Minister Berlusconi of Italy also acted as 'presidential prime ministers.' Under the conventional 'preliminary vetting system' of Japan's ruling party, the prime minister had previously been unable to formulate original policies and had a limited staff. In order to implement the Prime Ministerial leadership system, Prime Minister Hashimoto (1996–1998) increased the authority of the Executive Secretary to the

Prime Minister; increased the responsibilities of the Cabinet Secretariat, which serves as the prime minister's direct assistant (e.g., national security, public relations, information research, personnel assignment); and created a Cabinet Office that supported the Cabinet Secretariat. The subsequent Koizumi administration (2001–2006) also exploited the full potential of the intra-party leadership role of the prime minister by excluding Diet members in the selection of LDP candidates in single-seat constituencies, even influential ones, after acts of disloyalty, using the powers he obtained as a result of the 'Prime Ministerial leadership' system, and garnering strong public support by holding single issue general elections. The Abe administrations (2006–2007, 2012–2020) created a team at the Prime Minister's Office that consisted of a few individuals who were close to the prime minister, which ensured his strong, long-term administration. Koizumi and Abe oversaw great shifts toward the institutionalization of prime ministerial leadership.

Third, the bureaucracy shifted from a 'bureaucracy-driven' system to a 'politics-driven' system that places increased importance on political leadership. Under the 'bureaucratic cabinet system,' ministers were little more than the representatives of the bureaucracies in their ministries. As a result, in many cases, the ministers simply approved policies created by the bureaucracy, and thus cabinet meetings existed simply to approve policies that had already been worked out by the bureaucracies of the relevant ministries. In contrast, the Hashimoto administration strengthened politician-led policymaking, and a system of controls over the ministries by politicians. This coincided with a reduction in the number of ministries and the adoption of a system of deputy ministers. The ministers, whose leadership abilities were increased due to the adoption of this type of 'politics-driven' system, behaved in accordance with the leadership of the prime minister under the 'Prime Ministerial leadership' system. The shift from a bureaucracy-driven to a politics-driven system continues to this day and includes the period of rule by the DPJ (2009–2012). However, it has also been pointed out that the politics-driven system led to the effective failure of the bureaucracy's functionality. For example, the Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy (created in 2001), led by the prime minister and tasked with ensuring fiscal balance, is given the task of determining the general framework of the budget. As a result, powerful restrictions are placed on bottom-up budget demands by the ministries that have greater potential to reflect the needs of the general population. Furthermore, the Cabinet Personnel Bureau (created in 2014) allowed unilateral control of executive positions in the ministries by the prime minister. This made it difficult to engage in policymaking that was based on the needs of the civil society in a bottom-up fashion that was based on political neutrality, a long-term view, and expertise, which were the merits of the bureaucratic system.

Related to this is the fact that due to the 'Prime Ministerial leadership' system, the role of interest groups and social groups in the civil society—the fourth actor—has been increasingly limited. Previously, each ministry had policy councils to provide some breadth of representation to policy directions. However, the Prime Minister's Office has increasingly established its own councils that report directly to the prime minister. They consolidate the demands of all the interest groups that participated in the councils of the ministries and now set the overall direction of policy. The

task of each ministry and its council(s) are now restricted to ‘implementation’—giving concrete form to the policies of the prime minister. This shift certainly has merits. It allows the views of interest groups, that previously were excluded from existing industry groups, to be heard and places more importance on consumers than manufacturers.

Despite remnants of the bureaucracy-led system, the policymaking process that existed under the 1955 System shifted to a ‘Prime Ministerial leadership’ system as of the 1990s, gaining pace after Hashimoto’s administrative reforms completed in 2001. The next question relates to the characteristics of the policymaking process regarding education. This will be taken up in detail in the following section.

2.4 Characteristics of the Education Policymaking Process Today

Discussion on the characteristics of the education policymaking process will focus on the following four points: First, the shift from a Ministry-driven system to a ‘Prime Ministerial leadership’ system. Second, the shift from centralized authority to local authority. Third, the small amount of authority that was transferred to the school level. Fourth, the presence of fixed actors and the recent appearance of new actors in the field of education.

2.4.1 The Shift to ‘Prime Ministerial Leadership’

The first characteristic is one that is common to all policy sectors. It is the shift from an education policymaking system, led by Diet members with a special interest in education (*zoku-giin*) and bureaucrats in MEXT, to an education policymaking system under ‘Prime Ministerial leadership.’ The ‘preliminary vetting system’ for bills that was discussed in the above section applied to all policy areas, including education. The Education *zoku-giin* Diet members (technically covering Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology) frequently met to discuss bills. Additionally, the members were engaged in various other activities such as issuing regular survey reports, conducting study sessions led by outside experts, sharing information about the status of debates taking place in councils, and exchanging ideas with MEXT bureaucrats (Aoki, 2019; Ogawa, 2010; Park, 1986; Schoppa, 1991; Shimbori & Aoi, 1983). Due to their expertise as well as their unique networks that includes industry groups and local municipalities, MEXT bureaucrats also had and have considerable influence in the policymaking process (see Chap. 7). Since local municipalities have the authority to operate school education, MEXT functions

as the ministry that lays emphasis on policymaking, and thus it has the smallest full-time staff of the ministries.[3]

The Central Council for Education (CCE; created in 1952) is the policy making council of MEXT that assists in policymaking. Its secretariat is headed by a MEXT bureaucrat. When important policies are formulated (e.g., reforms to the course of study, restructuring the Board of Education system, making changes in the teacher licensing system), the CCE receives inquiries from the Minister of Education, and, after approximately two years, it issues a report after engaging in discussions to consolidate the expert knowledge provided by interested parties and academic experts. CCE committee members are selected by the Minister of Education. They consist of approximately 30 individuals who represent industry groups, the Association of School Principals, the PTA, mayors of local municipalities, academic experts, and managers of private companies. However, few of these members are academics from the field of education. The CCE reports influence the discussions among MEXT bureaucrats and LDP policy study groups (Maekawa, 2002; Murakami, 2013; Ogawa, 2010, 2016).

In contrast to this previously practiced policymaking process, as mentioned in the previous section, a system that is 'Prime Ministerial leadership' began in the 1980s and has been gaining momentum since the turn of the century as the conventional method of integrating the Japanese civil society. The integration of corporate society has decreased owing to the deterioration of the economy. Specifically, instead of the CCE, which is part of MEXT, a council that reports directly to the prime minister was created to debate issues related to education. In the early years, this was known as the Ad Hoc Council on Education (AHCE, 1984–1987), which issued four reports during the Nakasone administration (1982–1987). Unlike the uniform and egalitarian style of education that was previously adopted by the LDP and MEXT, the AHCE presented neoliberal policy proposals that placed importance on individuality, choice, and competition in education. However, at the stage during which the AHCE was in existence, there was still a system in place that made it difficult for the prime minister to display leadership. Specifically, the law that established the AHCE stipulated that appointments to the AHCE committee be made up of no more than 25 individuals who were to be determined by resolutions in the Diet. In addition, the secretary-general of the AHCE was the (career bureaucrat) Administrative Vice Minister of Education (Hood, 2001; Nitta, 2008; Schoppa, 1991).

The councils set up by subsequent cabinets were not established due to laws passed by the Diet but rather were 'private advisory bodies' to the prime minister whose members were experts selected by them. The secretariat of the AHCE was placed in MEXT, but the secretariat of subsequent councils were placed in the Cabinet Secretariat, and thus staffed more directly by appointees of the central government. For example, the National Commission on Educational Reform (NCER) established by the prime minister (2000, during the Obuchi and Mori administrations) produced

[3] According to the regulation for the prescribed number of personnel of MEXT there are approximately 2,000 staff in 2020 including the Agency for Cultural Affairs and the Japan Sports Agency.

17 Proposals for changing education that included many neoliberal policies that had not been considered previously. In other words, basic policies for educational reforms were formulated on the basis of advice provided by a council that reported directly to the prime minister. This policymaking process was further leveraged by subsequent administrations and became mainstream. The role of the CCE became no longer to form independent education policies, but rather to give concrete form to the basic policies of the Prime Minister's Office and the ruling party.

The education 'reform' that was proposed and realized through this 'Prime Ministerial leadership' policymaking process was wide reaching and included the following changes: Reforms to the Fundamental Law on Education and the three education acts that comprise the provisions for how education operates (later realized in 2006–2007), reductions in the fixed number of civil servants and their pay, adoption of methods used in private business, permission of school selection, permission for limited companies to operate schools, changes in the structure of local boards of education, inclusion of moral education as a formal school subject (see Chap. 7; Bamkin, 2018), changes in the university entrance examination system, changes in the pre-school education curriculum, changes to university governance, and changes to the teacher training curriculum. These changes included aspects that were impossible to reform under the conventional policymaking process followed by the LDP Education *zoku-giin*, who had strong ties to education-related industry groups, and MEXT, and they were achieved at a speed that had been previously impossible. However, this 'Prime Ministerial leadership' education policymaking process tended to exclude specialized bureaucratic organizations and academics. As a result, the system suffers from numerous problems. Policy is created with a lack of evidence and insufficient democratic control as the members of the council that reports to the prime minister are selected without educational expertise or democratic legitimacy.

Furthermore, 'Prime Minister led' policymaking was suited to the realization of fiscal tightening since it does not permit the previous bureaucracy-driven process to create a budget based on the needs of the population (and their bureaucratic interest). For example, the Koizumi administration (2001–2006), without creating policy firmly within the education portfolio, forcefully backed fiscal and administrative reforms over a wide range of areas through the Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy that was then newly established in the new Cabinet Office. This resulted in a reduction of the national education budget via the so-called 'Trinity Reforms.' In addition, bureaucrats working in the Prime Minister's Office in recent years have consisted of staff sent from various ministries, but consistently over-represented by the Ministry of Finance, which works toward fiscal balancing and fiscal tightening; and the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, which works toward integrating the administrative portion of the local government and board of education, reducing the independence of local boards of education; and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, which was attempting to utilize school education as a form of economic policy and personnel training. As a result, these ministries have an enormous influence on education policy, and in turn the influence of MEXT over education policymaking is in decline.

Unlike the educational policy of the LDP, the education policymaking process of the center-left DPJ, who held power briefly between 2009 and 2013, was neither a bureaucracy-driven style led by MEXT nor 'Prime Ministerial leadership.' Instead, it was a 'politics-driven' style led by the Minister, two Vice Ministers and two Diet Secretaries. In addition, it viewed the CCE as no more than a single source of information that represented a limited number of interest groups and industry groups. Thus, the DPJ sought a novel method of policymaking via meetings held throughout the country and online, as these methods allowed the consolidation of public opinion across a wide range of the public and those involved in education. However, the DPJ administration accomplished only a few policies. Their specific achievements were limited and included the following: payment of government allowances for children aged 15 years and younger; removal of Japan's opt-out on article 13-2 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) to gradually realize the free secondary and tertiary education it requires; the Act on Free High School Education (2010), which replaced means-tested subsidies for SHS with universal free senior high school provision; and the reduction of the national standard for maximum class size (first year of elementary school) from 40 to 35 students (2011). Nevertheless, although DPJ was in power for a short period of time, they were able to implement important policies that required enormous budgetary outlays. This was because they operated a politics-driven policymaking process rather than the conventional bureaucracy-driven process that emphasized sustainability and stability.

2.4.2 From Centralized Control to Local Control

The second characteristic of the education policymaking process that exists today is the shift from centralized control to local control. The weakening of the power of MEXT under the bureaucracy-driven system that was discussed above was combined with another dimension of the Trinity Reforms—a shift away from centralized control and uniform policy decision-making by MEXT and placed financial authority and the authority to determine education policy in the hands of local municipalities.

As suggested above, in Japan it was the central government rather than civil society that took the lead in creating a modern nation-state during the Meiji Period (1868–1912) and in creating a democratic nation following the end of the Pacific War. In both cases, since the central government placed importance on education, the education standards were both high quality and relatively homogenous, but the system and specifics of the implementation of education were centrally controlled and uniform. For example, the Japanese system of local government is divided mainly into two levels: the prefectural level and municipal level. Until 1999 there was a system in place known as the Appointment and Approval System for Superintendents of Education, in which the appointment of a Superintendent of Education at the prefectural level required the approval of the Minister of Education, while the appointment of a Superintendent of Education at the municipal level required the approval of the

prefectural Superintendent of Education. In addition, school education had a variety of strict standards.

These standards include not only standards on facilities, personnel placement, and the number of class hours, but also those related to educational content. The course of study exists from kindergarten to high school and for all subjects taught, and they include legal restrictions placed on instructors by MEXT. These functioned as the 'maximum standards'—standards that schools cannot exceed—as well as the 'minimum standards'—standards that schools need to satisfy. Furthermore, the course of study provides content standards used in the textbook approval procedure when determining whether a textbook is in compliance. Teachers are required to use approved textbooks screened by this process. In addition to these strict laws regarding the conditions and contents of education that are imposed uniformly throughout the entire nation, bureaucrats at MEXT temporarily transfer into important civil servant positions on prefectural boards of education and the boards of education in large cities. MEXT also integrates administrative examples by issuing various types of official notifications and 'orders' in the form of 'guidance' and 'advice,' which is particularly effective because bureaucrats have discretionary powers over the subsidies that are allocated to local boards of education. Thus, while the system is set up so that the establishment and operation of school education as well as the hiring of instructors is undertaken by the local municipalities themselves, the central government places powerful restrictions on them, and exercises informal persuasion. While this certainly has the positive outcome of a guaranteed national minimum by, for example, paying a certain percentage of the salaries of teachers working in schools across the country that provided compulsory education,[4] it also means that uniform and detailed restrictions are imposed. The relative benefits and drawbacks of this balanced have been discussed by many authors (e.g., Decoker & Bjork, 2013; Gordon et al., 2010; Horio, 1988; Kariya, 2013; Kitamura et al., 2019; Shields, 1990; Tsujimoto & Yamasaki, 2018; Yonezawa et al., 2018).

In contrast, after the 2000s, this centralized control was relaxed as advances were made to give local administrations more substantive authority. For example, the above-mentioned system of appointing and approving superintendents of education was abolished in 2000. Additionally, the 'Trinity Reforms' of the Koizumi administration reduced the subsidies paid by the national government and increased the percentage of local taxes that could be used independently (for education and for other expenditures) by local municipalities. This resulted in large cities independently engaging in unique class formation practices that were not bound by national or prefectural standards and the independent employment, transferring, and training of instructors. The leadership of local boards of education that held authority over local education was strengthened. Boards of education are executive bodies that are independent of the mayors of local municipalities, and they are mandatory in each

[4] Public school teachers' salaries are paid by the 47 prefectures rather than by the municipality-level authorities (numbering approximately 3,000 at the beginning of the year 2000 but down to approximately 1,700 in 2020) in order to ensure that there were no regional disparities. The national government pays one-third (down from one-half before 2006) of the salaries of teachers at primary and junior high schools.

prefecture and municipality (with some leeway in designated villages). They consist of approximately five members whose appointments are approved by the local councils. Previously, boards of education functioned somewhat as the local branches of the central government (MEXT). However, in 2015 the superintendent of education, who had previously functioned as little more than an administrative director for the board of education, was made the director of the board of education offices and the mayor or governor was granted the power to appoint the superintendent of education. This change was expected to create unity between the superintendent of education and the mayor, who is directly elected by the local citizens, which in turn would promote local authority over education. It must, however, be added that even in recent years, as transfer of authority to local municipalities has advanced, the central government has also increased its control. Examples include the inclusion of moral education, which places more importance on the entire group and harmony than on individualism, as an official school subject from 2018 onward and a textbook screening process that demands that the government's view of territorial issues be included in texts.

2.4.3 Limited Authority at School Level

The third characteristic is the fact that, although authority over policymaking was partly shifted to the local municipalities, no progress was made on shifting this authority to the schools. In 2018, it became mandatory for a School Management Council to be established at each public school. This created a system by which interested parties, such as students' legal guardians and local community residents, could participate in school management such as approving the basic policies of the school. However, unlike many other countries, there is still no organization with broad authority over personnel, and the budget (such as the School Governing Body in England). Only a section of the interested parties have access to a route through which they can actually influence school policy, and this access is not available to all legal guardians and children. As school principals are not required to have particular qualifications or advanced degrees, their expertise may not extend to management or finance, for example. Thus, the leadership of school principals is not autonomous but reliant on the local boards of education.

2.4.4 Actors in the Field of Education

The fourth characteristic of the education policymaking process is the fact that there are actors and interested parties who are unique to the field of education and are absent in other policy fields. The first of these is teachers. The group that historically represented teachers, the Japan Teachers' Union (JTU), has been regarded as being positioned on the left wing of the Japanese labor movement, and it functioned as an

important ideological actor during the 1955 System (during the 1950s the membership rate among teachers was 85% or more). However, it had almost no access to any route that would have allowed it to directly participate in the education policymaking process (Schoppa, 1991). The JTU has no rights under the labor laws that recognized labor unions (e.g., the right to engage in collective bargaining, the right to strike), and, unlike its Western counterparts, it has no organizational autonomy to regulate the hiring of workers and colleagues in the same field, train them, and discipline them, and it does not have the right to control intervention of the government in education. Consequently, teachers are marginalized in educational administration. Under a 'corporatism without labor' system, unlike European welfare states in which teachers' groups are committed to education policymaking and reaching agreements, teachers' groups in Japan are excluded from the education policymaking process. As a result, the JTU adopted a strategy in which it engages in resistance activities in schools once policies were put into practice, rather than at the stage at which the policies are being formed, which has led to major conflicts (e.g. the Asahikawa Test Case). In recent years, the union membership rate has fallen to approximately 22% (33% including all teachers' groups; figures for 2018), which has further eroded the unions' influence. However, when important education policies have been formulated in recent years, MEXT has interviewed representatives of the teachers' unions in the same way that they generally interview other interest groups and interested parties.[5]

The next party consists of the parents and legal guardians of students. Comparing the characteristics of Japanese school education with those in other countries has shown that, in Japan, the rights or influence of parents over school are weak. There are no laws or regulations that clearly and comprehensively state the parents' rights in the public education system (cf. Article 10 of the Fundamental Law on Education), and individual regulations are extremely limited (e.g., the explanation process when a student is suspended from school was stipulated in the regulation in 2007). At the municipal level as well as at the central level, there is no system through which parents and legal guardians—either as individually or collectively—can participate in education policymaking, and at the individual school level there is likewise no system through which parents can participate in school administration. The PTA has no influence over school policymaking and is mainly engaged in activities that support the implementation of school policies that have already been determined. On the other hand, in recent years parents and legal guardians have, as is the case in other countries, played a role in ensuring school accountability through the introduction of school choice and school assessments. Thus, rather than participating in education policymaking by communicating with schools, parents and legal guardians promote the execution of school policies—mainly related to academic improvements—and

[5] As a result of the diversification in learning formats (e.g., 'free schools' and online schools) and in the types of schools, it has become increasingly difficult to obtain a consolidated view from the CCE alone. Thus, a process was established by which a wide variety of related groups would be interviewed. In addition, when forming important policies including the field of education, a public comment system at central and local level is also utilized in order to obtain views from a wide range within the general population.

thus their involvement is limited to the supervision of schools and teachers. Similarly, children have extremely limited involvement in the formulation of policies by municipalities and schools. School rules are unilaterally determined without any involvement of either children or their parents and legal guardians. In addition to these procedural problems, in a general sense, there are also many anachronisms. These include a wide variety of restrictions such as the color of underwear, hairstyles, and activities outside of school.

Unlike in some Western countries, religious groups have almost no influence over the formulation and implementation of educational policy in Japan. Again, this is due to the fact that, in Japan, school education has historically been solely managed by the central government and not by civil society or faith-based groups. To begin with, the number of students in Japan attending private schools is very small: approximately 1% of elementary school students, 7% of junior high school students, 30% of high school students and 75% of university students. In addition, the number of private schools established by religious groups such as Cristian and Buddhism is less than half of all private schools. What is more, private schools as well as public schools are required to use textbooks conforming to the course of study, and discretion for private schools to develop original curricula is very limited. In this way religious groups have no serious influence in education. At the same time, in Japan there has been almost no input from private corporations, entrepreneurs, or philanthropists in school administration. If we discount cram schools and extra-curricular activities such as swimming and English language classes taken by students, then we see that the education market—including the establishment of schools—is closed off from private corporate participation. However, recent technical developments have made it possible to provide highly individualized learning to students via information and communications technologies. Private corporations that produce such technologies and products have begun to enter the education market and schools. Because of the Covid-19 crisis since 2020, efforts to provide each child with a tablet, a Wi-Fi compatible environment, ICT devices, and training seminar products have been fast-tracked. Through issues such as digital textbooks, IB exams, test scoring and advisory tasks, and the management of teacher labor time, private corporations are anticipated to begin influencing education policymaking in the future.

In addition, as is the case in other countries (Ball, 2021), international organizations—especially the OECD—influence education policy in Japan. The primary and secondary education curricula have been shaped by the OECD's view of academic achievement that is based on 'key competencies,' which is closely linked to work-related skills. Moreover, the questions used on the National Academic Achievement Test implemented by MEXT at the final grade of elementary school and junior high school have been influenced by the questions on the PISA exam that was created by the OECD.

Finally, although the courts have taken a largely passive stance, they are an actor in the education policymaking process. In Japan, education-related laws do not clearly mention the rights of children and their parents or legal guardians, and MEXT tends to disregard their rights. Thus, the courts have played only a limited role in preventing infringements on the rights of children and their parents and legal guardians. Notable

examples include supreme court decisions such as the following: Limitations on the binding power of the course of study determined by the national government (the Asahikawa Test Case in 1974), arbitrary implementation of school textbook vetting was disallowed (the Ienaga Textbook Case in 1997), and the recognition that students in public schools can refuse educational content provided by public schools that is in conflict with their beliefs (Kobe City College of Technology case in 1996).

2.5 Changing Education Policies and the Changing Education System

Since the 1980s, when Japan entered its period of a mature economy, along with changes to the economic system, the process of determining policies also changed from a bureaucracy-led system to a Prime Minister led top-down system. The process of formulating education policy underwent this same change. Furthermore, the changes in the economic system led to the LDP changing the political ideas upon which it relied. Specifically, in the past, the LDP was a broadly conservative political party while at the same time it adopted policies that regulated the free market rather than those that espoused liberalism, and it placed importance on the entire group and uniformity rather than a respect for individualism and diversity. However, since the 1990s, it has adopted neoliberal policies, which has resulted in the relaxation of a wide variety of national restrictions.

Changes have also occurred in the education policies of the LDP. Previously, taking MEXT policy as that of the LDP, instead of a policy of non-intervention, its education policies demanded strict compliance with a variety of standards set for both public and private schools regarding their educational content as well as their facilities and equipment. In addition, it took on a positive attitude toward ensuring equality and increasing social changes and social mobility. However, since the 1990s, the education policies of the LDP have placed increasing importance on values such as the market, competition, freedom, and choice, and it has become more accepting of disparities. During the previous period of domestic demand-driven high economic growth, the LDP believed that what was needed to support the domestic demand was a homogeneous, robust middle class and its ability to work. In contrast, during the period since the 1980s, when there was a shift to an economy that was dependent upon foreign demand, the LDP has recognized the need for personnel that have the skills required for multinational corporations to develop overseas, personnel that are available at low wages who can support the domestic welfare and hospitality industries, and migrant workers. The systems in place in Japanese school education underwent the following changes.

The first change that occurred in the school education system was the shift from a centralized, traditional system that emphasized homogeneity and equality to a system of diversity. Legally, Japanese school education is the responsibility of each local municipality, although in fact—as was seen above—in the past, MEXT demanded

uniformity throughout the country, thus, the decision-making powers held by local municipalities and schools were limited. Specifically, in order to be recognized as an officially sanctioned school, strict conditions have to be met. A major disadvantage to students is the fact that, if they do not graduate from these officially sanctioned schools, they would be unable to pursue higher education or be employed.

Today, the conventional system that was uniform across the country—i.e., the 6-3 year system of primary and junior high schools—has diversified to the extent that some municipalities have adopted a 9-year system, while others have adopted a 4-3-2 year system. It has also become possible for municipalities to adopt a school-choice system for public elementary schools. The Equal Opportunity in Education Act (2016) recognizes 'learning sites other than schools' and other 'non-official schools' attended, for example, by students who refuse to attend 'official' schools, and so recommends the provision of financial support. In addition, education curricula for exceptional schools, that are only partially bound by the course of study, have been created, and routes for obtaining teacher licenses other than university study have been expanded.

The second change in the school education systems is a shift from general and common education, which placed emphasis on the systematics of the curriculum, to education using a curriculum that placed importance on empiricism and was relatively strong in its relevance to practical work. Previously, education in Japan from the primary to the secondary levels placed importance on general and common education, and it was not divided at the secondary level, unlike the tripartite division system of secondary education in Germany. In addition, secondary education in Japan provided almost no learning that prepared students for the workplace. This was because vocation-related learning was provided by the companies that employed students after they graduated. Thus, in Japan, public institutions providing professional and vocational training—including in public schools—had not developed. Since it was the general rule that Japanese corporations employed only new graduates and employees would be transferred within the company among various departments, including accounting, personnel, public relations, legal affairs, manufacturing, and the like, they did not require school to provide training in particular skills. Schools prioritized teaching students general, common basic traits and skills that are useful in any job, such as perseverance and cooperation.

By contrast, in today's school education, there is increased awareness of the need to prepare students for the workplace, and a shift is seen from the 'unitary skill set' view that required all students to master a common set of basic skills to a 'plural skill set' view that requires students to master a particular skill that they will use in the workplace in the future. In addition, there is another shift taking place. This is the shift from a school system that follows a 'single track' to a 'multiple-track' school system in which there are several routes available at the high school level, some that emphasize advancement to university and others that emphasize vocational education. In the past, the vast majority of high school students in Japan took the general course of study, while today the number of courses in high schools for a diversity of occupations is increasing (e.g., in addition to the traditional industry, commercial, and agriculture choices, there are now choices such as welfare, design, sports, and

teaching). Companies have stopped providing the conventional in-house vocational training and have started to demand that vocational education be provided outside the company. Curricula are now designed to provide links to the local community and systems that allow schools to include the experiences of people in the local community have been adopted as part of the ‘community school’ system. Primary and junior high schools are less frequently providing traditional teaching teacher-led instruction of all students for the purpose of knowledge transmission and are increasingly providing exploratory project-based learning in which students engage in discussion with each other. The assessment of academic achievement has also shifted from the assessment of aggregate knowledge acquired to assessments of interest, enthusiasm, curiosity, editing and compiling capabilities, and presentation abilities. University entrance exams are also moving away from overemphasis on knowledge itself and toward the adoption of diverse assessment methods. University education itself was previously inclined toward a liberal arts education and thus it did not place importance on education that was linked to employment. However, the number of Humanities departments have been reduced and an increase in the number of instructors who have practical experience in the subjects they teach has led to an overall increased emphasis on preparation for the workplace, and the creation of new vocational universities (2017) as well as vocational graduate schools (2003).

2.6 Conclusion

Interestingly and importantly, in spite of the above-mentioned changes that have occurred in recent years, some patterns of Japanese education reform have not changed in the last 150 years. Reforms still follow a top-down pattern, and reform is still channelled through school education. Since the start of the Meiji Restoration in 1868, which marked the beginning of the country’s modern society, Japan has developed using a national government-led and school education-led method. Today, despite the relative decline in the influence that schools have on children because of social and economic developments, the expectation of policymakers and people remains that any problems that may arise in society should be quickly handled via school education. Examples include moral education designed to deal with the problem of bullying, physical education designed to improve physical strength, and multicultural education designed to deal with the increasing number of non-Japanese students in Japanese society. Even today, the national course of study is revised by the national government approximately every ten years, and these guidelines have authority and influence over teachers. Thus, top-down reforms via school education take precedence. Changes implemented at the level of local government appear to be oriented toward appeasing business. The fact that there is little input from civil society in these reforms and that there are few reforms or policies that utilize the potential capabilities in communities are all traditional characteristics of the pattern that exists in Japan. Whether this traditional pattern can be changed and whether a shift can be made from a government-driven system of education policymaking to a

civil society-driven system of education policymaking are problems that remain to be solved.

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Chapter 3
Thirty Years of Education Reform: Previous Revisions of the Course of Study

Ryo Sasaki

Abstract The chapter provides an overview of revisions to the course of study in Japan over the past 30 years. It discusses the institutional framework in which the course of study operates and its legal and administrative status in relation to long-standing debates on its effects on schools and teachers. The contents of subsequent revisions over the past three decades are discussed, focusing on how ability and personality are conceptualised and envisioned in the discourse of each revision. These discussions provide a historical perspective against which to consider the latest (2017) curriculum revision.

Keywords Course of study · Ad Hoc Council on Education (AHCE) · New perspective on academic ability · Zest for living · Integrated studies

3.1 Introduction: Overview on the Course of Study in Japanese Public Education

This chapter provides an overview of the transformation of the course of study in Japan over the past thirty years, focusing on the views of ability and envisioned personality upon which its reform has depended. The course of study contains the minimum required standard of contents taught in primary and secondary education. It is issued by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) and provided to all schools, public and private, at the elementary and junior high and senior high school levels. Though not discussed here, 'education requirements' (*kyōiku-yōryō*) are also issued for pre-school education. The latest full revision is due for implementation from 2020 at elementary level, 2021 at junior high level and 2022 at senior high level.

In the following sections, the status of the course of study is expounded from a legal and administrative perspective (Sect. 3.2), and related to long-standing debates

R. Sasaki (✉)
Department of International Studies, University of the Sacred Heart, 4-2-24 Hiro-o, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo 150-0012, Japan
e-mail: rsasaki@u-sacred-heart.ac.jp

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on its effect on schools and teachers (Sect. 3.3). These debates underpin a discussion of the transformation of the views of ability and desired character on which the course of study has is based. These are chronologically discussed through each revision (Sect. 3.4). Finally, the closing section provides a critical discussion of the new curriculum revision for the 2020s.

3.2 Institutional Framework of Education in Japan and Status of the Course of Study

The School Education Act (1947) stipulates that the Minister of Education shall have the authority to determine matters of public education curriculum (Articles 33, 48, 52, 68 and 77), and to then substantiate them. Further, the Regulations for Enforcement of the School Education Act (1947), promulgated by ministerial ordinance, state that the Minister issues the course of study (Articles 52, 74, 84, 109 and 129). The course of study is formally an administrative announcement (*kokuji*) issued by the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology based on these Regulations.

In consideration of the hierarchical structure of law, the course of study can be seen as a substantiation of the State's obligation to realise the right of citizens to education, which is guaranteed primarily in the Constitution. Article 26 of the Constitution of Japan stipulates that all people shall receive an equal education and places an obligation on parents to have children under their protection receive such education. Article 26 of the Japanese Constitution is interpreted more narrowly than the corresponding right to education in international human rights law. The right to education prescribed in Article 26 of the Constitution is substantiated by statute (primary law enacted by parliament), such as the Fundamental Law on Education (*Kyōiku Kihon-hō*) and School Education Act (*Gakkō Kyōiku-hō*). The more restricted interpretation of the right to education is derived from educational law rather than constitutional law. It is understood as including three factors: the freedom of education from state intervention, the guarantee of good institutions to provide education, and the equality of opportunity in education. The latter is equivalent to the right to education prescribed in the United Nations core human rights treaties, such as Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Kobayashi, 2003: 59–61).

The equality of opportunity in education can be understood as both the right to education as well as the principles of non-discriminatory practices and equality as basic principles of human rights protection. In other words, those who are different may be treated differently in accordance with their needs, but unreasonable, unjustified distinctions should be prohibited. The State is required to take positive measures in order that those who would otherwise have less access to education are enabled to have unrestricted access to educational establishments and receive an equal education. Those clauses should not be interpreted as permitting the selection of children

on the basis of ability, but guaranteeing that the right to education should be undertaken for the child's development and in consideration of the personality of each child (Singh, 2011: paras 35–38). To substantiate Article 26 of the Constitution and provisions of the international treaties mentioned above, Article 1 of the Fundamental Law on Education states the core aims of education. It provides that: Education shall aim at the full development of personality, striving for the rearing of the people, sound in mind and body, who shall love truth and justice, esteem individual value, respect labor and have a deep sense of responsibility, and be imbued with the independent spirit, as builders of a peaceful state and society. The normative perspective of public education suggests that the course of study and its reform must be always based on the aforementioned laws and the constitution above them.

3.3 Status of the Course of Study Under the Framework of Educational Administration in Japan

While the State has an obligation to realise the educational rights of people in general and for children in particular, it is parents or guardians who enable children to access education in practice. Nonetheless, two opposing doctrines have emerged from a conflict in the interpretation of the right to education prescribed in Article 26 of the Japanese Constitution: the theory of 'civic (people's) control of education' (*minshu no kyōikuken*) and the theory of 'state control of authority' (*kokka no kyōikuken*).

The former, the theory of civic educational authority, evinces that teachers as professionals in public education shall primarily have a right to determine the contents of public education (Ashibe & Takahashi, 2011: 265–266). More accurately, the core meaning of the right to education is interpreted as the realisation of children's right to learning. The control of education lies with the people (citizens). The State is thus the trustee of the people's right to education, and thus should abstain from excessive intervention in the contents of education (Horio, 1992: 215–217). The authority of education is delegated to teachers who, though unelected, are educational professionals. To secure the freedom of education, the role of the State in the subject area of education should be limited to its institutional guarantee, i.e., to prepare necessary institutions, financial support and so on. The latter, state educational authority, suggests that the government generally, or the Ministry in particular, shall have authority to determine the contents of public education because the government holds *pouvoir constitué* (Sieyès, 1789) as the democratically appointed power.

This doctrinal issue was discussed by the judgement of the Supreme Court in the Asahikawa Test Case (1976). The Court refused both doctrines of state educational authority and civic educational authority as each too extreme and one-sided (Supreme Court of Japan, 1976). The judgement stood at an intermediate position, suggesting that, while teachers have a certain range of discretion as to how they determine the content of public education, the state is also entitled to intervene to

determine the content of public education within a certain scope. The former must be necessary and relevant, but the latter is ultimately required to realise a common national standard for public education, which in turn is required to guarantee the right to education. The judge further emphasised that this middle-ground interpretation holds firmly for primary and secondary education because of limited choice and because children's abilities of critical understanding are limited. Otherwise stated, it does not apply to higher education. In this context, the question of whether the course of study is legally binding was directly considered. The Court ruled that, insofar as it is limited to an outline and framework, a legally binding course of study is compatible with the Constitution (Hosokawa, 1983: 110–111).

3.4 Thirty-year Reform of the Course of Study

The reform of the course of study over the past three decades can be understood through debates that firstly discuss the meaning of required academic abilities in a globalised era and secondly through the increasing subordination of education to nationalistic policies. During this timeframe, the course of study has been fully revised four times: in 1989, in 1998 (primary and secondary schools), 1999 (high schools), in 2008/2009 and in 2017. This section begins with an overview of educational reform in Japan in the 1980s, which provides a basis for each subsequent revision of the course of study.

In the 1980s, when Japan became a great economic power, structural reforms in various societal realms, including public education, were required. Against the background of America's enormous trade deficit to Japan, the latter was criticised for its excessive working hours and trade surplus. Despite significant economic growth, numerous educational pathologies were discussed domestically in Japan, including bullying among pupils, violence by teachers, and exceedingly oppressive school regulations (Mizuhara et al., 2018: 181–182). Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone established an Ad Hoc Council on Education (AHCE, *Rinkyōshin*) in 1984. In 1987, the AHCE regarded the devastation of education in the 1980s as 'an adverse effect of high economic growth which post-war Japan had experienced in 1950s and 1960s' (*Rinkyōshin* 1987). Administrative reform in the 1980s was guided by neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism, which had a significant effect on the deliberations of the AHCE. While both neo-conservatism and neo-liberalism lean toward small government, privatisation and competitive market mechanisms, neo-conservatism also emphasises nationalistic sentiments and traditions of the state. These two ideologies have guided educational reform in Japan until today.

(1) Revision in 1989

Following the conclusion of the AHRC, a 'new perspective on academic ability' was advocated by MEXT as a guiding principle for revising the course of study in 1989, when that of primary, secondary, and high schools were amended together. The new conceptualisation of academic ability places more focus more on pupils' interest,

motivation and attitudes than knowledge, understanding and abilities acquired. It promotes pupils' acquisition of capacities for self-learning based on abilities to think, make judgements and express themselves. This concept of academic ability is in turn based on four guiding principles: (1) development of a spiritually enriched personality, (2) cultivation of a capacity for self-learning, (3) emphasis on a foundation for each subject and education that respects the personalities of individuals, and (4) respect for culture and tradition, and the promotion of international understanding.

First, the development of a spiritually enriched personality relates to education on lifestyle, moral and civic education, volunteering, and contact with nature. At the pre-primary (kindergarten) level of education, it promotes a lifestyle and attitudes that foster interaction with others. At primary and lower secondary (junior high school) education, moral education through contact with nature and volunteering is emphasised. At upper secondary (high school) level, pupils are encouraged to consider, through moral education, how they should live as a human being, member of a community, as a national citizen and in relation to nature. Second, cultivation of the capacity for self-learning indicates abilities of logical thinking, judgement, expression, creativity, intuitive senses, and information handling. Pupils are expected to be independent learners who can survive the instability of contemporary society through life-long learning. Third, emphasis on a foundation for each subject aims to ensure consistency of curricula from primary and secondary and enable pupils to establish habits of daily life and learning at levels of pre-primary (kindergarten) and junior grade of primary education. Education for respecting the personality of individuals aims to increase a variety of optional subjects and introduce ability-differentiated teaching in secondary education. Fourth, the principle of respect for culture and tradition, and promotion of international understanding was based on the thought that future national citizens living in a globalised era are expected to understand life and culture of foreign countries as well as respect the culture and traditions of Japan. It influenced history education in primary and lower secondary education, Japanese classics and foreign language education in lower and latter secondary education, and patriotic education through use of the national flag and anthem in school ceremonies.

(2) Revision in 1998

The revision of the course of study in 1998 (for primary and junior high schools) and 1999 (for high schools) was guided by a newly coined concept—the 'zest for living' (*ikiru chikara*). Zest for living, in sum, means the integration of knowledge and developing independent-minded learners with an issue-resolving orientation based on crosscutting and integrated knowledge, which contrasts with conventional knowledge separated into subjects.

Classtime for integrated studies (*sōgō tekinagakushū no jikan*) was newly introduced into the curricula for primary, lower and upper secondary education. The focus of this revision of the course of study had been the fundamental parts of each subject. As the 'foundation' of each subject was carefully selected, the revision became increasingly narrower. On the one hand, without a solid understanding of the basic parts of each subject, students could not have knowledge to integrate. On the other hand, integrated studies was placed in parallel to subjects, so each school was

required to clarify how they were inserted into the conventional curriculum. In other words, though views on the teaching of conventional subjects were maintained as a strong foundation, integrated studies was intended to develop the 'zest for living', which guided a revision of the course of study in this time. Each school was expected to make a strong effort both to teach fundamental parts of traditional subjects and to develop the independent-minded learners by carefully placing the integrated studies in the school syllabus.

In reality, it turned out to be an excessive expectation of schools, especially at the secondary level (Bjork, 2016; Cave, 2016). Moreover, the decrease of time for learning conventional subjects was severely criticised at a time when a supposed decline in academic achievement was being reported by various media outlets.

(3) Partial revision in 2003

Administrative measures taken to combat supposedly declining academic achievement were understood as transforming the emphasis from the 'zest for living' to conventional academic skills, which led to further criticism against the government for inconsistency. In 2003, the course of study was partially modified. Three points can be specified in this partial revision.

First, the character of the course of study as a minimum standard of public education was clarified and teachers came to be expected to teach the contents, but were also encouraged to add some materials in consideration of pupils' circumstances and ability. The second was improvement of integrated studies emphasising 'integration of knowledge', which indicated an expectation that the period would draw in and integrate knowledge and skills learnt in other subjects for application in real life. In substance, each school was requested to formulate a comprehensive plan on integrated studies. Given that some schools had used this time for exam preparation for the entrance examination, reform measures to implement integrated studies were required. Third, teaching in accordance with the individuality of pupils was emphasised. The revised course of study showed ability-differentiated teaching and supplementary tutoring as examples.

In sum, as the partial revision in 2003 provided further substance on the vision of the 1998/1999 course of study, whose fundamental principles were maintained. However, criticism against the educational reform in the 1990s focused not on the outcome of the introduction of integrated studies, but on supposedly declining academic abilities. As such, the partial revision in 2003 reinstated a degree of focus on traditional subjects.

(4) Revision in 2008

The courses of study for kindergartens, primary and junior high schools were revised in 2008 and for senior high schools in 2009. The five points of the significance of the reform during that time can be summarised as: (1) further advancing of the 'zest for living' as a basis of the curriculum, (2) a new view of three-layered learning ability, (3) a skill of international standard of communication and literacy, and (5) common compulsory subjects prioritised over optional ones.

In the revision of 2008/2009, the development of key competencies was pursued, which are considered to be a requirement in the twenty-first century knowledge society. The new view of three-layered learning ability was proposed which consisted of (1) acquiring basic knowledge and skills, (2) applied thinking skills, decision-making, and expression, and (3) attitude towards self-initiated learning. Based on these, pupils were expected to reach an 'international standard' of communication and literacy, high standard of morality, and to be fulfilled with the 'zest for living'. Interestingly, this was long before the OECD took an interest in character and morality. There was a feeling that the skills introduced in this revision would be challenging for teachers to put into practice in the classroom.

(5) Revision in 2017

The latest version of the course of study came into effect in 2020 for elementary schools, 2021 for junior high schools and 2022 for senior high schools. All subjects were revised with the aims of independent-minded and dialogical deep learning (Mizuhara et al., 2018: 257). The revised course of study focuses on the development of abilities with broad utility based on the idea of 'what pupils will be able to do'. To substantiate the curriculum, schools are required to conduct curriculum management in consideration of the circumstances of pupils, and to introduce an active way of learning and assessment in each subject. It aims to develop pupils' generic skills and competencies, which means development of abilities applicable outside school in addition to acquiring knowledge.

The revision of the course of study in 2017 was influenced by the concept of 'key competencies', proposed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). 'Key competencies' correspond to sophisticated applied academic abilities with general versatility. In concept, it includes applying knowledge taught in conventional subjects to issues which we face in daily life as well as life-long continuous learning by reflecting on choices and decisions. The revision of the course of study in 2017 was guided by the intention to drastically reform the knowledge-acquiring-oriented concept of learning.

Three pillars are suggested as the basis of abilities and skills which pupils are expected to obtain: (1) acquiring knowledge and skills, (2) developing capacities for thought, decisions, and expressions, and (3) cultivating a personality that aspires to independent learning.

First, 'acquiring knowledge and skills' is primarily related to those learnt through conventional school subjects, but it does not mean memorising knowledge divided by subjects. Rather, knowledge and skills to learn are required to have an organic link and be applied in authentic situations. For example, in the case of history, pupils are expected to learn 'why an event happened and its subsequent influences' rather than memorise 'in which year what event happened'.

Second, 'developing capacities for thought, decisions and expressions' corresponds to processes of thinking, decision-making, expression, and creativity in response to a problem. The overall process can be divided into three phases: (a) a phase of finding, in which pupils find an issue, determine its range, plan a settlement of the issue, behave with predicting result, and reflect on the process to influence

finding and resolving subsequent issues, (b) A phase of establishing a thought, in which pupils form their own idea, express it by text and dialogue on the basis of scrutinised information as well as create an idea as a group through communicating with others, and (c) a phase of innovating, in which pupils are expected to find new significance and shape a new value.

Third, 'cultivating a personality that aspires to learning' is related to so-called 'meta-cognition'. It corresponds to an ability to control emotion and behaviour and maintain amicable relationships with others, attitudes to respect diversity and collaborate with others, contribute to creating a sustainable society such as leadership, teamwork, sensibility, and humanity. In sum, meta-cognition in this context means an objective understanding of one's thinking, practised as reflection in a class.

Both before and after revisions, moral education was prescribed to be conducted throughout the curriculum. That is, all subjects and integrated studies are intended to include learning for moral education. Through a partial revision of the course of study in 2015, the designated classtime for learning moral education, on which pupils were previously not assessed, was reformed as a subject within the curriculum. Moral education became a subject to cultivate morality as an independently-minded individual together with others. Since the revision, teaching must adhere to a ministerially approved textbook. As this reform was led by the nationalistic group in the Liberal Democratic Party, it is criticised as it may result in an indoctrinating patriotic education (Bamkin, 2018).

3.5 Concluding Remarks: Critique of the Recent Reform of the Course of Study

This chapter has explained the right to education and the legal basis on which the course of study operates. Subsequently, it reviewed previous reforms of the course of study for the past thirty years from the 1980s to the present. This reform has been guided by the concepts of a 'new perspective on academic ability' and the 'zest for living'. It has not only covered the contents of each subject but also discussed changes in how ability and personality are conceptualised and envisioned for each revision. The period for integrated studies was newly introduced, and moral education became a subject where pupils' learning outcome is assessed.

While the course of study is based on the idea of 'fully developing the individual character imbued with the qualities making up a peaceful and democratic nation and society' (Article 1 of the Fundamental Law on Education), criticism of the recent and on-going educational reform arises on this point. The content of the course of study has been increased and deepened. However, strictly controlling the content of education and methods of teaching may result in excessive limitations on the practice of schools and teachers, especially where it runs counter to professionally shared interpretations of the nature of the course of study shown, for example, by support for professional freedom to determine the content of teaching in the Asahikawa Test

Case, albeit within the framework of public education determined by the state. Given that discretion given to teachers has been unreasonably narrowed, there is a risk that standardised public education may be provided by a centralised state without enough consideration for the situation of each school or pupil (Nakadaira, 2019: 130–131). In addition, moral education, introduced as a subject in 2015, weakens the democratic spirit of the Constitution of Japan, which is rooted in individual freedoms, towards an institutionalisation of service to society (Takahashi, 2020: 346). Not only moral education but also the course of study as a whole should be based on respect for individuals rather than indoctrinating pupils into an 'ideal human personality' which the government seems to expect.

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Chapter 4
Active Learning

Viveka Ichikawa

Abstract The umbrella term 'active learning' was formally introduced into the course of study for compulsory education in 2017. However, the concept has a long and complex history; and includes many ideas which are far from new in Japanese schools. This chapter traces the history of active learning from its unlikely origins in US higher education to its migration into compulsory education in Japan; overviews official policy on active learning as it was adopted and Japanized by the Ministry of Education; and discusses some challenges and examples of practice. While active learning encourages innovation and creative collaboration between teachers and students, its demands on teacher time, as well as the extent of cognitive adaptation required of teachers against the specific social and structural norms of the Japanese education system, present significant challenges to the widespread adoption of active learning.

Keywords Active learning · Japanese education · MEXT · Proactive · Interactive · Deep learning

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the history and change within the concept of active learning, from its unlikely origins in US higher education to a migration into compulsory education in Japan. Japan's Ministry of Education (MEXT) adopted the term for use in universities under similar 'massification' conditions as those in the US. However, the core content of this 'umbrella term' was later adapted for compulsory school education through efforts to adapt the term for the specific purposes of the Ministry of Education. Despite the potential for active learning, illustrated in examples of classroom practice below, it also attracted critique from teachers and scholars who argued that active learning was already practiced in schools before its introduction

V. Ichikawa (✉)
Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto,
246 Bloor Street West, Toronto M5S 1V4, ON, Canada
e-mail: viveka.ichikawa@mail.utoronto.ca

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as curriculum policy. The main problems with active learning, from this perspective, are the demands it makes on teacher time at a time when workloads are steadily increasing with non-pedagogic tasks; and the extent of cognitive adaptation required of teachers against the specific social and structural norms of the Japanese education system. The chapter concludes with an overview of these past, current and future directions of active learning in Japanese compulsory education.

4.2 History and Development of Active Learning in US Higher Education

It is valuable to provide an overview of early theory on active learning to illustrate how its definition has changed as it has moved from the anglosphere to Japan and from university-level to compulsory education. It also provides a background to the means by which Japanese educationalists first encountered active learning.

The term active learning came into popular use as a reaction to the ‘back to basics’ movement prompted by a milestone report to the US Department of Education *A Nation at Risk* (Department of Education, 1983). The report analyzed the decline in the academic achievement of American children from various perspectives and identified problems with the curriculum at that time (so-called ‘Smorgasbord Curriculum’), then advocating curriculum reform with the overriding goal of ‘Back to the Basics’. The report received much praise and set the official direction for educational reform in the US for the following decades (Kobayashi, 2012; Sato, 1997). In response, the National Institute of Education published a report entitled *Involvement in Learning* (Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education, 1984), a critical response to *A Nation at Risk*, which is said to be the origin of the term active learning, and its utilization as a ‘movement’. Active learning thus provided an umbrella term for learner-centred education, alongside and against the ‘back to basics’ policy direction (Bain, 2004; Barr & Tagg, 1995; Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Fink, 2003). Active learning was popularised by influential works such as Chickering and Gamson’s *Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education* (1987), which were adopted in efforts to shape teaching practices in US higher education. The broad concept, since the beginning of the 1990s, has often been defined in reference to Bonwell and Eison (1991): ‘instructional activities involving students in doing things and thinking about what they are doing’ (p.3). Key features of active learning under this definition include:

- Students are involved in more than just listening to the class.
- There is more emphasis on developing students’ skills than on delivering information.
- Students are involved in higher-order thinking (analysis, synthesis, evaluation)
- Students are engaged in activities (e.g., reading, discussing, writing)
- Emphasis is placed on students’ exploration of their attitudes and values
- It involves externalizing cognitive processes.

Though generally outside the scope of this chapter, it is worth making two further points about the development of active learning in the US. Firstly, utilising active learning as an umbrella term was effective in the early attempts to consolidate a movement in response to the US government's turn to 'back to basics' policies. However, similar educational techniques and strategies to active learning, such as active participation in learning (Pratton & Hales, 1986) and problem-based learning (PBL) (Kilroy, 2004), cooperative learning (Gillies, 2016) had existed with their own backgrounds. For example, PBL developed from practices in medical education, and cooperative learning grew from psychology theories, only later developed outside those specialized fields and subsumed under the umbrella of active learning. Against this background, active learning emerged as an umbrella concept for almost all learning theories that promoted the shift from teaching to learning (Barr & Tagg, 1995).

Secondly, the active learning movement coincided with other changes in higher education which complicated their development. The most important of these changes was the massification of US universities in the 1960s and early 1970s. Women, ethnic minorities, adult students over the age of 25, and part-time students, who had previously not been represented in universities, became a diverse group set to receive higher education. Later, students from abroad joined and further accelerated the diversification of the student body. Despite the merits of such a widening of participation, the change in the student body precipitated the differentiation of the roles of university faculty. Exactly how this differentiation occurred is a matter of debate. According to 'academic development' accounts (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Biggs & Tang, 2011), from the latter half of the nineteenth century to the end of the century, and especially after World War II, research as a role of university faculty became more critical. Many university faculty members were immersed in research activities and regarded teaching activities as secondary. For this reason, the question of what education means to university faculty, as well as what and how students should learn at university, was beginning to be fundamentally questioned. From a different perspective, budgetary constraints affected community colleges and 'new' universities primarily. Their massification required teaching to be undertaken by more professionalized 'university teachers' as opposed to independent scholars, creating efficiency gains in codifying 'best practice' in university teaching at universities below the elite tier. In either case, a shift in the teaching–learning paradigm *from Teaching to Learning* was proposed to revive higher education based on this issue (Ambrose et al., 2010; Biggs & Tang, 2011; Mizokami, 2014, 2016). However, in the latter case, the active learning movement also served as an accidental force in the growth of disparities between elite and diverse universities (Hada, 2014). The university teachers in the diverse universities were provided a career path in teaching through the discourse of active learning.

4.3 Historical Background and Implementation of Active Learning in Japan

Though active learning could be found as a concept in books on higher education for many years (e.g., Mizokami, 2011), active learning was practically introduced into Japanese higher education in 2012 as a proposal in the MEXT CCE report: *Toward a qualitative shift in university education to build a new future: Universities foster lifelong learning and the ability to think independently* (MEXT, 2012). This report addressed the rapidly changing reality of Japan in an unpredictable era and where the country is affected by issues such as globalization, advanced information society, a rapidly ageing population and declining birth rate. In that context, universities and university education are faced with new and more significant responsibilities and demands. Furthermore, it was an urgent task for universities to nurture next-generation leaders for a mature society that actively draws on outstanding knowledge and ideas to develop and maintain fair and stable growth (MEXT, 2012). This overarching goal for secondary education invited active learning as a strategy to grow out of the traditional lecture-based pedagogy. Unsurprisingly, the report drew on Bonwell and Eison's definition of active learning discussed in the previous section (e.g., MEXT, 2015). This first report that would serve to introduce active learning into Japanese high education outlined the term thus:

> Active learning is a general term for teaching and learning methods that incorporate the learner's active participation in the learning process. The aim is to develop general competencies, including cognitive, ethical and social competencies, education, knowledge and experience, through active learning. It includes discovery learning, problem-solving learning, experiential learning, research learning, etc., but can also be incorporated in the classroom through group discussion, debate, group work, etc. (MEXT, 2012)

Similar issues were being discussed in relation to compulsory education. The increased complexity, diversity, and insecurity heightened by the amplified flow of information and people in a globalizing world raised new and significant education issues. Meanwhile, increased school violence, school absenteeism, and so-called class disruption—whether real or imagined—became widely discussed by the media (Okada, 2011, 2019). Despite efforts to implement less pressured education in preceding years, MEXT also began to recognize the problem of educational inequalities differentiated by class at the start of the second decade of the twenty-first century (see Chap. 11). New perspectives and guidelines for education were seen as urgent tasks. Discussion within MEXT of the new curriculum came to coalesce around two aims: (1) adapting for global economic development and competition taking place in the world; and (2) ensuring equal opportunities in education. These formed the background for introducing active learning in the Japanese education system (Okada, 2011, 2019).

From about 1990 to 2010, MEXT made several attempts to transform the school curriculum by directing the CCE or by convening other education policy councils. Zest for living is composed of abilities/capacities to enable children to identify tasks; to learn and think on their own; to make judgements proactively; to create better

solutions and to develop a rich personality, to regulate oneself, to collaborate with others, to care for others and to get emotional sensations; and finally, to develop their health and physical strength. This was seen as a milestone for Japanese education to move beyond a traditional system to help students think independently. In addition, the policy of *yutori kyoiku*, interpreted as more relaxed education or education with some freedom, was implemented. The yearly total of teaching hours and education contents got cut down with the 'integrated learning' (*sogo teki na gakushu no jikan*) curriculum, which was meant to give schools and teachers more freedom in selecting contents of study to strengthen student competency and cultivate creative thinking.

However, this flow toward the greater flexibility and freedom of students and teachers was questioned when Japan's score on PISA (the Program for International Student Assessment that measures 15-year-old students' reading, mathematics, and science literacy) showed a dramatic drop in 2003, which raised public concerns in Japan. Consequently, in the 2000s, Japanese education searched for a new direction and a new plan for the twenty-first century. In 1977, after a time where the so-called cramming education or indigestion of educational content was consistently practiced, the number of class hours, increasing since the end of World War II, was reduced for the first time. Following that, 1989 marked the beginning of the Heisei era in Japan, and a new perspective on academic achievement emphasizing the ability to think, make judgements, and express oneself, was being proposed in the course of study and issues in the school environment such as increasing visibility of bullying and long-term absence from schools (*futōkō*). With the introduction of the five-day school week, the key concepts promoted were the willingness for self-motivated and independent learning. Then, in 1998, the COS aimed at fostering 'zest for living' in a relaxed school atmosphere and had the fewest number of class hours. This period was called *yutori*, or 'relaxed' education.

In the 1990s, with the twenty-first century just around the corner, the emphasis turned to each school in Japan developing a distinctive education in a less-pressured environment, ensuring that students acquire fundamental content, and fostering 'zest for living'. While emphasizing the mastery of fundamental learning content, the key was to promote the ability to learn and think for oneself, as symbolized by establishing a new comprehensive study time (*sōgōteki na gakushu no jikan*) to provide a less-pressured education. However, this reduction in class hours and the careful selection of educational content led to a decline in academic performances. The results of the 2003 PISA revealed issues such as the fact that the time spent on the home study was the lowest among participating countries and that reading comprehension was on par with the average. In response, the Ministry of Education announced the 'recommendations for Learning', in which the term 'solid academic ability' was used for the first time. Then, it was recommended that additional learning contents not be included in the Courses of Study based on the actual situation of the students. This event was the so-called PISA shock. Then, securing 35 hours of weekly class time became a standard afterwards.

In 2017, The Guidelines for the course of study, fully implemented in 2020, focused on responding to changes in society. Changes in the various subjects are discussed in Chaps. 6–10. As a historical summary, Table 4.1 provides the total

Table 4.1 Class hours in each course of study for elementary school

Year	Grade						Total class hours
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	
1947	770	840	875	980–1050	1050–1190	1050–1190	5565–5915
1951	870	870	970	970	1050	1050	5780
1958	816	875	945	1015	1085	1085	5821 (↑)
1968	816	875	945	1015	1085	1085	5821
1977	850	910	980	1015	1015	1015	5785 (↓)
1989	850	910	980	1015	1015	1015	5785
1998	782	840	910	945	945	945	5367 (↓)
2008	850	910	945	980	980	9080	5645 (↑)
2017	850	910	980	1015	1015	1015	5785 (↑)

number of class hours under each curriculum revision since 1947. In 2017, the increase of 140 hours corresponds to the increase in classtime for foreign language, which was simultaneously restructured as the subject of English (Chap. 6).

4.4 The Incorporation of Active Learning into Japanese Compulsory Education

The term active learning was first introduced in the context of elementary and secondary education in Japan in the CCE report: *Integrated Reform of High School Education, University Education, and University Selection* (MEXT, 2014a, 2014b). Then, active learning began to be considered for use in higher education and subsequently in primary and secondary education. It was also during this year that the formal process began to revise the curriculum, following the regular cycle of one major revision approximately taking place every 10 years. The CCE deliberated for two years and published a report recommending the direction of curriculum change for elementary and secondary education. The latest revision to the course of study was based on this report (MEXT, 2016a). The report made numerous recommendations from new subjects to how schools and communities might collaborate to reduce the workload of the teacher. Spanning through all teaching would be a set of general principles. It was here that active learning was introduced.

MEXT added active learning as an example of a learning method that fosters necessary qualities such as the willingness to work independently and as a team, and the ability for students to find their interests through discussions and hands-on learning. It was intended to indicate the future concept of active learning and specific measures to be taken in line with the development of students, especially on how to measure and evaluate the learning outcomes of students through the process of problem-solving. This report utilized an expanded phrase to refer to active learning:

'realization of independent, interactive and deep learning (from the perspective of active learning)'. The use of this phrase adds further substance to the concept of active learning, modifying it to align with MEXT plans for implementation in compulsory education in Japan. Figure 4.1 shows the overview of how active learning is situated in the curriculum design.

The 2016 report made a series of recommendations on active learning and how it might be incorporated into the course of study. It was recommended that the requirements for active learning be incorporated into the 'general provisions' of the provision to clearly communicate that their provision runs through the curriculum. Moreover, examples should be given and provisions should be incorporated into granular sections to make the planning process easier at each school. The first matter to resolve was the meaning of active learning, or its expanded form of 'independent, interactive and deep learning'. Figure 4.2 shows the official vision of proactive, interactive, and deep learning.

The same report also defines the three key terms:

- Independent learning. Learning in which the child works persistently with a long-term goal, while relating it to the direction of his or her career development, and reflects on his or her own learning activities to connect them to the next step.
- Interactive learning. Learning to broaden and deepen one's own thinking through collaboration among children and dialogue with teachers, staff, and people in the community.

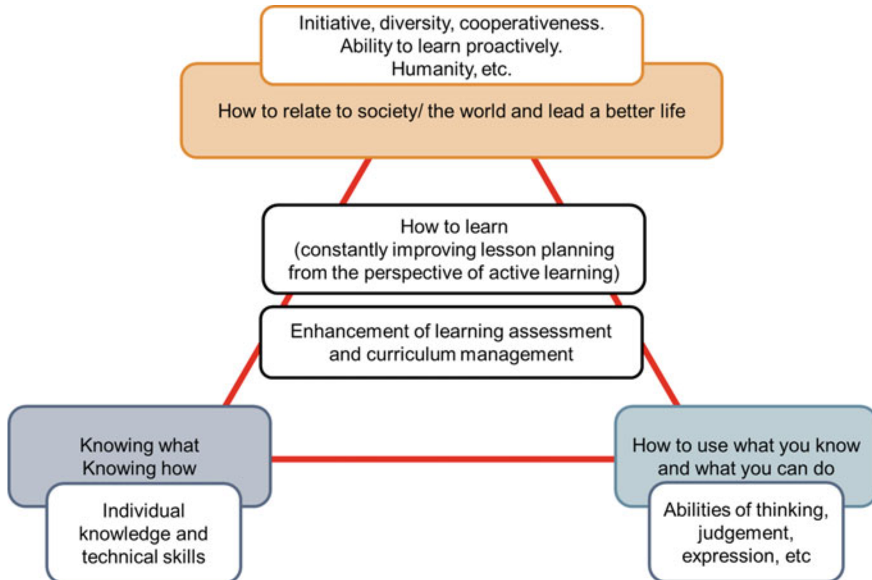

Fig. 4.1 Concepts for Japanese curriculum design based on the three pillars of qualities and abilities that should be fostered (MEXT, 2015)

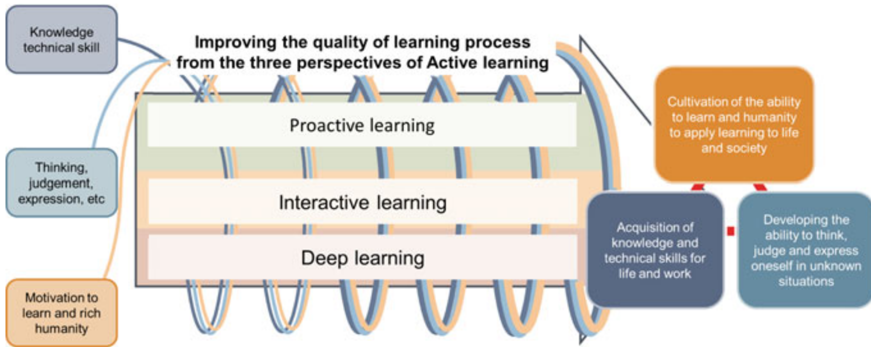

Fig. 4.2 Improving the learning process from the three perspectives of active learning (MEXT, 2016b)

- Deep learning. In the process of learning through acquisition, utilization, and exploration, children learn to relate knowledge to each other for deeper understanding, to formulate ideas by examining information carefully, to find solutions to problems, and to create based on their thoughts and ideas, while using the 'ways of seeing and thinking' that correspond to the characteristics of each subject.

The report further clarified that content should be taught to children for understanding in relation to their lives and the state of society, that they acquire the qualities and abilities required in the future, and that they continue to learn actively throughout their lives. In order for children to acquire knowledge and skills that they can use in their lives, the report suggests that they develop the ability to think, judge, and express themselves so that they are enabled to cope with unknown situations; and develop the motivation to learn and to enrich the humanity, which both enable them to apply their learning development to their lives and to society. Here, 'rich humanity' means developed dispositions of interest in social relations and cooperation with others, or development as a person and in relation to other people. It is important that during the learning process, children can make independent connections between the meaning of learning and their own lives and the state of society. They can expand their thinking through dialogue with diverse people. Another goal is to deepen learning so that students can realize that acquired qualities and abilities can be used to deal with various issues, rather than merely memorizing knowledge.

The quality of learning, focusing on how children learn, must be continuously improved. It is important to share perspectives on how to improve daily teaching and activate efforts to achieve 'independent, interactive and deep learning' as described previously. However, this is not just a matter of formally introducing interactive lessons or improving techniques aimed at a particular type of teaching. Rather, it is intended to draw out a variety of high-quality learning based on the interests of each child and according to their individuality.

The intention of the CCE to effect real changes in classroom pedagogy is clear from their references to curriculum management, which signals the increased directorial leadership of principals and other school leaders. The report suggests that:

> Learning in schools is underpinned by the efforts of individual teachers to improve pedagogies and teaching materials. These innovations and efforts are directed towards the pursuit of children's learning.

The importance of children learning independently and collaboratively in the classroom and in groups has been pointed out in previous discussions on educational methods, and many practices have been developed. The fact that the National Assessment of Academic Achievement and Learning included questions on 'application' (so-called 'B' questions, or 'PISA-style questions'), to test a certain kind of understanding, had a significant impact on teaching in primary and secondary schools.

What can be understood in this process of introducing and implementing active learning into Japanese compulsory education is that learning is not understood as simply one pedagogy but rather what is required is diverse, high-quality teaching that meets the new needs of students and society in Japan. The process also encouraged a re-examination of the nature of learning from what qualities and abilities could potentially be nurtured. This discussion has been ongoing since the conception of 'zest for living' and *yutori* education. However, active learning includes more self-motivated activity from students to foster self-learning, and also seeks to evaluate understanding, assessment, and attitudes such as self-motivation (see Chap. 5). On the other hand, the original definition of active learning typified by Bonwell and Eison (1991) was transformed into a Japanese original version of 'independent, interactive and deep learning'.

4.4.1 The Disappearance of Active Learning from the Course of Study

The term active learning has been combined with the concept of 'proactive, interactive, and deep learning' since the middle stages of its introduction to Japanese compulsory education, and there is less visibility of active learning as a term standing alone in the most formal document from MEXT. Does this mean that the introduction of active learning in Japan has failed? It seems not to be the case. The term continued to be used extensively in informal settings and in theoretical and practitioner books. Moreover, MEXT continued to associate these partially equivalent terms with less formal documents. Some media articles explained this as the undesirability of a 'vague' or 'foreign' term (e.g., Natsume, 2017). More likely, MEXT were working to escape the theoretical baggage that comes with a perhaps *overly*-defined umbrella term, with sources in many contexts, to a 'fresh slate' of its own making. Moreover, the term was not entirely discarded. For example, there is an interesting mention of active learning as late as 2019. The CCE report *Comprehensive reform of the work*

style in schools to build a sustainable school leadership and management system for a new era of education provides that:

> The main and most important duty of a teacher is to teach and give a quality lesson. It is essential to prepare for the class by researching and preparing teaching materials. From the perspective of active and interactive learning (active learning), which is emphasized in the new curriculum guidelines, the lesson preparation is crucial for improving students' learning. (MEXT, 2019: 71)

What can be assumed is that 'proactive, interactive and deep learning' is an adjusted and translated version of active learning into the Japanese language and context, which retains many of the features expected of the call toward student-centred learning, but also provides scope for MEXT to alter the meaning of the term and sidestep incompatible sources. In short, active learning is incorporated into Japan's compulsory education system under a slightly different name.

4.5 Criticism and Opposition to Active Learning

At primary and secondary schools in Japan, teachers had been committed to creating an active and interactive classroom long before introducing the concept of active learning, especially at elementary school. Many critics, opposed to the sudden top-down implementation of active learning without much discussion or inputs from field educators, argue that the policy is simply not necessary. Shibata, for example, draws attention to the long-standing advocacy for cooperative learning in elementary and junior high schools long before the introduction of active learning in Japan (2016). Tanaka, a scholar in educational methodology in Japan, is not critical of active learning but notes that there was no innovativeness in active learning for its emphasis on the active and collaborative nature of learning (2016). Those opinions are supported by Imamiya's work to collect examples of active and interactive classroom facilitation before introducing active learning in Japan (2016).

There are inevitably limitations and inadequacies in the existing practices of Japanese compulsory education. However, it seems reasonable to assume that various innovative and creative techniques with student-centred and inquiry-based learning occurred prior to the government's official implementation of active learning. This seems not to be acknowledged in the introduction of active learning. For example, the CCE report *Comprehensive reform of the work style in schools to build a sustainable school leadership and management system for a new era of education* (MEXT, 2019) suggests that 'the [planning] burden may be reduced in reference to practical examples of best practice made available by the National Institute for School Teachers and Staff Development or through online training programs tailored to individual tasks for improving lessons'. This intends to provide support, but also reveals the way in which MEXT ignores the good practices happening already in schools.

In addition, long work hours and overwhelming workloads on elementary, junior high school and high school teachers have been seen as deeply problematic, as has

the high turnover rate among compulsory school teachers. Some 'typical tasks that have been carried out by schools and teachers' are summarized in the report under three categories (MEXT, 2019: 61):

- Community contributions outside of school
  - Safety Measures on the way to and from school
  - Patrolling after school hours and at night and responding when students get convicted with any kind of crime
  - Collection and management of school fees
  - Liaison and coordination with local volunteers
- School work, but not necessarily carried out by teachers
  - Responses to survey inquiries
  - Taking care of students during the daily break times
  - Cleaning and basic maintenance of the school
  - Club activities
- Tasks for teachers but can be reduced
  - Supervising school lunchtime
  - Class preparation
  - Assessment and grading
  - Preparation and organization of school events
  - Career guidance
  - Consulting with students and families in need of support

All of those tasks used to be considered constituent parts of the teacher's role. The already heavy burden of teachers' work and a feeling of policy fatigue contribute to a reluctance of teachers to embrace new policies wholeheartedly, regardless of the quality of the policy. The solution offered by the report is for a greater division of labour among other staff, community members, and local government.

4.6 Active Learning in Practice

Finally, I would like to introduce some of the active learning practices that are taking place in Japan. These two case examples were collected during visitations to public elementary and junior high schools in Japan by Shin'ichi Mizokami (2021), one of Japan's leading scholar-practitioners on active learning (Mizokami, 2007, 2011, 2017).[1] As best practices, these are not intended to illustrate how active learning is in Japanese schools but at least one perspective on how it might or should be from the perspective of expert practitioners who influence teachers by explaining how to do active learning (Bamkin, 2021).

[1] The author is grateful to Dr Shin'ichi Mizokami for his kind permission to reproduce the photographs below.

4.6.1 Case Study 1: Junior High School/Geography

Nurturing students to deepen their learning independently and interactively: Thinking about natural disasters preparation:

Grade:	2nd-year junior high school (13–14-year-olds)
Subject:	Geography
Number of students:	31 (17 males, 14 females)
Class time:	50 min

Context of the class:

A recent typhoon severely had damaged the area of this school, with the river overflowing. After the incident, the school cooperated with the social welfare council, the head of the local disaster prevention committee, and other local people involved in disaster prevention efforts, to provide opportunities for students to learn about natural disasters and how to respond to them as a community. This class was provided for second-year students who attended that workshop in the previous year. The aim was to improve their ability to respond to natural disasters and acquire related skills.

1. Review of the previous lesson (3 min)
   The past year's workshop review used a PowerPoint presentation with visuals to describe the disaster and its and aftermath.
2. Past disasters in this area and suggested goals for the future (4 min)
   Group reflection on the past disaster in the area invited students to participate in class learning. The goals were presented for the whole class in three places: the upper left corner of the blackboard, the electronic whiteboard, and the worksheets so that students could return to the goals at any time. Figure 4.3 shows how the teacher used the electronic blackboard to provide the lecture and also to summarize the class discussion.
3. Assign roles and hold a family meeting stimulation (20 min)
   This simulation was facilitated as a family meeting to prepare for a natural disaster. Scenarios were changed for each group. In addition, students were asked to assign among their groups the individual roles of family members.
   The discussion period that followed worked to deepen their thoughts and then the groups summarized their conclusions on a mini-whiteboard. Figure 4.4 shows how individual work deepened students' understating. Then, during the presentation period, students could use this whiteboard to deliver their thoughts to peers.

Fig. 4.3 Teacher using the electronic blackboard to present. http://smizok.net/education/subpages/aAL00076(Fujiyama_Sonobe).html

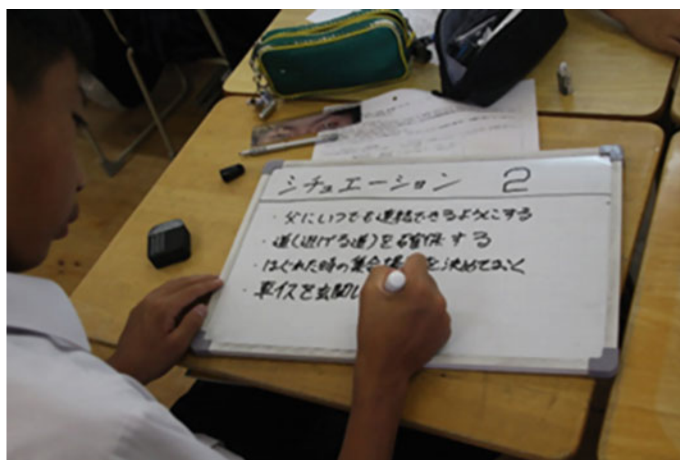

Fig. 4.4 Student summarizing on a mini-whiteboard. http://smizok.net/education/subpages/aAL00076(Fujiyama_Sonobe).html

4. Exchange the results of the family meeting (12 min)
   The mini-whiteboards filled out by each group were hung on the main blackboard in front of the whole class, and presenters from each group put forward opinions that came out from their discussion. Each presenter was instructed to take and hold their mini-whiteboard, look at everyone, then speak.

   Opinions expressed by the groups were shown on the blackboard using strips of paper or were written on the board so that the points arising from

the discussion were clear. The use of strips of paper was also for structuring time.

After the exchange, the students used the electronic blackboard to organize the items that should be considered when holding a family meeting for actual natural disasters.

5. Learning about the 'three aids' of disaster prevention (self-support, mutual-support, and public-support), reviewing the hazard map and explaining natural disaster mitigation. (6 min)
   Using the electronic whiteboard, the teacher explained the concept of the three aids to students.

   Students were also shown a disaster prevention map and learnt about disaster prevention efforts already underway in the area. The disaster prevention map was only introduced and not explained in greater detail, but was later posted in the school hallway for students to review.

   Finally, the teacher raised awareness of the importance of natural disaster mitigation.
6. Summary (5 min)
   Students summarized what they had learned and thought about in a 100-word document to organize their learning process. Figure 4.5 shows the final individual reflection worksheet.

Teacher and Observer (Mizokami)'s reflection on the class

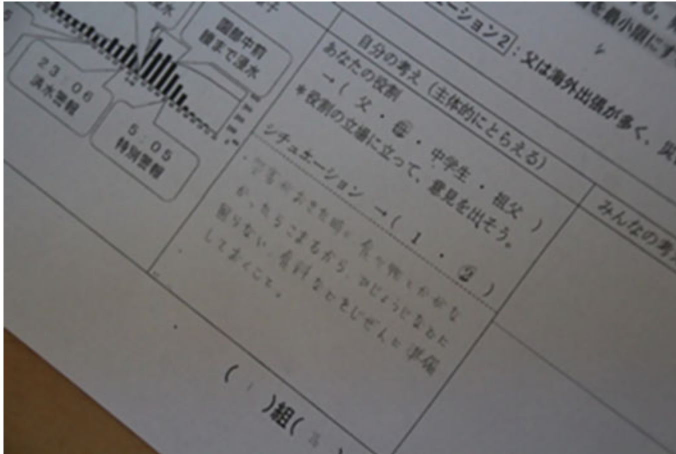

Fig. 4.5 Worksheet (individual). http://smizok.net/education/subpages/aAL00076(Fujiyama_Sonobe).html

Results

By incorporating group work in study groups (3 to 4 students) into the presentation and a discussion with the whole class after, it was possible to create a discussion format that allowed opinions to be exchanged smoothly.

Use of the mini-whiteboard made it possible to summarize and post everyone's opinions so that everyone's views were highlighted equally.

Students were able to make their presentations in a respectful manner to the audience, facing everyone and showing the mini-whiteboard as well as performing the 'rei (Japanese bow)' greeting at the beginning and end of their presentations.

The students' attitude toward learning was beginning to develop, and they became ready to learn further about the disaster response outside of the class.

Challenges

The presenter's voice was too low, making it difficult for everyone to understand.

Another issue was that the role of moderator should have been given to students instead of a teacher to better facilitate class discussions.

Even though each group had active conversations overall, the depth of exchanging of opinions taking place tended to stay at the surface level.

Instead of covering this much content in a singular session, it would have been better to focus on one theme for students to think deeply about, with more activities to deepen their own thoughts after learning about the ideas of others.

The theme of this class was 'establish a class experience that enabled independent and interactive deep learning among students' with the deep listening attitude and an individual → group → individual learning style. However, there was still insufficient ingenuity in the approach to further move toward deep learning. The teacher who organized this class emphasized the perspective of learning from the past and thinking about how to prepare for future natural disasters, a worthwhile venture when considering Japan's history with natural disasters. Through thinking about disasters that had occurred in their community, heightening relevance, the class aimed to deepen the understanding of disaster response among students, with a hope that they would play leading roles in future natural disaster situations.

4.6.2 Case Study 2: Elementary School/Science

Nurturing Children as Learners = Active Learning, the students are now ready to learn

Target Class

Class:	Elementary school 6th grade (11–12-year-olds)
Subject:	Science
Number of students:	32

Aims and principles of the class

For students to gain a way of solving any problem they encounter by noticing, feeling, and by expanding their thoughts. These were the points consistently addressed in the classroom:

1. Cherish each student's awareness, thoughts, judgements, and questions in every situation.
   The class teacher aimed to create a class where students could naturally come up with topics they wanted to learn. However, sometimes students were challenged to come out of their comfort zone with an intentional push from the teacher to talk about their perceptions and feelings. Questions such as 'what do you notice?' and 'what do you think about that opinion?' were asked repeatedly in the classroom.
2. Foster the ability to notice, deepen one's thinking, and sit with one's question through writing
   Students were given many opportunities to write with attention about various things in their daily lives and studies. The emphasis was placed on nurturing students' writing abilities with an intentional attempt to deepen their thoughts on their surroundings.
3. Emphasis on listening skills
   Students were expected to develop the ability to listen with both attention and intention as a step toward the following discussion period. Commonly asked questions in the classroom were 'let's repeat what ____ just said', and 'what do you think about what ____ just said?' and 'what do you think about what ____ said?'
4. Teaching → Acquiring
   Real learning does not happen simply by teaching students: this was the premise of the class's structure and curriculum. For example, in a science course, it is easy to teach that a substance is acidic if a blue litmus paper turns red. However, for students to truly understand the system behind it, they need to test various methods to find the commonality of aqueous solutions and try them out by themselves.

Class setting

The structure and flow of the class were designed so that students could understand the lesson on their own rather than just simply memorize information. The course topic was the working of leverage (weight of objects × distance from the fulcrum) and the class was facilitated to deepen their awareness about subjects as the class progressed gradually.
The teacher waited to summarize the equation on the blackboard toward the end of the course. Until then, students were asked to summarize what they found out, what they noticed, what they thought, what they didn't understand, and what they wondered. In the middle period of the class, the students were provided with step-by-step tasks to discover the regularity of the balance between objects. In the last period, the students were given the opportunity to use their knowledge to

create questions for each other. By doing so, they were able to understand this knowledge more clearly. Then, the students examined the tools around them and explained their functions using their knowledge so far.

The whole class was structured in three stages: 1) experiencing, 2) pursuing, and 3) writing reports using the obtained knowledge (Takada 2017).

Reflection

For most of the class time, students would facilitate discussion and simultaneously deepen their thoughts. In this process, they would listen to their friends' shared ideas holistically and mindfully (ears, body, and mind). In addition, speakers tried to convey ideas to their peers by repeating and rephrasing in an effort to communicate better. The teacher repeatedly emphasized the importance of expressing one's thoughts and opinions without considering if they were right or wrong. The class successfully created an atmosphere where students expressed themselves without hesitation, which was understood as the first step for students to learn independently and interactively.

Students were asked what would happen if they added one weight on each side from the previous balanced state in the question period. Students came up with both a multiplication method guess and add-sum method guess. Some students also suggested some non-calculative ways of thinking. While going through several opinions, the students realized that it would be impossible to explain the logic of working leverage (weight of objects × distance from the fulcrum) with the add-sum method. However, some students could not understand even after listening to their peers' opinions. Therefore, the discussion continued until those students understood, with support from peers.

In their reflections toward the end of the class, students were asked questions such as 'What did we learn from today's lesson?' 'What did you notice?' 'What did you learn by connecting the previous day and today's lessons?'

As a summary of the class, students presented keywords of what they had discussed in the group. Next, each student wrote down what they had learned in a notebook, rather than having the teacher summarize it for them. Then, the teacher checked each child's understanding, and for those who did not understand, the teacher supported them.

Teacher and Observer (Mizokami)'s reflection on the class:

Results

Students had gained the ability to carry on with the 45-min class without hindrance. They were able to add to and connect each other's comments. In addition, some of the children began to try to deepen their ideas from others' comments.

Challenges

In this lesson, the teacher might have been too fixated on making students answer the question ('can the multiplication method or the multiplication method explain the working of leverage?') Since this was supposed to be the last lesson about the

weight of an object, the teacher consequently tried to make sure students gained that knowledge without future delays. When students were asked to write down what they found out from the experiment and what they thought, it seemed that they realized on their own that the weight of objects could not be explained by the adding up method. Therefore, the inquiry from the teacher might not have been needed.

4.6.3 Discussion and Issues

4.6.3.1 Time Allocation

Time distribution is often pointed out as a complication by teachers who try to implement active learning into their class facilitation (Mizokami, n.d.). For example, in the science class of case study two for sixth grade, the words and concepts of the fulcrum, force point and action point (weight of objects $\times$ distance from the fulcrum) were things students needed to acquire as knowledge. On the other hand, there was a requirement for other skills to be developed: the ability to listen to peers' ideas, explain ideas logically, summarize thoughts, and to solve problems in one's own way. As stated in the reflection section, due to a lack of time, the last part of the lesson could not be fully incorporated into the individual student's learning. Within the limited class time (50 min), it was important to balance the time distribution between lecturing and deepening students' own thinking.

It is vital to save space for students' unforeseen questions and improvised activities. Individual teachers can be creative in their class facilitation, but also the amount of content assigned to each grade in the course of study may be adjusted to provide enough space for improvised lessons unique to each classroom. Furthermore, the two teachers in the case studies took fascinating actions for their classes' preparation and facilitation. However, the previously mentioned labour distribution within schools can also create a barrier for overwhelmed teachers who wish to put time and effort into doing additional work on top of the contents they already have to teach.

4.6.3.2 Creating a Genuinely Safe and Courageous Classroom Culture

In case study 2, it was pointed out as one of the challenges faced that: 'Even though each group had active conversations, the depth of the opinion exchanges tended to stay at the surface level'. There are many ways to understand this kind of peer/classroom dynamic, and often it's a combination of multiple factors. However, it is still clear that in creating a classroom culture to cherish the process of understanding concepts instead of simply demonstrating the correct answer, the roles of teachers (knowledge transferer) and students (knowledge receiver) should shift toward a more collaborative and equal enterprise. Furthermore, impacts of cultural and social norms must be critically reflected on in order to create a genuinely safe and courageous classroom

culture (Ichikawa, 2020). For example, some cultural and social norms not unique to, but commonly held in Japan: respecting harmony, peer-pressure, playing assigned roles, reading between the lines, etc. can have some influence on classrooms trying to practice active learning in an authentic and innovative way. The importance of creating a safe and courageous classroom culture as a foundation of active learning is more important in Japan compared to the West, where speaking up and expressing one's opinion are generally encouraged and affirmed first and foremost before the accuracy or persuasiveness of the content (Ichikawa, 2020). Creating a classroom culture in which the process is valued rather than the answer itself is the foundation necessary to build a better classroom environment, which requires courage and trust among students and teachers to step out of the safe and predetermined road and take an unknown path together beyond what is framed by manuals and rules and based on what is written in textbooks.

4.7 Conclusion

Active learning was largely welcomed by educators across Japan. However, the extent to which it is a new concept in Japanese compulsory education is a matter for debate. Some educators have argued that classroom practice that fulfils many of the aims of active learning can already be found in Japanese schools.

Pedagogical methods grounded in the concept of active learning have been adopted naturally in compulsory education in Japan, especially in primary education, for a long time, compared to universities where the traditional format has mainly been one-way lectures.

The named practice of active learning was introduced into Japanese compulsory education in the midst of an increasing number of class hours, which consequently increased critique of the overwhelming workloads of teachers. These circumstances might have created some difficulties for teachers attempting to balance the authentic implementation of active learning while also covering course materials assigned by the course of study. In addition, some of the cultural and social norms of Japan may require a more attentive and proactive classroom culture setting in order to truly practice authentic and meaningful active learning methodology.

Active learning is not a proposal for a new educational approach that has never existed before, but rather a way of structuring and sharing educational methods that individual teachers have used in the field in creative and innovative ways. Despite these twists and turns, the development of Japanese-style active learning is expected to continue in future.

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Chapter 5
Evaluation and Assessment to Improve Student Outcomes

Naohiro Iida

Abstract This chapter describes the requirements of the Ministry of Education on what they have defined as the primary challenges Japanese schools must address in developing, implementing, and sustaining a comprehensive approach to assessing and evaluating learning outcomes under the new course of study, and iterates how MEXT envisages schools might respond to these requirements. While evaluation and assessment ensure accountability, the primary focus of assessment and evaluation, as provided in the course of study, is on ensuring all actions improve student outcomes. Although elementary and secondary schools in Japan have made significant strides in assessing student learning outcomes, the Ministry identifies a number of challenges that must be addressed in order to fully realize the anticipated benefits of these efforts.

Keywords Assessment and evaluation · Curriculum management · University entrance examination · MEXT · Assessment for growth.

5.1 Introduction

This chapter[1] describes the requirements of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) on what they have defined as the primary challenges Japanese schools must address in developing, implementing, and sustaining a comprehensive approach to assessing and evaluating learning[2] outcomes under the new course of study (COS), and iterates how MEXT envisages schools might respond to these requirements. While evaluation and assessment

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[2] This chapter uses the terms assessment and evaluation interchangeably, following the Japanese term *hyōka*, which encompasses both English terms.

N. Iida (✉)
Institute for the Advancement of Higher Education and Graduate School of Education, Hokkaido University,
Kita 17, Nishi 8, Kita Ward, Sapporo, Sapporo, Japan
e-mail: niida@high.hokudai.ac.jp

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ensure accountability, the primary focus of assessment and evaluation, as provided in the course of study, is on ensuring all actions improve student outcomes. Although elementary and secondary schools in Japan have made significant strides in assessing student learning outcomes, MEXT identifies several significant challenges that must be addressed in order to fully realize the anticipated benefits of these efforts. This chapter discusses the requirements determined and the critique recognised by the Ministry of Education. More critical perspectives will be adopted in subsequent chapters.

Finally, issues of assessment are inevitably connected with the university examinations which determine for students their future learning and careers prospects via assessment. As such, this chapter examines issues related to the evaluation of students' learning outcomes from the perspective of university entrance examination reform, which is unfolding concurrently to the revision of the course of study. University entrance examinations have a great influence on assessment practices in primary and secondary schools. The qualities and abilities cultivated in primary and secondary education, that is, the learning outcomes achieved by learners, must be properly evaluated by university entrance examinations. Recent university entrance examination reforms have followed the new course of study in aiming toward a 'high school - university connection' (*kōdai setsuzoku*) and 'multifaceted and comprehensive evaluation' (*tamenteki sōgōteki hyōka*). This aims to ensure that the diverse qualities, abilities, and learning outcomes that students have acquired through subject learning, as well as various other activities in secondary school, are comprehensively evaluated, thereby connecting high school education with university education, and achieving a smooth transition. However, some policies that were set out as foundational to the university entrance examination reform have since failed. Under these circumstances, there is a sense of urgency in examining how to properly evaluate the qualities, abilities, and learning outcomes that students have acquired through primary and secondary education in university entrance examinations.

Based on the above observations, this chapter first considers the purpose of the revision of the new course of study and examines its key pedagogical concepts in relation to assessment and evaluation. After that, the qualities and abilities that primary and secondary schools are expected to develop in learners, that is, the characteristics of the learning outcomes that students are expected to acquire, will be clarified based on the course of study, related policy documents, and other materials. Finally, connections between the course of study, and university entrance examinations are discussed. This illuminates the contemporary challenges currently being addressed by MEXT, its recognition of critique, and the measures for improvement currently under discussion.

5.2 Background

The course of study is revised about once every ten years in anticipation of social changes such as globalization, computerization, and technological innovation. The latest (2017) course of study will be implemented from 2020 at elementary school, 2021 at junior high school and 2022 at high school.

The beginning sections of the course of study stipulate 'general provisions' regarding considerations for the entire curriculum. In addition to class hours these general provisions roughly define the goals and handling of contents. The 2017 curriculum included a greater amount of detail on classroom pedagogy and on assessment than previous revisions. The *Points for Revision of the Course of Study for Kindergarten, and Elementary and Junior High School* (MEXT, 2017c) lists the following three points as the basic concepts of this revision of the course of study.

- 'Based on the Fundamental Law of Education, School Education Law and other laws and regulation, and based on the practice and accumulation of school education in Japan, [education] will further develop the qualities and abilities for children to enter future society (*miraishakai wo kirihiraku*). As a curriculum open to society (*shakai ni hirakareta kyōiku katei*) the vision for what qualities and abilities are required of children is shared with society and works to cooperate with society.
- While maintaining the framework of the current course of study and educational content that emphasizes the balance between the acquisition of knowledge and skills and the development of thinking ability, judgment ability, expressive ability, etc., the changes bolster the understanding regarding knowledge is further improved, and nurture solid academic ability.
- [School education] fosters a rich humanity and a healthy body by enhancing moral education, emphasizing experiential learning activities, and enhancing guidance on physical education and health.' (MEXT, 2017c; underlining in original)

The idea of a 'curriculum open to society' is considered to be the basis of all important matters in the new course of study and it indicates the desire for schools and the public to create an improved society through better school education and to try to realize it by promoting cooperation, while clarifying how to learn the necessary educational content and what kind of qualities and abilities can be acquired at each school (MEXT, 2017e). In other words, the following three points can be cited as the characteristics of the 'curriculum open to society' (ibid.).

1. To create an improved society through better school education with a broad view of the current state of society and the world, and to share that goal with society through the curriculum.
2. To clarify and nurture in the curriculum what qualities and abilities are required for children who will create the future society, who will face and interact with society and the world, and who must open up their own lives.
3. In implementing the curriculum: utilizing the human and physical resources of regions and cooperating with social education that utilizes after school and

> Saturdays, etc., and aiming for school education operated not exclusively by the school; to realize these aims while sharing and cooperating with society.

Within this framework, the course of study continues to use the term ‘zest for living’ (*ikiru chikara*) to determine an education which encompasses: (1) solid academic ability, (2) rich virtue, and (3) physical health. New to this revision is the separate definition of the ‘three pillars of qualities and abilities’ (*shishitsu nōryoku no mittsu no hashira*), which are important to understanding the philosophy of the new course of study in relation to previous revisions: (1) knowledge and skills, (2) abilities to think, judge, and express thoughts using appropriate language, and (3) an attitude orientated to learning (*manabi ni mukau chikara*) and humanity.

Active learning is presented through all documents as the key approach to pedagogy for the new course of study, as outlined in Chapter 4. It is emphasized that ‘independent, interactive and deep learning’ does not mean neglecting the acquisition of knowledge, and that it is necessary to develop qualities and abilities in a well-balanced manner. Importance is placed on ‘how to learn’. This might be realized by implementing ‘classes that give students the ability to work persistently with a given perspective’ (MEXT, 2016b, 2020b: 9) and encouraging children and students to ‘look back on their own learning, looking at what is to be learned next and [relating it to] life’. Simultaneously, the course of study aims to promote children’s and student’s interest in learning, collaboration between children, and dialogue with teachers, staff, and local people.

The new curriculum presents approaches to curriculum management that look to improve the quality of educational activities in a curriculum ‘open to society’ (MEXT, 2020a). This exhorts school administrators to ensure continuous improvement of a school’s education, for teachers to collaborate in achieving these aims and to cooperate with the community to improve school education. Curriculum management seeks the cooperation of the community by combining the educational resources of the school, such as people, goods, money, information, and time, with the cultural and material resources of the community. Aspirations for the evaluation of educational activities is also contained in the notion of curriculum management, giving weight in particular to the plan-do-check-action cycle, based on the actual conditions and characteristics of the school and the region. The course of study provides the following overview of curriculum management:

> ‘Each school should strive to properly grasp the actual conditions of students, schools, and communities and assemble the educational content necessary to realize the purpose and goals of education from a cross-curricular perspective, evaluate the implementation status of the curriculum and improve it, and improve the quality of educational activities in a systematic and planned manner based on the curriculum by securing the human or physical resources necessary for the implementation and improvement of the curriculum (hereinafter referred to as “curriculum management”)’. (MEXT, 2017a: 18)

Based on the above, an accompanying document (MEXT, 2017f) elaborates that curriculum management supports the requirements to: (1) assemble the contents of education necessary to realize the purpose and goals of education from a cross-curricular perspective, (2) evaluate the implementation status of the curriculum and

improve it, and (3) secure the human and physical resources for the implementation and improvement of the curriculum. It clarifies that these three points are just ‘means’, while the purpose of curriculum management is the ‘improvement of the quality of educational activities (classes) of each school in a systematic and planned manner based on the curriculum, which should be organized by appropriately grasping the actual conditions of children, schools, and communities’.

In addition to encouraging contributions from the local community, curriculum management exhorts schools to share curriculum plans with the community. The course of study provides that ‘when organizing the [school] curriculum, the educational goals of each school shall be clarified, and the basic policy regarding the organization of the curriculum shall be shared with the home and the community’ (MEXT, 2017a: 18–19).

Regarding the relationship between the three pillars and curriculum management MEXT provides that:

- ‘it is necessary to look over the goals and contents of specific subjects and class, and enhance cross-curricular learning in order to nurture, in particular, the qualities and abilities (language ability, information utilization ability, problem finding and solving ability, etc.) that form the basis of learning and the qualities and abilities that are required to respond to contemporary issues. It is also important to devise a balance between acquisition, use, and inquiry in a group of several classes such as a unit in order to enhance “proactive, interactive, and deep learning.”
- [it is necessary to] improve the quality of educational activities based on the curriculum and establish curriculum management to maximize the effect of learning as a whole through the appropriate allocation of educational content and time, the securing of the necessary human and physical resources, and improvement based on implementation status.’ (MEXT, 2017b, 2017c underlining in original)

In other words, one of the key goals of curriculum management is to enhance ‘independent, interactive and deep learning’.

Finally, curriculum management is framed within an assumption of decentralization, whereby the result of planning may vary—perhaps greatly—between schools or regions. The curriculum is built on the three pillars of (1) knowledge and skills, (2) abilities to think, judge, and express thoughts using appropriate language, and (3) an attitude oriented to learning. (The third pillar is sometimes expressed as ‘an attitude oriented toward independently engaging in learning’). However, the details—for example, which specific skills are considered central to the curriculum—is at the discretion of each school in line with the characteristics of the region, family, and children. Therefore, it is conceivable that differing evaluations will result in differing learning conditions. At the same time, even if the qualities and abilities are expressed similarly (for example, communication skills), the corresponding learning activities, contents, and evaluation methods may differ slightly or significantly between schools and regions. This variation and its implications will be a topic for research once the course of study has been implemented at all levels of schooling. In this revision of the course of study:

> ‘in order to nurture children’s development in knowledge, virtue, and body (“zest for living”) [...] all subjects and classes will be reorganized based on three pillars: (1) knowledge and

skills, (2) thinking ability, judgment ability, expressive ability, (3) ability toward learning, and humanity, etc.' (MEXT, 2017b, underlining in original)

As discussed in Chapter 4, the three pillars of qualities and abilities are intended to be utilized in society, which is undergoing drastic changes and will face unknown situations. In other words, in response to informationization and globalization, it is required that people must utilize their own qualities and abilities according to various situations and issues in each of the primary stated objectives of school education (solid academic ability, rich virtue, and physical health). As such, the object of assessment should be relevant to society. However, the object of assessment aimed for is the three pillars, with emphasis on the requirement that these three pillars are to be nurtured in a well-balanced manner. This is an important piece of context that has a great influence on the assessment methods discussed in the next section. In particular, the written test has long been the most common assessment tool and is often assumed to be the most efficient for school education, and even more so for entrance exams. However, this is not the mode best suited to assess all three pillars in a balanced way. Therefore, school education and entrance examinations are required to have measures that evaluate the second and especially the third pillars in a well-balanced manner. On the other hand, to properly evaluate the third pillar, 'ability toward learning', the question of how to tackle the issues related to validity and reliability is extremely important. This issue will be described in detail later.

5.3 Evaluation and Assessment of Learning Outcomes

This section details how the 'three pillars of qualities and abilities', overviewed above, should be evaluated according to the course of study. The final version of guidelines for assessment were developed and substantiated in 2019, more than a year after the promulgation of the course of study, but in advance of its actual implementation. The notice provides a description of the relationship between curriculum management and 'independent, interactive, and deep learning' with their respective evaluations.

> 'To integrate with instruction, evaluation plays an important role in steadily developing qualities and abilities in each subject through class improvement from the viewpoint of the "proactive, interactive, and deep learning" that is emphasized in the new course of study.' (MEXT, 2019a)

Numerous documents refer to 'the integration of teaching and assessment' or 'integrated instruction and evaluation' as an integral aspect of other requirements.

MEXT (2019a) summarizes the main points of improvement to assessment and evaluation as below:

1. In order to promote the integration of instruction and evaluation under the new course of study, which is organized under the three pillars of qualities and abilities of (1) 'knowledge and skills', (2) 'thinking capability, decisiveness, and expressiveness, etc.', and (3) 'ability to learn, humanity, etc.', the responsible

authority[3] is required to ensure the organization of assessment from each of three perspectives: (1) 'knowledge and skills', (2) 'thinking, decision-making, and expression', and (3) 'attitude toward independently engaging in learning'. It must be kept in mind that some aspects of the 'ability to learn, humanity, etc.' can be assessed and graded while others can be assessed [only] through [subjective] individual evaluation (*kojin-nai hyōka*).

2. Regarding the 'attitude to independently engage in learning', assessment should ascertain whether students are trying to adjust their learning in a persistent effort toward acquiring knowledge, skills, thinking capability, decisiveness, and expressiveness, etc., according to the purpose of each subject […].
3. When using the results of assessment, it is important to improve subsequent teaching based on the basis of both [a] students learning evaluated from each perspective, which assesses students' learning situation analytically in each subject and [b] [criterion-referenced] grading to assess the student learning each subject in reference to the whole curriculum.
4. In particular, regarding the evaluation of each subject in high schools and special needs schools […], it was clarified that both the assessment of the learning situation from multiple perspectives, which analytically assesses the learning situation, and the grading system that assesses this situation in a summative manner, should be conducted as a criterion-referenced procedure that evaluates the implementation status in light of the goals and contents of the subject set by the school according to the actual situation of the community and students, which are, in turn, based on the goals of each subject shown in the course of study.

The exception to criterion-referenced assessment is the subjective 'individual evaluation'. This is defined by the Ministry for aspects of learning related to the students' 'humanity', for which objective criterion-referenced assessment is deemed not appropriate. This subjective 'individual evaluation' is undertaken in reference to the individual student's learning progress against that student's performance at an earlier time. It is non-graded and seeks to develop the student's strengths. The broader vision of assessment from elementary to senior high school is summarized in Fig. 5.1.

Furthermore, the document (MEXT, 2019a) lists points for improvement for the goal of enhancing assessment, given from multiple perspectives, and for reducing the burden on teachers. The commitment to assessment from multiple perspectives in high schools is of particular interest because of its implications for selections informed by university entrance examinations, which are described in the next section. A later report (MEXT, 2021) describes the improvements as follows.

> 'It is necessary to positively evaluate the strong points and progress of students so that they can realize the significance and value of what they have learned. In addition, from the perspective of assessing the learning situation to realize the goals of each subject, it is necessary to evaluate the learning process and its results by devising evaluation scenes and methods while anticipating the unity of the content and time, such as the unit and its subject

[3] The relevant board of education in the case of public schools.

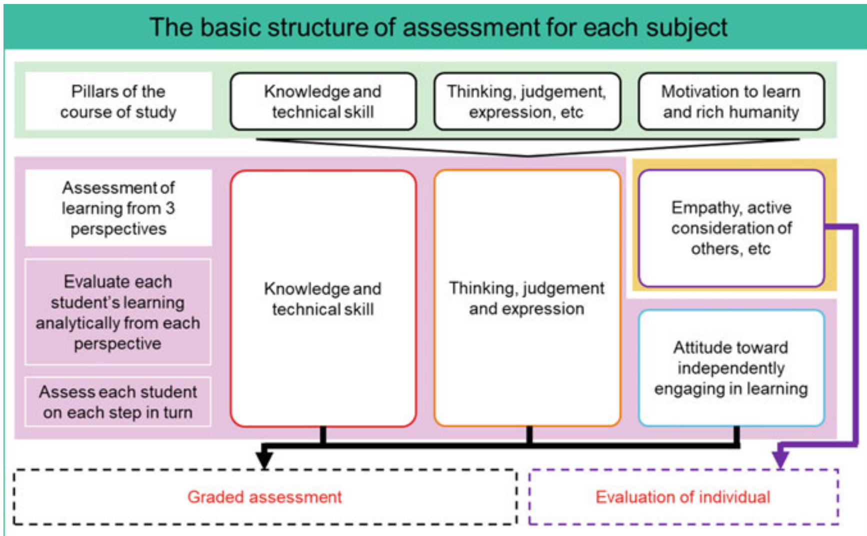

Fig. 5.1 The basic structure of assessment for each subject and classtime (NIER, 2019: 6)

> matter, improving instruction and students' motivation to learn, and using this to develop students' qualities and abilities'.

Such exhortations move the focus away from summative assessment for sorting students and toward formative assessment to enhance instruction and to aid student growth.

Learning evaluation, along with learning instruction (classes), is positioned here as

> 'the basis of schools' educational activities and plays a central role in curriculum management, which aims to improve the quality of educational activities in a systematic and planned manner based on the curriculum.' (ibid; underlining in original)

Further, in addition to the importance of formative assessment, this document states that 'it is important to assess the various outcomes to instruct and support the development of learning according to students' interests'.

Referring to various prior documents, the 'attitude to independently engage in learning' is elaborated from the perspective of evaluation:

> 'The "attitude to independently engage in learning" should be evaluated in two aspects: (1) attempts to make persistent efforts to acquire knowledge, skills, thinking capability, decisiveness, and expressiveness, etc.; and (2) attempts to adjust one's own learning while making the persistent efforts mentioned in (1). It is also necessary to evaluate the intentional aspect related to whether students are trying to learn while adjusting their own learning, such as understanding their own learning situation and making trial-and-error steps to proceed with learning.
>
> This viewpoint is important in nurturing "ability to learn, humanity, etc." and should also be given special importance for enhancing "individual optimal learning" and "collaborative learning."' (ibid.; underlining and bold in original).

The above points highlight that the ‘attitude to independently engage in learning’, which is closely related to the ‘ability to learn, humanity, etc.,’ is emphasized in the learning evaluation, taken from the ‘three pillars of qualities and abilities’ that the course of study dictates should be nurtured.

5.4 University Entrance Examination Reform and Issues Related to the Evaluation of the Ability to Learn

One point that must be considered, along with the revision of the course of study, when analyzing the assessment of students’ learning outcomes is the concurrent reform of university entrance examinations. The *Final Report of the High School–University Connection System Reform Council* (MEXT, 2016a) is an important policy document that determined the direction of university entrance examination reform in response to the adoption of a ‘high school–university connection’ philosophy. The policy originated in the Fourth Report of the second Education Rebuilding Council (Kantei, 2013), deliberated by the CCE (MEXT 2014) and formulated into a plan (MEXT 2015), which then culminated in the 2016 report. In addition to the reform of high school education discussed above, this report recommends improvements to university selection based on ‘multifaceted and comprehensive evaluation’ from the perspectives of the three elements of academic ability (*gakuryoku no san yōso*), which are closely related to the three pillars of qualities and abilities discussed in the previous section. It aims to clarify the correspondence between this evaluation method and the abilities required of applicants for admission, amending the evaluation method and selection process based on these abilities, and to introduce new tests and descriptive, short-answer questions to replace the current Common Test for University Entrance Examinations (*Daigaku nyūshi sentā shiken*), administered by the National Center Test for University Admissions. In a plan published shortly before the final draft of the course of study, the aim of the high school–university connection was stated:

> ‘to reform high school education, university education, and the selection of university entrants in an integrated manner. In the selection of university entrants, it aims to evaluate the abilities of students nurtured through high school education from multiple perspectives, and in university education, to further improve the outcomes of high school education. In high schools, it is necessary to organize, implement, and improve the curriculum and to enhance guidance and evaluation while facilitating the prospect of a high school–university connection.’ (MEXT, 2016b)

A later announcement in response to the report’s recommendations provided that:

> ‘improve the selection of entrants at each university through a multifaceted and comprehensive evaluation of the “three elements of academic ability” (“knowledge and skills”, “thinking capability, decisiveness, and expressiveness”, and “attitude to learning independently and collaboratively with diverse people”), based on the policy of acceptance of entrants in accordance with the policy of graduation certification and degree conferral and the policy of curriculum organization and implementation.’ (MEXT, 2017g)

In light of the above, *University Admissions Selection Implementation Guidelines 2021* stipulates that the:

> 'selection of entrants should be implemented based on the entrance examination method (hereinafter referred as "general selection" (*ippansenbatsu*) that evaluates and judges the abilities, motivation, aptitude, etc., of applicants in a multifaceted and comprehensive manner, using the contents of school reports, academic ability tests, essays, […] and materials provided by the applicants themselves, etc.' (MEXT, 2020b, 2020c: ch3).
>
> 'Materials provided by the applicants themselves, etc.' may include 'essays, interviews, debates, group discussions, presentations, records of various competitions and awards, and materials and interviews regarding students' outcomes in inquiry-based learning during the period for integrated study (*sōgōteki na gakushū no jikan*), etc.' (ibid.)

The above points are in line with the intended purpose of the revision of the course of study and the comprehensive evaluation of diverse qualities, abilities, and learning outcomes that have been examined thus far in this chapter. Based on the implementation guidelines, the Common Test for University Admissions *(Daigaku Nyūgaku Kyōtsū Tesuto*) was established in January 2021 in place of the former National Center Test for University Admissions.

Regarding the relationship between learning evaluations and university enrolment selection, MEXT (2019a) states that 'the evaluation of learning is conducted to improve learning and teaching, not only for the purpose of admissions selection. Therefore, when using the results of the evaluation of learning for admissions selection, it is important to take appropriate measures that consider the characteristics of learning evaluations'. In addition, regarding the improvement of university admissions selection, the notice states that 'the contents of the 2025 University Admissions Selection Implementation Guidelines for students who have studied under the new High School course of study will be announced in 2021'. According to a report entitled *the Ideal Method of Learning Evaluation for Children*, the following points should be kept in mind when considering the notice:

- 'In particular, in terms of the various activities conducted outside of school, each university should consider how to evaluate these activities by appropriately combining a report prepared by each school, the materials provided by the applicant, and the accompanying declarations to ensure that each student is evaluated in a multifaceted and comprehensive manner based on each university's admission policy, without being overly dependent on the school reports.
- From the perspective of the work style reform in schools, school reports created based on the cumulative guidance record (*shidōyōroku*) should also be examined after organizing the information required for admissions selection, including the use of the evaluation of the learning situation by viewpoint.' (MEXT, 2019a, 2019b).

The above notice describes 'multifaceted and comprehensive evaluation', and notes that it should be 'appropriately combined'. This stipulation arose from reflection on the fact that when traditional entrance exams were written, test-centered evaluations emphasized the knowledge learning aspect primarily. For example, the *Concept of the Revision of the course of study* states that:

> ‘in high school education, it is an issue that the memorization of trivial factual knowledge is considered in the selection of university entrants. In order to overcome such an issue, a high school–university connection reform, including the arrangement of important terms, will be promoted.’

This document also states that ‘learning content will not be reduced’ during the ‘establishing of new subjects and reviewing of goals and content based on the qualities and abilities required in the new era’ (MEXT, 2017d).

However, the problem with ‘multifaceted and comprehensive evaluation’ is the evaluation of the third pillar, that is, the ‘ability to learn, humanity, etc.’ (independence, collaboration, diversity). As mentioned above, the evaluation of the ‘attitude to independently engage in learning’ is positioned as an important element in the evaluation of learning, and the ‘ability to learn, humanity, etc.’ is closely related to the viewpoint of this evaluation. However, it is difficult to conduct the evaluation ensuring validity and reliability when selecting university entrants since it is technically difficult to evaluate attitudes, for example, when developing evaluation scales (see Chapter 11). Relatedly, it is also difficult to unify the evaluation criteria among teachers, schools, and regions, and to solve the problems of fairness and equity in the selection of university entrants, especially in light of decentralization and the expectation of school and regional diversity under the ‘curriculum open to society’.

MEXT considers it important to evaluate the qualities and abilities that must be assessed. The ‘JAPAN e-Portfolio’ initiative was established as a measure to do so. The e-Portfolio was an online system that allowed students to manage their own learning activities and achievements, while also allowing universities to use the information when selecting entrants. It was conceived as a tool for evaluating the ‘three elements of academic ability’, and in particular, the ‘attitude to learn independently and collaboratively with diverse people’. However, the operating license was revoked in 2020. The reason given by MEXT was that it was not possible to secure enough participant universities to adopt the system, and that there were restrictions on business operations (MEXT, 2020c, 2020d). If this system had been fully realized, it would have been possible for participating universities to obtain information related to the evaluation of the ‘attitude to learn independently and collaboratively with diverse people’ or the ‘ability to learn, humanity, etc.’ in a common format. However, it is expected that it will be difficult to actively promote the evaluation of these qualities and abilities during the selection of university entrants (especially in general selection) in the future because of the system’s failure.

Furthermore, descriptive (short-answer) questions in the Common Test for University Admissions, which has great significance for the evaluation of the second of the ‘three elements of academic ability’ and of the ‘three pillars of qualities and abilities’, ‘thinking capability, decisiveness, and expressiveness’, were initially intended to be included for two subjects—English and Mathematics, in January 2021. However, the introduction of these questions was postponed due to problems related to the objectivity of the scoring. Even before that, the use of the results of the English qualification/certification examinations, operated and implemented by various private companies, which was planned to be introduced in order to assess and evaluate the four English language skills, as opposed to only reading, was postponed. The

postponement of these policies caused confusion in the educational field and had a great impact on the evaluation of the diverse qualities and abilities and the learning outcomes of the students that the new course of study aimed to realize.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter examined the assessment and evaluation of student learning outcomes under the new course of study from the perspective of the qualities and abilities (three pillars) that this course of study aims to nurture in schools. MEXT sees it as necessary to practice the evaluation of diverse qualities and abilities, in various teaching and learning activities at school, based on the 'three pillars of qualities and abilities' stipulated by the new course of study, which underpin the three elements of assessment of knowledge and abilities (Fig. 5.1). Furthermore, the policy of a 'high school–university connection' has been promoted, and the development of the 'three elements of academic ability' and the practice of 'multifaceted and comprehensive evaluation' are important policy issues. How each school positions the evaluation of qualities and abilities, including the 'ability to learn', in its curriculum management is considered critical, as it implements continuous assessment and evaluation of students' learning outcomes through the PDCA cycle. Considered equally critical is how each university conducts its selection based on a well-balanced evaluation of the three elements of academic ability, including 'independently engaging in learning'. These considerations have a great influence on whether the revision of the course of study and the reform of the university entrance examination system will lead to a substantial improvement in the evaluation of students' learning outcomes.

However, some important facets of the university entrance examination reform, which is closely connected to revisions of the course of study, have failed. The introduction of descriptive (short-answer) questions, which were thought to play an important role in the evaluation of 'thinking capability, decisiveness, and expressiveness', and the recognition of private English certification were postponed. Moreover, the 'JAPAN e-Portfolio', which was believed to play an important role in improving school reports and evaluating 'independence', was discontinued after a very short period of operation. This is important because the requirements of the university entrance examination inevitably shape student and school practices. Yet the new course of study is being fully implemented at all educational stages without full alignment with the university entrance examinations.

It is also expected that various practices for assessing learning outcomes will be developed among teachers, schools, universities, and regions in the future. In this regard, the relatively imprecise definitions of the 'three pillars of qualities and abilities' and the closely related 'three elements of academic ability' can be seen as both a weakness and as a strength. Development of practices on the ground is partly welcomed, considering that various efforts can be implemented according to the characteristics (strengths) and policies of each school/university. Otherwise, there would be a risk of diminishing the original purpose and significance of the reform,

which adopts a respect for decentralization and diversity of provision. Nonetheless, such a system will produce a mixture of wheat and chaff, which is questionable from a quality assurance perspective. Differences between schools and between universities to evaluate differing qualities and abilities may also cause confusion among outside observers, such as guardians.

However, the objectives related to decentralization needs to be balanced with the fundamental question of the validity and reliability of evaluations, which is an important consideration when evaluating various qualities, abilities, and learning outcomes. For example, a problem of validity will arise if only a written test is used (or the weight given to the written test is excessively high) during selection when judged against the objective of assessing various qualities and abilities, including not only knowledge but also ‘thinking capability, decisiveness, and expressiveness’, ‘ability to learn’, and ‘independence, etc.’ The descriptive (short-answer) questions and ‘JAPAN e-Portfolio’ were the key policies that aimed to solve this problem. However, these policies were not realized because the reliability (objectivity) of evaluation caused consternation and were reconsidered at a late stage in the process. Consequently, the validity and reliability of evaluation are in a trade-off relationship in the university entrance examination. Thus, the debate can be reframed as one balancing validity with reliability. Within this debate, while it can be said that ‘the weight of the written test should not be excessively high’, there is no objective standard of excessiveness. Therefore, the key to the success or failure of any reform is how to secure ‘legitimacy’.

To nurture the three required qualities and abilities in a well-balanced manner and realize an authentic ‘high school–university connection’, information on various existing evaluation practices should be collected. Much pedagogical innovation occurs in schools designated for curriculum action research (*kyōiku katei kenkyū shiteikō*), and guidance is provided by the Ministry of Education. A database of such action research should also be created, or the current interface should be updated to a form that is easier to use than the current iteration. At this time, what is important is the correspondence between individual qualities/abilities and specific teaching/learning activities and evaluation contents/standards. A system that allows teachers, schools, and universities to cross the boundaries of institutions and educational stages, select and obtain information according to their own circumstances and characteristics, and use it to improve educational practices will be a necessity in the future.

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Chapter 6
Controversies Surrounding Revisions of the Course of Study for English Language 1989–2020

Robert W. Aspinall

Abstract There has been severe criticism of the English language curriculum in Japan's schools since at least the 1970s. An overemphasis on the study of grammar and written texts meant that generations of Japanese young people have finished school without the ability to communicate well in spoken English. Reforms throughout the period 1989–2020 were aimed at solving this problem. These reforms included introducing native-speaker Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs), introducing English language as a subject in elementary schools, and revising the university-entrance exam system. Each of these reform efforts met with serious practical difficulties at the implementation stage as well as push-back from important stakeholders. However, efforts to add tests of spoken English have failed to bear fruit. Efforts to introduce English to elementary schools have been hampered by a lack of qualified teachers. Many students continue to see English as a very difficult subject with little relevance to their daily lives.

Keywords Grammar-translation · *Yakudoku* · Textbooks · Oral communication · Active learning · Monolingual

6.1 Introduction

Of all the subjects in the school curriculum in Japan, English language is the one that has sustained the most criticism since at least the 1970s. There is a perception that the state education system has failed to prepare Japanese students sufficiently well to communicate with the outside world. The course of study (COS) guidelines announced in 2017 represented yet another attempt to improve the quality of foreign language teaching. They required a significant increase in the time allocated to English language study at elementary school. For grades five and six the number of mandatory English lessons was doubled and for grades three and four, mandatory

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R. W. Aspinall (✉)
Center for Global Education, Doshisha University, Karasuma-Higashi-iru, Imadegawa-dori, Kamigyo-ku, Kyoto 602-8580, Japan
e-mail: aspinall_robert@hotmail.com

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English was introduced for the first time. Another major change that was planned for 2020 was the introduction of a new testing regime for the common English language entrance exams required to enter many universities. The new regime would require the testing of all four skills of English as a foreign language—reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The intention was to produce a positive 'washback' effect to encourage a balanced study of all four skills throughout the time a student studies English in school. However, the introduction of the new system was first postponed to 2024, and—at the time of writing—looks like it will not be introduced at all.

There are also many practical obstacles that stand in the way of successful implementation. Proposed reforms do not always garner the full support of key stakeholders that are relied upon to implement the changes. This chapter will discuss the most controversial issues. It will explore practical concerns as well as ideological objections. An additional issue to be discussed in this chapter is the relationship between foreign language learning and inequality. In certain other nations, most notably those that are former colonies of Great Britain, aptitude at English language is a sign of high social status. This was never the case in modern Japan. However, there are concerns that this could change if the path to fluency in foreign language is only available to those with a sufficient amount of social, cultural or economic capital. This chapter will focus on efforts for reform and improvement made over the past thirty years by the Japanese government.

6.2 Background

'Consensus' is an important concept in Japanese society and culture. It is especially important in the administration of Japan's school system. There has long been a consensus on the need to improve English language education. To date, however, this has not been translated into satisfactory improvements. 'The history of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Japan for the last hundred years is often depicted deplorably as one of constant failure and confusion' (Saito, 2019: 211).

The post-war period was dominated by the grammar-translation (*yakudoku*) method in which English was taught as a written language, with the emphasis on understanding English words and phrases and being able to translate them into Japanese. Since very few Japanese people ever had a chance to talk with a foreigner this seemed like a logical approach, but it did not go unchallenged. In the 1970s, a debate took place over the future direction of English language education that was to have major consequences over subsequent years. The debate began in April 1974, when an LDP Diet member and former diplomat called Hiraizumi Wataru wrote a report that was critical of the status quo in English teaching. He pointed out that almost all young people when they leave the education system have poor skills at reading and writing English and non-existent skills in speaking or listening (Aspinall, 2013: 62). He argued that the reasons for these low standards were the lack of motivation to study, the university entrance exam system, and poor teaching methodology. Hiraizumi wrote a list of proposals to remedy these problems that included

making English an elective subject after the first year of Junior High School (JHS), selecting students with a talent for foreign language learning, and removing English completely from the entrance exam system. He added that only about five per cent of the Japanese population really needed to possess practical skills in English. His idea of selecting, at the age of thirteen, a small group of students who had a talent for English language learning offended two of the most important norms of learning in Japan: the belief that success at any subject or task is due to effort, not innate ability; and the egalitarian ideal that all children should study the same curriculum at least until the age of fifteen.

Professor Watanabe Shoichi of Sophia University wrote a rebuttal to Hiraizumi's proposals. He argued that all Japanese children should be taught a background knowledge of English, in the traditional *yakudoku* way. Students who wanted to master practical English or advanced English would do so in the upper stages of the education system or outside the education system altogether. In the short term, Hiraizumi's suggestions were not acted upon, but his criticism of the existing English language curriculum was to have influence on the debate going forward. During the 1980s this criticism was given extra weight by complaints from the Japanese business community that poor English skills amongst employees were hampering their ability to take full advantage of lucrative opportunities overseas. The Ministry of Education responded to these criticisms with a series of reforms over subsequent decades. The most important reforms took the form of course of study revisions.

6.3 A Review of the Four Most Recent Course of Study Revisions: 1989, 1999, 2008/2009, 2017

The course of study (COS) (*gakushū shidō yōryō*) functions as Japan's national curriculum. The first COS revision was announced in 1958 and it has been revised at ten-yearly intervals by the Ministry of Education since then. Prior to each new set of revisions being announced there is a consultation phase which is now coordinated by a subcommittee of the Central Council on Education (CCE), the main advisory body to the minister. Members of the CCE typically include professors of education, university presidents, business leaders, local political leaders, school principals, representatives of Parent–Teacher Associations, journalists, and cultural figures. (Classroom teachers or their representatives are not directly consulted). From the date of the public announcement of the revisions, there is a gap before changes are implemented to give schools time to prepare. Changes to the elementary school curriculum are implemented two or three years after the initial announcement of the new, revised COS, followed by junior high school changes one year later and finally senior high school changes a year after that. Consultation on the directional or foundational ideas of the following cycle of revision then begins all over again.

Each time the course of study is revised, publishers must provide new editions of the textbooks that teachers use and that normally play a crucial part in lesson

planning in every school subject. There is an official textbook authorization process that runs parallel to the COS revision. This involves the screening of new textbooks by experts appointed by the Ministry of Education in order to check that the new editions conform to the revised course of study. It is normal for publishers to begin the process of writing new textbooks before the official announcement of the COS revision. They can do this because the close ties they have with the ministry and the CCE enables them to anticipate the content in advance (Kariya et al. 2007: 10). In the case of English language textbooks, a native speaker is employed to check that the English contained in the book is 'natural English'. After the textbooks have been approved and published, prefectural and municipal boards of education around the country are free to choose which ones they will adopt. We will now proceed to examine the four most recent revisions in turn looking first at the general context and then the specific case of English language reform.

6.3.1 The 1989 Revisions: General Context

The debate on education reform in the 1980s was dominated by Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro's Ad Hoc Council on Education, which called for far-reaching changes to exams and the organization of the secondary school system (for example it proposed combining each junior high school and senior high school into one continuous secondary school), as well as improvements in teacher quality and a return to moral education that emphasized Japanese values (Aspinall, 2001: 113). The emphasis on using schools to help instil a sense of national pride in children went hand-in-hand with an increased stress on the internationalization of the curriculum. On the surface this may seem paradoxical but in the minds of conservative educators and politicians there was no contradiction inherent in teaching Japanese children to have a thorough understanding of their own culture as well as encouraging them to learn about and respect foreign cultures. Taken in this way the controversial notion of 'internationalization' (which is always a contested concept) was not a threat to the traditional conservative view of the world. It was potentially reinforced by the notion of a binary divide between the nation of Japan and the 'foreign' other.

Few of the proposals discussed by Nakasone's Ad Hoc Council made it into the 1989 COS revision, although they did have a degree of influence on the education debate going forward. Calls from the business community for more liberalization and flexibility had an effect on what became known as a 'new perspective on academic ability' with a greater focus on students' individual interests and increasing their motivation (Cave, 2016: 19).

6.3.2 *The 1989 Revisions to the English Language Curriculum*

In response to the Ad Hoc Council's calls for internationalization, the 1989 revised COS for foreign languages in senior high schools included for the first time a section on 'Communicative English', which was subdivided into optional sections on English debate and English listening. Very few schools chose the English debate section because of the great difficulties involved in getting high school students to engage in debate in a difficult foreign language. It did not help that almost none of the students had been taught how to debate in their own language.

Practicing the skill of listening, on the other hand, did become a more important classroom exercise, a trend that was reinforced by two factors: the gradual introduction of listening tests as a core component of English entrance exams for universities; and the increasing use of native-speaker Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) in secondary schools. The latter development was brought about by the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) programme launched in 1987 at the instigation of the Nakasone government (McConnell, 2000). This was one way in which the theoretical notion of 'internationalization' was put into concrete practice since it brought thousands of native speakers into the classrooms of Japan's secondary schools. The JET programme illustrates well the two-pronged notion of internationalization policy under Nakasone. As much designed to improve the understanding of foreign cultures amongst Japanese children as it was to promote Japan's image abroad. 'Particularly interested in improving relations with the United States, Nakasone embraced the opportunity presented by JET to shape Japan's post-war image as an internationally engaged and economically responsible rising power' (Metzgar 2017: 61).

6.3.3 *The 1999 Revisions: General Context*

The 1999 COS revisions were highly controversial. They introduced a range of far-reaching reforms designed to develop in children and young people *ikiru chikara*, which has been translated as the 'power to live' or 'zest for living'. The aim was to develop more independence and creativity amongst children without losing sight of the values of cooperation and empathy (Cave, 2016: 20). The reforms embraced the slogan of *yutori kyoiku*, a term which has been paraphrased in English as 'a more relaxed education style' (Kariya, 2013: 112). The plan was to cut the compulsory content of the course of study by 30% and introduce a new period of 'integrated studies' (*sogo-teki na gakushu*) into the timetable that would allow individual schools and teachers to design their own classes. The gradual phasing out of lessons on Saturdays was continued, and by 2002 no state schools had regular class on the weekends. These reforms were a direct response to long-standing criticisms levelled at secondary schools in Japan that alleged there had been an excessive amount of stress placed on children, and that curriculum planning was too 'top-down'. It was

also hoped that the ending of Saturday school would mean families would now be able to spend more quality-time together on the weekends.

Unfortunately for those in favour of these reforms, they were immediately the subject of an intense backlash from those who argued that in core subjects like mathematics and reading, standards were already in decline and so to reduce the course of study further was to invite disaster (Tsuneyoshi, 2004: 371–372). To add ammunition to the critics' case, the OECD-sponsored PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) results that were published in 2004 seemed to show declines in the performance of Japanese fifteen-year-old students in reading and mathematics. The media soon dubbed this decline the 'PISA Shock' and pointed to a fall in Japan's scores relative to other nations (Takayama, 2008). In place of the reasonably smooth implementation of changes that normally takes place when the COS is revised, this time there was a crisis of such epic proportions that the reform process was halted before it was fully implemented, and a series of drastic U-turns took place that signalled a retreat. The 30% cut in the course of study was restored just five years after it had been ordered. In most prefectures schools remained closed on Saturday, but in some cases this change was also reversed in informal ways. For example, in 2010, the Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education issued a notice that gave tacit approval for Saturday classes. Schools were told they could hold 'open classes' on Saturdays, i.e., classes that could be observed by parents. In practice schools used this opportunity to hold regular classes on Saturday (*Yomiuri Shimbun* 13th May 2010).

6.3.4 The 1999 Revisions to the English Language Curriculum

One suggested use of the new 'integrated studies' period, to be introduced into elementary schools from 2002 onward, was to increase activities related to English language learning. There had been a small number of pilot projects before 1999, but the majority of elementary schools continued to have grave concerns about how they could successfully teach English without properly qualified teaching staff. Since the Ministry of Education also lacked expertise in the teaching of English to young children, they turned to the private sector for help. In January 2000, Nakata Ritsuko, founder of the Institute for the International English Education of Children (IIEEC), was appointed to a panel of experts organized by Education Minister Nakasone Hirofumi (son of Nakasone Yasuhiro) to consider ways to improve English language teaching in Japan's schools. Nakata held workshops throughout Japan to introduce elementary school teachers to useful techniques for English language activities aimed at young learners. The absence of a sufficient budget for teacher training, however, was illustrated by the fact that many of these teachers had to attend the workshops at their own expense (*Daily Yomiuri* April 17, 2000).

The 2004 'PISA shock' mentioned above did not directly affect the debate on the English language curriculum because foreign language was not one of the subjects that was surveyed as part of the PISA study. It is very difficult to compare the foreign language curricula of different countries with different mother tongues. One survey of TOEFL scores showed that Japanese examinees had the lowest average score out of 25 Asian nations (*Asahi Shimbun* 28 March 2007). TOEFL is a difficult test taken only by a small proportion of students, so the results cannot be viewed as an accurate comparison of the foreign language abilities of whole cohorts of students. However, the poor performance adds ammunition to those at home and abroad who have a dim view of the foreign language abilities of Japanese people. Certainly, in all the COS revisions discussed in this chapter, MEXT and the CCE have taken the view that something needs to be done to improve standards in foreign language teaching and learning in Japan's schools. In subjects like reading (in Japanese) and numeracy there are occasionally concerns about standards slipping—such as the panic that followed the PISA shock. In the case of English language there is a consistently painful awareness that standards have never been high, except in the rather limited area of understanding written texts.

6.3.5 The 2003 Action Plan

The separate treatment of the English language curriculum compared to the general school curriculum was illustrated by the introduction of a major set of reforms that followed a timetable separate from the regular COS review process. This was the ambitious 'Action Plan to Cultivate 'Japanese with English Abilities' set out in 2003. In spite of across-the-board cuts in government spending brought about by Japan's increasing fiscal crisis, the Ministry of Education was able to secure increased budgets for programmes designed to improve practical English language skills. The Action Plan included clear and transparent criteria for measuring the English language ability of students. It made use of the 'Eiken' or STEP test, an English language test produced by the Society for Testing English Proficiency, an organization set up in 1963 by the Ministry of Education. The Action Plan had the following goals:

> On graduation from a junior high school, students can conduct basic communication with regard to areas such as greeting, responses, or topics relating to daily life. (Graduates should be at the third level of Eiken.)
>
> On graduation from a senior high school, students can conduct normal communication with regard to topics, for example relating to daily life. (Graduates should be at the second level of Eiken.) (MEXT 2003: 1)

These are extremely ambitious goals. Some boards of education were already using the Eiken as a school-leaving exam and the results showed that about half the JHS students in the country were not yet meeting these goals. Would it be realistic to try to raise so many students up to this level? Once again energy and resources were being expended on efforts to develop an English curriculum for *all* Japanese

school students, regardless of motivation or aptitude. The ministry was sticking to its ideology of egalitarianism, regardless of results. Simultaneously, however, the 2003 Action Plan also included innovations that showed greater realism in the form of special provisions for students who could proceed to more advanced levels of English than their peers. The most important of these was the Super English Language High School (SELHi) in which greater time and resources were provided to students who followed special English tracks (Aspinall, 2013: 66).

6.3.6 The 2008 Revisions: General Context

The COS revisions that were announced in late 2008 and early 2009 were the first to take place after the highly controversial revision of the Fundamental Law on Education (*kyoiku kihon ho*) that was passed by the Diet in 2006. The following objective was added to the Law: ‘to foster an attitude to respect our traditions and culture, love the country and region that nurtured them, together with respect for other countries and a desire to contribute to world peace and the development of the international community’. This embedded in law the Nakasone-era goal of nurturing future Japanese citizens who could be proud of their distinctive Japanese identity whilst at the same time interacting successfully and productively with people from other nations. Nationalism and internationalization continued to be combined in official policy.

This set of revisions also formalized the series of U-turns that effectively reversed the reforms of ten years earlier. TV programmes compared textbooks for the 1989 COS, the 1999 COS and the 2008/2009 COS, and it was clear to the naked eye that the books had dropped in thickness by about one third after 1999, and then had been restored to their original thickness following the implementation of the 2009 revisions. The experiment of relaxed education (*yutori kyoiku)* was over.

6.3.7 The 2008 Revisions to the English Language Curriculum

So far as the foreign language curriculum is concerned the most controversial change announced in 2009 was the introduction of English as an academic subject into the elementary school curriculum in the fifth and sixth grades (the final two years of elementary school). The Ministry of Education curriculum for ‘Foreign Language Activities’ for grades five and six stipulates the following content:

1. Instruction should be given on the following items in order to help pupils actively engage in communication in a foreign language:

    - To experience the joy of communication in a foreign language

- To actively listen to and speak in the foreign language
- To learn the importance of verbal communication

2. Instruction should be given on the following items in order to deepen the experiential understanding of the languages and cultures of Japan and foreign countries:

- To become familiar with the sounds and rhythms of the foreign language, to learn its differences from the Japanese language and to be aware of the interesting aspects of language and its richness
- To learn the differences in ways of living, customs, and events between Japan and foreign countries and to be aware of various points of view and ways of thinking
- To experience communication with people of different cultures and to deepen the understanding of culture (MEXT 2008: 9)

This content is consistent with what has been in the foreign language COS guidelines for JHS and SHS since the introduction of 'Oral Communication' in 1989. The emphasis is on practical activities and the development of communication skills for use in real situations (for conversations with real foreigners). It is a long way from dry *yakudoku* activities involving rows of silent, passive pupils, and clearly represents a constructive response to the criticism that MEXT has received for so long about the *yakudoku* model. However, implementing these improvements in real classrooms remains a challenge.

The 2004 'PISA Shock' brought to a head a long-running struggle between reformers who want to encourage a 'zest for living' in Japanese children, and those who are worried about declining standards and want to go 'back to basics' with an emphasis on hard work and reading, writing, and numeracy. Reforms to the English language curriculum have also been influenced by this debate.

Language education expert Yoshida Kensaku was a member of the CCE's sub-committee that advised on the 2009 English language revision. He has made the argument that the two most recent revisions of the COS represent a move from 'declarative knowledge' to 'procedural knowledge'. 'Declarative knowledge' is knowledge about facts, whilst 'procedural knowledge' is knowledge about how to do something. This change can be seen both in the new course of study as well as the proposed reforms of the Centre Exam. In the English language curriculum that preceded these changes, students mostly answered questions that had only one correct answer. For example, they might be given a sentence with a word missing and asked to choose from four possible words. If they had learned English grammar 'correctly' then they would choose the one correct answer. This is an example of the student's declarative knowledge. Under the proposed changes students will be asked to write answers that require them to use language in a meaningful context.

Another innovation in this round of reforms was the requirement that foreign language education should do more than teach communication; it should also develop in students the ability to use language for more cognitively demanding purposes (Yoshida, 2009: 3). According to the sub-committee of the CCE responsible for

foreign languages, this included 'the ability to use language to deepen one's capacity for thinking and communicating with others on the basis of knowledge and experience, reasoning ability, and sensitivity and affection towards others' (quoted in Yoshida, 2009: 3). This educational objective is also applied to Japanese language and other school subjects in addition to English language classes. This is highly significant because it is the first time that a COS revision in the foreign language curriculum has been coordinated with a simultaneous revision in the national language (Japanese) curriculum. In making this change the CCE and MEXT have finally responded to consistent criticism of earlier English reforms that had attempted to improve abilities in one without the other (for example debate).

Also, in this round of reforms, MEXT announced that English classes were to be taught principally in the medium of English in all senior high schools starting from the 2013 academic year. This would require major changes in lesson planning and teaching style from teachers, especially those in high-level academic high schools in which the English language curriculum was largely devoted to helping students pass very demanding entrance exams for Japan's most prestigious universities. These exams require an understanding of very advanced and complex English grammar which is normally explained to the students in the medium of Japanese. Conducting these explanations in the medium of English would be impossibly demanding for teachers and students alike. Complaints were made that policymakers in Tokyo did not have a proper understanding of the day-to-day job of teaching English in actual classrooms. An editorial in the Asahi Shimbun spoke for many when it complained that 'by abruptly telling English teachers to start giving lessons only in English, the education ministry is creating confusion and consternation' (*Asahi Shimbun* 24 December 2008). The stress caused by a sudden top-down order for English to be taught in the medium of English illustrates the problem that can arise when policymaking bodies exclude teachers and their representatives.

6.3.8 The 2017 Revisions: General Context

The 2017 COS revision had as its focus the encouragement of 'active learning' which has been commonly understood to mean that children will be taught to evaluate data and come to their own conclusions, rather than being told by the teacher that each question has only one correct answer. This represents a response by officials to the increasing exposure of children to the internet. It also follows the lowering of the voting age in Japan from twenty to eighteen. Since eighteen-year-olds are now considered to be independent adults, they must learn to come to their own decisions about important topics like who to vote for in an election. The lowering of the voting age was also given as a reason for the addition, from 2022, of the new subject of 'public affairs' (*kokyo*) to the senior high school curriculum.

For the first time in 26 years a new subject in compulsory education was added when moral education became an official subject in elementary school. This was one measure taken in response to perceived increases in bullying cases in all types

of school, including high-profile cases that have led to the suicide of the victim. Textbook publishers played safe and mostly used materials (like traditional folk tales) that were already in use in non-subject class time that dealt with ethical issues (see Chap. 7).

6.3.9 The 2017 Revisions to the English Language Curriculum

The 2017 revisions are notable for linking Japan's aims in foreign language learning with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for languages, which functions as a guideline for describing achievements of learners of foreign languages throughout Europe. This development was welcomed by experts who have pushed for the Japanese government to focus its foreign language learning objectives on standards that are recognized universally (Yoshida, 2020).

The 2017 revisions involved a large increase in the time dedicated to teaching English in elementary schools. In April 2020, 15 lessons of English per year were introduced to grades three and four, whilst the number of English lessons for grades five and six were increased from 35 per year to 50 per year. Concerns have been raised about where this extra time will be found in an already packed school timetable. Although at the time of writing, concurrent with the widespread and varied impact of the Covid-19 crisis, it is still not clear how this will be successfully implemented in practice, it is hoped that there will be more coordination between the English language curricula in elementary schools and junior high schools than before. Following on from the 2009 call to use language for more cognitively demanding purposes, the 2017 revision introduced 'active learning' methodologies and promoted the incorporation of debate and oral presentation activities. Once again, this revision was not confined to the subject of English language but was spread throughout the course of study.

6.3.10 The Textbook Revision Process

Textbooks need to be rewritten at least every ten years to comply with new COS guidelines. Teachers in Japan are legally obliged to use approved textbooks in their classrooms (although they are also free to add their own supplementary materials). The content and structure of textbooks therefore have an important influence on English language lessons, as they do for all other subjects. Unlike some other OECD countries where new technology, for example smart whiteboards, have been placed at the disposal of many school teachers, teachers in most of Japan before the onset of the Covid-19 crisis in 2020 were limited to a blackboard and the textbook. At least five different sets of textbooks for JHS and as many as thirty for SHS by different

publishers are approved for each academic subject and then local boards of education are free to choose which one their schools will use. There are various ways in which boards of education select textbooks but there is evidence that the role of teachers in making these decisions has been reduced since 2001.

In the case of JHS, textbooks are purchased by the local authority and given to the students. In the case of SHS, students are told which books are needed and they must purchase them for themselves. In both cases, therefore, books need to be inexpensive, and this limits them in their size and design. In the case of English language texts, the *yakudoku* tradition of language teaching requires detailed explanations of the grammar of the target language, and these are always given in Japanese. Because of the large amount of grammar that is required to be taught by the national guidelines, this results in the books being written almost entirely in Japanese with English words, phrases, and sentences being used to illustrate the various grammar points. I briefly had the job of doing a 'native-speaker' check on some draft textbooks in 1999 and 2000. My job was to check the English words and phrases for any mistakes or 'unnatural English'. It was quite an easy job because there was so little English contained in the books. I found only a very small number of areas for concern, but other studies of JHS textbooks have shown that the English sentences used as examples are often clearly translations into English of Japanese sentences. This can sometimes result in errors and 'unnatural English' being used. In contrast to this over-use of the L1 language in Japanese textbooks, secondary school English language textbooks in other Asian countries, for example Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, are written almost entirely in English.

6.4 English Language Teaching Reform: Problems and Obstacles

6.4.1 The Washback Effect of High School and University Entrance Exams

The course of study acts as the official, national curriculum of Japan. However, from the point of view of many students, their teachers, and their parents, there exists a second shadow curriculum which is of equal and sometimes greater importance. This curriculum is determined by the content of high school and university entrance exams. If a student is aiming to get into a very selective high school or university then it is not sufficient to study only the content of the national course of study. The exams for selective schools and universities are designed to be tougher than that and require the additional study of a large volume of extra material. Some of this study will take place outside of official school hours in the shadow education world of the cram schools (*juku*). The increased use of listening exams in universities during the 1990s, for example, gave added impetus to the practice of listening exercises during lesson time in high school.

The Minister of Education noticed that: ‘Although reading, listening, writing, and speaking are the four necessary competencies for English language education, the common university entrance exams administered by the National Center for University Entrance Exams to over half a million students around the country each year focus almost exclusively on reading, with slight coverage of listening and almost nothing on writing and speaking’ (quoted in McMurray, 2018).

After years of criticism the ministry finally decided to act. In 2017 it was announced that from 2020 the existing centre exam would be replaced by a hybrid system involving a privately run test of all four language skills combined with officially produced reading and writing tests. In November 2019, however, education minister Hagiuda Koichi abruptly announced that the new exam system that was supposed to begin in the 2020 academic year was now to be delayed until 2024. At the time of writing, it looks like the new system will not be introduced at all.

6.4.2 *The Difficulty of the Subject*

A major challenge facing policymakers in charge of English language education is the difficulty of the subject. Post-war education reforms used the United States education system as a model. For school subjects like mathematics this was unproblematic, but in the case of foreign language education a serious problem occurred. In the 1940s the foreign languages most commonly taught in American schools were French and Spanish. According to the United States Foreign Service Institute, these languages are classified as ‘category one’ for an English-speaking person to learn; a category that means these languages require between 575 and 600 hours of class time to learn. It is possible to achieve this in the six years of secondary schooling. Japanese, however, is classified as ‘category four’—the most difficult category—which requires at least 2,200 class hours (Aspinall, 2013: 6). The same applies in reverse. For Japanese students, English is a difficult language in comparison to, for example, Chinese (with a similar script for some words) or Korean (with a more similar word order). A Japanese student receives 180 hours of English class time in JHS, and between 470 and 650 hours in SHS. This is well short of the minimum number of hours required. The introduction of English to elementary school will add more time to the curriculum—but not a sufficient amount.

6.4.3 *Student Motivation*

Surveys show that lack of motivation to study English amongst schoolchildren is a serious problem. Alienation from English starts very soon after children at the previous (later) starting age were introduced to the subject. In November 2011, MEXT’s National Institute for Educational Policy Research conducted a nationwide survey of 3,225 JHS third-year students. The survey produced the paradoxical result

that whilst 85 per cent of respondents believed 'it is important to study English' and 70% agreed with the sentence that 'English will be useful to get a job in the future', only 11 per cent responded that they strongly hope to get a job that requires English skills. Furthermore, 43 per cent answered 'I don't want to get a job that requires English skills', up from 36 per cent in a survey conducted in 2003 (*Yomiuri Shimbun*, 29 January 2012). An editorial in the *Japan Times* remarked that the 'disjuncture between what [the JHS students] consider important for the future and what they want for themselves is puzzling and disappointing' (*Japan Times*, 5 February 2012). It went on: 'English teachers, administrators, and the education ministry should take these results as a wake-up call. The current approach is clearly de-motivating students'. It is an uncontroversial fact that English language *is* difficult for Japanese children to learn, especially since it has direct relevance to the daily lives of very few of them. The national survey quoted above shows that most JHS students are aware that English ability is important for adults competing in the job market. But their daily experience in the classroom only teaches most of them that mastery of English is far beyond their reach.

In the face of these problems, many experts feel that more could be done to help students adopt a more positive attitude to English in the JHS classroom. Foreign teachers with qualifications in TEFL often express frustration when team-teaching in JHS classes because children are never allowed to 'have a go' at making an answer to a question when they do not have all the exact words at their fingertips. They are taught to remain silent until they have the one 'correct answer' in their heads, and then to verbalize the answer. It is often difficult to stop the learning style of other subjects from carrying over into the English classroom. So, if the students are told in their *kokugo* (Japanese language) class that there is only one correct way to write a kanji character (to give just one example), then they also unconsciously assume that there is only one correct way to make a certain English sentence. This is another example of the norms of the Japanese classroom working against a positive approach to learning a foreign language.

6.4.4 Large, Mixed-Ability Classes

An aspect of JHS English education that has come under much criticism from foreign and domestic experts is the insistence that students must be mixed in large classes regardless of their ability or whether or not they had previously studied English. There are countless reports of fluent and bilingual children following the same tasks as their novice classmates. The requirement that children in compulsory education (i.e., up to the end of JHS) should not be put in streams or sets according to aptitude or ability is one that is based upon some very deeply held beliefs in Japanese society about what a good education should provide. However, as any teacher of adolescents knows, if the content of the lesson is too easy or too difficult for some students the likelihood of class disruption increases. The unintended consequence is that parents are forced to pay for their children to go to *juku* or an *eikaiwa* class that is

appropriate for their individual ability and objectives if they want them to receive education in subjects like English. MEXT is aware of this problem, and as part of its 2003 Action Plan to improve English it proposed that 'Small-group teaching and the streaming of students according to proficiency in the English classes of junior and senior high schools will be positively adopted' (MEXT 2003: 3). Apart from some pilot projects, including the 'Super English High schools' (SELHi), no serious efforts have so far been made to implement this proposal. The widespread adoption of 'small group' teaching would require the recruitment of more teachers, something that is not possible due to budget constraints.

6.4.5 Teacher Beliefs and Attitudes

In every education system there is a tension between the stated aims of the curriculum and the reality of what goes on in individual classrooms. Teachers often worry that changes in the course of study might lead to unwanted disruption in the classroom. In the case of English language, traditional methods of 'grammar-translation' instruction have involved straight-forward classroom management skills, since this kind of 'teacher-centred' instruction requires the students to sit in silence facing the front of the classroom where the teacher stood upon a raised platform. The teaching of oral communication, on the other hand, requires constant chatter on the part of the students. If the class contains only a small number of well-motivated students accustomed to independent learning, then there are no problems with this method. If, however, as often is the case in Japanese secondary schools, there is a large group of students with mixed levels of ability and motivation, then the situation is much more challenging.

Innovations which help the teacher deliver communicative English classes successfully include a trained assistant, a reasonably small class size, a limit on the range of abilities present in the room and appropriate training for the teacher. In addition to the above, the English teacher is also helped if other subjects are also being taught in similar ways. So, for example, students are taught some basic debate skills in their own language before they are asked to debate in English.

The large increase in the number of Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) has also caused problems. The Japanese teacher or teachers in the host institution who have been chosen to take care of the foreign newcomer have quite the set of responsibilities, for they must not only introduce the ALT to the rules and routines of the school, they also have to help the ALT in all aspects of their domestic life: arranging accommodation, helping them to open a bank account, telling them how to use the trains and buses and so on. Most ALTs who come on the JET programme have little or no Japanese language ability on their arrival and usually have never been to Japan before. They therefore need help in almost every aspect of daily life. In addition to helping foreign assistant teachers with mundane but time-consuming tasks like learning how to pay the electricity bill and grocery shopping, Japanese English teachers were often faced with the more intangible burdens that come with being

responsible for the only foreigner in a Japanese institution. A common conundrum was how to deal with the delicate issue of those English teachers on the staff who could not actually speak a word of English. Sometimes this problem was solved by the Japanese Teacher of English (JTE) avoiding all contact with the ALT and refusing to team-teach with them. ALTs interviewed by McConnell told him that they did not find out that certain Japanese staff were English teachers until months into their school visits (McConnell, 2000: 218).

One of the features of Japanese school culture least understood by new Western ALTs is the way in which poor or inappropriate behaviour on the part of the ALT can directly tarnish the reputation of the JTEs who are responsible for them. The JTE must act as a go-between, between the ALT and the school. In the case of extreme cultural insensitivity or rudeness on the part of the ALT, McConnell found that the attitude of the staff would often be one of endurance, knowing that the time-limited nature of the ALT contract would mean that the source of irritation would eventually be gone (McConnell, 2000: 219). In many ways the results of the JET programme have been very positive, but it remains the case that the obstacles and problems described above prevent ALTs from being used to their full potential to assist Japanese young people in learning practical communication skills in foreign languages.

6.5 Inequality: Because not Everyone Needs English

I have already mentioned the serious problems posed when a teacher is required to teach a very challenging subject like English to a mixed-ability class of secondary school students. In the post-war period a strong egalitarian ethos pervaded the compulsory education system in Japan. There was a strong desire to uphold the fiction that all elementary schools are the same and all Junior High Schools (JHS) are the same. Furthermore, the students within these schools all advanced along the path to further knowledge lockstep in year-groups that were not sub-divided into sets or academic streams. This emphasis on uniformity was challenged by critics. Very quietly, changes were made. In a 2002 survey conducted by MEXT more than 60% of both elementary and junior high schools answered that they had adopted some forms of ability grouping, especially in mathematics (Tsuneyoshi, 2004: 385). English is a subject like mathematics that some students will go further with than others and at varying paces. The communicative and active approaches to teaching English introduced under recent COS revisions accentuate the divisions between those students who are motivated and able and those who do not see the relevance of English and struggle to master the basics. Up until now, more advanced students have only been able to improve their skills by attending supplementary classes (if their parents can afford it).

The 2019 decision to postpone the introduction of a new university entrance exam system for English from 2020 to 2024 was partly brought about by a gaffe from the education minister Hagiuda Koichi. When he was questioned about the extra costs for students required by private English exams, he remarked that students would

need to compete for places in good universities 'in accordance with their (financial) standing'. This broke the taboo that entrance to prestigious institutions should not be influenced by financial inequality. The English-language newspaper the *Japan Times* noted that by postponing these entrance exams until 2024, the education ministry only secured fairness by making every student less skilful in English communication regardless of whether they are rich or poor, or whether they live in the city or rural regions. (*Japan Times* November 11, 2019). This opinion is in accordance with my own views, presented in a book I wrote on international education policy in Japan. In the final words of the book I argued that 'the existing English language education system is one that spreads misery and failure equally throughout the land. This is a perverse form of egalitarian education indeed' (Aspinall, 2013: 187). In other parts of Asia, proficiency in English is often one marker of social status. This is especially true of former British colonies like India and Hong Kong, where local elites have been sending their sons to expensive, elite schools in England for generations. Members of Japan's elites, by contrast, have mostly shared with the rest of the nation an awkwardness in the use of foreign languages. This, combined with their shared Japanese language—unspoken in any other land—has been a marker of national solidarity; something that unites rich and poor. However, the price for this unity is a lack of capacity to fully reap the benefits offered by other languages and cultures, including minorities within Japan who are not monolingual.

6.5.1 Linguistic Minorities

The official ideology that every child in Japan receives the same education up to the age of fifteen, and then has the same access to educational choices after that age, makes it difficult for government policy to address the concerns of various minority groups, including linguistic minorities. In recent years there has been a growing awareness of such groups, and an increase in the diversity of people coming to Japan to live, as well as those leaving Japan for substantial periods of time and then returning. Such groups include Okinawans, Amerasians, Koreans, Brazilians (and other South Americans), Chinese, and Japanese child returnees. Official policy towards these groups both at the local and the national level has been to assimilate them into Japanese society mainly by trying to ensure that children from non-Japanese-speaking homes are taught sufficient Japanese language to be able to participate in the education system. Lack of government support for the children of immigrants is sometimes made up for by local NPOs and by individual volunteers. Support for returnees is sometimes undertaken with more dedication reflecting the fact that their parents are often of elite status (Kanno, 2008).

MEXT is aware that the number of English-speaking families living in Japan has increased since the 1980s, and in the 2003 Action Plan it stated that 'People living in the local community proficient in English will be positively utilized' (MEXT 2003: 7). The reality on the ground, however, is that in contemporary Japan it is hard to find any acceptance of the concept of multilingualism. In fact, parents who want their

children to grow up bilingually and biculturally in Japan must contend with the fact that the Ministry of Education and its schools do not 'recognize the possibility of students constructing multiple identities in the world' (Parmenter, 2000: 252). The officially endorsed concept of national identity as a monolingual Japanese identity creates practical problems for those in Japan who want to become fluent in more than one language. This may be the place where nationalism and internationalization prove to be irreconcilable. To add to the difficulties for those with more than one linguistic identity, the ministry does not accredit or financially assist bilingual schools that are established to help minorities. One example of this is the 'AmerAsian' school set up in Okinawa in 1998 for children of Japanese mothers and American fathers. To make matters worse, private donations to non-accredited schools such as this are not tax-deductible. This inflexible position of the ministry has undermined efforts to exploit the international human resources that Japan has within its own borders.

6.6 Conclusion

Since the 1980s there have been many efforts to improve English language teaching in Japan's schools. The four Course-of-Study revisions and the one 'Action Plan' considered here show the determination of Ministry of Education bureaucrats and their advisors to overcome the negative reputation that foreign language education in Japan has suffered from for decades. There has been a continuous effort to extend English language classes into elementary schools. Also, the SELHi programme showed that reformers, by their efforts to provide special advanced English tracks for more motivated and capable students, were not afraid to risk the accusation that they were being elitist. Unfortunately, the ambition to improve university entrance exams so they have a positive 'washback' effect on high school English, has been met with frustration and delay. The increased use of native-speaker ALTs has resulted in some positive benefits but has also been accompanied by disappointment and frustration in many instances.

For reasons of official nationalist ideology, models of multicultural or multilingual identity that might have had beneficial consequences for the foreign language curriculum have not been allowed to develop in the state education system. Japanese children are encouraged to see English as the language of the foreign 'other', and so it is unsurprising that many students fail to see the relevance of the language to their lives. In practice, government policy to promote nationalism alongside increased internationalization (in the form of trade and tourism policies) is not going as smoothly as some had hoped.

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Chapter 7
Policy Change in Moral Education: Working Through the Ministry of Education

Sam Bamkin

Abstract Moral education (*dōtoku*) was revised outside of the regular curriculum revision cycle, two years before other subjects. The new moral education places greater emphasis on teaching for patriotism and the subordination of individuality for the good of society. It converted moral education classtime into a designated subject. In concrete terms, this requires syllabus planning, the use of an approved textbook, and assessment for moral education. This significant reform was driven not by the Ministry of Education (MEXT), as most curriculum matters have been, but by a supra-cabinet council under the leadership of the prime minister. The reform changed the content of the course of study, but also exposed new tensions in the policymaking process, the examination of which provides new insight into the role of the Ministry of Education. This chapter examines how policy unfolds both before and after its written form is promulgated. It considers how policy changes as it is translated into practice, as teachers, school administrators, members of the boards of education and textbook publishers work through the Ministry to mediate policy. Rather than closing the discussion on how moral education is enacted in schools, this chapter aims to illustrate some of the complexities of policymaking, to question the perceived internal coherence and omnipotence of MEXT, and to encourage studies that look beyond written policy and towards the interaction between policy and practice.

Keywords Education policy · Moral education · Dotoku · Curriculum reform · Policymaking process · Japanese education

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S. Bamkin (✉)
Graduate School of Education and Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia, University of Tokyo, 7-3-1 Hongo,
Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo 113-0033, Japan
e-mail: sbamkin2@gmail.com

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7.1 Introduction

The course of study chapter entitled moral education (*dōtoku*) was the only section of the course of study which was not revised in 2017. This is because the single chapter providing for moral education was revised outside of the regular curriculum revision cycle two years earlier in 2015 (for implementation from 2018 at elementary school and from 2019 at junior high school). The new course of study section (MEXT, 2015a) placed greater emphasis on teaching patriotism and the subordination of individuality for the good of society. The wording of the course of study chapter holds resonances of a pre-determined social order and of national pride. This is not accidental. It represents the articulation of a longstanding dream in the conservative—now mainstream—wing of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to utilize moral education as a vehicle of nation building. The revised chapter aims towards a 'strengthening' of moral education, which becomes a 'special subject' rather than 'classtime'. Substantively, it now requires the use of a textbook selected from a range approved by the Ministry of Education, an annual syllabus to be pre-written by each school, and qualitative assessments of children and students throughout the nine grades of compulsory education.

This was the most significant reform of the moral education provisions for a sexagenary since its (re)introduction in 1958 and could only have been achieved by separating moral education from the full curriculum revision cycle through a supra-cabinet council under the recently effectuated prime ministerial leadership (Chap. 2). This reform, driven through the Ministry at cabinet level, not only brought extant tensions on the topic of moral education to bear on the community of teachers, but also exposed new tensions in the reformed policymaking process. Rather than supplanting the policymaking role of the Ministry, a supra-cabinet council under prime ministerial leadership overlaid the existing system, resulting in a dual system of education policymaking. Whilst the cabinet moved to increase its control over the content of moral education, the Ministry was in the process of stepping up its efforts to promote active learning through the new course of study (Chap. 4), the latter of which would crystallize in the 2017 course of study.

Teachers and educators perceived the strengthening of moral education as being motivated by nationalism (Bamkin, 2018). On the other hand, the active learning promoted by the Ministry aims to engender 'thinking and discussion' and group activities, drawing more on what students bring to the classroom and facilitating their potential to *question* content, utilizing the textbook but not following it. Beyond the implications for classroom practice, the reform of moral education provides an interesting case study through which to examine the policymaking process and, in particular, what might happen when curriculum policy is made 'above' the Ministry of Education at cabinet level.

The chapter approaches policy not only from a top-down perspective, but also as a complex process involving various interests and interventions. As such, it is important to keep in mind the possibility of disagreement between government bodies. Moreover, MEXT is not a monolith (Fujita, 2010), but is both a multi-layered and a

multi-dimensional organization balancing remits to implement cabinet requirements faithfully, to administer education with a professional workforce of around 900,000,[1] and to consider the current and future state of education based on teaching expertise, in tandem with other bodies, particularly the prefectural and municipal boards of education, textbook publishers, and semi-independent experts who are appointed to policy councils or positions attached to MEXT. These various remits and its organization and overall size allow for protracted disagreements within MEXT and between its various semi-independent policy councils, and allow for outside expertise to work through it. Whilst discussing the revision of moral education, this chapter unpacks some of the processes by which the Ministry of Education balances the requirements of the supra-cabinet council, whilst facilitating the mediation of policy by educationalists.

Section 7.2 provides an overview of recent moral education reforms introduced by the cabinet and the formal responses of various departments within MEXT and councils attached to it. Whilst the Central Council of Education that sits at the apex of MEXT is configured to realize cabinet policy, other departments further down the echelons prioritize the promotion of active learning and other visions seemingly as separate strands of policy. Section 7.3 brings into focus some of the actors who work through the Ministry to ease the translation of the moral education curriculum into practice favouring active learning. This reveals the permeability of some quarters of MEXT, bringing career educators in to its policymaking processes. Section 7.4 discusses the outcomes for moral education in the classroom. Rather than closing the discussion here, the final section overviews some of the complexities of policy and its enactment in practice, to question the internal coherence and omnipotence of MEXT, and to encourage studies that look beyond written policy to consider how policy changes as it is translated into practice (Ball, 2012).

7.2 Formal Responses of the Ministry of Education

The second Education Rebuilding Council, formally established to advise the prime minister, called for the strengthening of moral education in 2013 (Kantei, 2013). It was understood well that moral education was to become a special subject, to utilize textbooks, and to be strengthened in terms of importance and patriotic content. Shimomura Hakubun, an ideological supporter of patriotic education, was appointed from the corresponding shadow portfolios as both Minister of Education and (Cabinet Office) Minister for Rebuilding Education when Abe returned to power in 2012. Its implementation was handed to the Central Council of Education.

[1] There were 907,000 teachers at elementary, junior and senior high schools in 2020. See MEXT (2013) for slightly outdated statistics presented in English. Teachers are employed not by MEXT but by the prefectural board of education. Nonetheless, MEXT both partly administers the employment of teachers and relies on teachers at the end of the line to carry out policies.

7.2.1 Following Cabinet Policy

The Central Council of Education (CCE) is formally an advisory body to the Minister of Education, but in practice sits at the apex of MEXT with the authority to issue high-level reports that constitute MEXT policy aspirations. The rise of prime ministerial leadership has resulted in fewer educationalists appointed to the CCE, being partly replaced by culturally conservative members, loyalists, and business interests. Nonetheless, much of the policymaking work, particularly drafting and recommendation, is undertaken by civil servants not on the CCE council but appointed to its 'secretariat' support organ (Nitta, 2008: 18; Schwartz, 1998) and through their recommendations of experts to sub-committee and expert panel appointments. However, the centrepiece policy in the spotlight must be realized. The moral education subject was delivered and the partial revision to the COS was announced.

Aspects critical of teachers, discussed in an earlier consultation by the Minister, were dropped from the CCE report (MEXT, 2014), but the substantive recommendations changed little. A new 'special subject' was recommended to provide a 'cornerstone' for moral education which would run through the whole course of study. Technically, this was achieved by promulgating a revision of the course of study on moral education in 2015, for implementation beginning with the 2018–2019 and 2019–2020 school years, at elementary and junior high school respectively. Textbooks would be adopted; schools would be required to undertake assessment of moral education classes; and the requirement for a predetermined school syllabus for moral education would be enforced.

7.2.2 Sensitive Issues

In the months after the COS revision had been promulgated, other departments of MEXT were firefighting against anticipated fallout from the strengthening of moral education. Some quarters of the Ministry are closer to the ground and understand educational issues and educators to a certain degree. These departments of the Ministry are cognizant of educators' scepticism towards nationalism and sensitivity towards both textbooks and assessment in moral education. The post-war years, well into the 1970s, were marked by acrimonious conflict between the Ministry and the then-powerful Japan Teachers' Union, which still forms part of the collective memory of the teaching community (Duke, 1973). A later fragmentation and shift in the Japan Teachers' Union (JTU) towards a more moderate position, and warmer relations from the mid-1990s onward allowed the Ministry to consult members of the teaching community, though not the unions, more widely (Aspinall, 2001), and to appoint education experts from schools and localities to consultation and drafting panels. A small but steady stream of current and former teachers with experience in classroom teaching, school administration, and local government made temporary and semi-permanent transfers into the Ministry.

Documents published by MEXT showed a high level of caution towards the moral education revision and acknowledged sensitivities. This was reminiscent of the first moral education course of study published in 1958. At that time, at the height of tension between the JTU and the Ministry of Education, the course of study was driven through by a hawkish Minister, but also carefully crafted to create distance from questionable practices, explicitly warning against 'preaching' values and against a pre-war didactic style of teaching (MOE, 1958). The first subsequent attempt to reform moral education was undertaken by the first Abe administration in 2007–2008. At that time, two successive Ministers of Education followed the Central Council of Education of the time, essentially expressing dissent towards the reforms (Katsuta, 2020). The later attempt was successful partly because of stronger political will in a more culturally conservative ruling party, partly because of a strong minister, and partly because the CCE had been packed with loyalists.

Regarding the recent reforms, the (MEXT) Curriculum Division of the Bureau of Primary and Secondary Education worked to pre-empt discontent and released a one-page announcement onto the main web page for moral education (transcribed in Fig. 7.1). A powerpointesque bulletin answers a question on nationalism, then summarizes a wide series of positions on moral education textbooks and assessment.

「道徳」の評価はどうなる？？

Q 道徳が「特別の教科」になり、入試で「愛国心」が評価されるというのは本当ですか？
道徳が評価されると、本音が言えなくなり、息苦しい世の中にならないか心配です。

A **道徳科の評価で、特定の考え方を押しつけたり、入試で使用したりはしません。**
「特別の教科　道徳」※では、道徳的な価値を自分のこととしてとらえ、よく考え、議論する道徳へと転換し、特定の考え方に無批判で従うような子供ではなく、主体的に考え未来を切り拓く子供を育てます。

※「教科」とは、教科書を使用し、教科ごとの免許があり、数値による評価を行うものを言いますが、道徳については、数値による評価を行わず、担任が担当することから、特に「特別の教科」という新たな位置づけが設けられました。平成30年度から小学校で、31年度から中学校で「特別の教科　道徳」（道徳科）が始まります。

- **これまでの道徳の時間には、様々な課題がありました。**
  - いじめなどの現実の問題に対応できていない
  - 読み物を読んで感想を述べるだけで終わっている
  - 教科書や評価がないことなどから、他教科に比べて軽視されがち（行事の準備を行う時間になっていることも…）
- **「教育再生実行会議」の第１次提言や中央教育審議会答申等を踏まえ、「道徳の時間」を「特別の教科　道徳（道徳科）」とし、抜本的な改善を図ります。**
  - 質の高い教科書を使えるようにし、９年間を通じて適切な学習が行えるようにします。
  - 例えば、小学校低学年では、人の気持ちを考えさせ、「してはならないことがあるよ」などの基本を指導します。
  - その上で、道徳的な価値を自分のこととして考えるための、「考え、議論する道徳」へと転換します。
- **道徳科の学習状況や成長の様子を評価し指導の改善に生かしますが、入試には使いません。**
  - 道徳科の評価については、これまで国会などでも何度も丁寧に説明しています。
  - 評価は教育改善のためのものであり、道徳科では、特に、数値で評価して他の子供達と比較したり、入試で活用したりすることはしません。
  - 「国や郷土を愛する態度」などの個別の内容項目の評価はしないので、「愛国心」を評価することなどあり得ません。
  - 道徳科の評価は、道徳科の授業で自分のこととして考えている、他人の考えなどをしっかり受け止めているといった成長の様子を丁寧に見て行う、記述による「励まし、伸ばす」積極的評価を行います。
  - このような道徳科の評価は入試にはなじまず、入試で活用したり調査書（内申書）に記載したりはしません。

※　**こうした方針のもと、現在、文部科学省において有識者会議で議論を進めており、7月開催予定の会議において議論をまとめた上で、都道府県教育委員会等に周知・指導します。**

（文部科学省初等中等教育局教育課程課）

Fig. 7.1 Bulletin summarizing assessment, linked from the MEXT website main dōtoku page (MEXT, 2016b)

Question: When moral education becomes a subject, is it true that assessment of 'nationalism' will count towards entrance examinations? If it is assessed, we will not be able to speak our mind freely, and risks creating a world of censorship.
Answer: In assessing *moral education*, no specific way of thinking will be imposed and it will not be used for entrance examinations. The special subject of moral education will move towards a model using thinking and discussion, based on moral values that belong to the child. Rather than expecting children to uncritically follow a particular way of thinking, it raises 'children for the future' who think independently.

- The system of moral education classes so far had various issues
  - it did not address bullying
  - classes that only discuss the feelings of characters in a story need to end
  - because there is no assessment or textbooks, etc., it tends to be disregarded.
- The second Education Rebuilding Council has planned unprecedented reform of moral education to become a special subject:
  - an appropriate 9-year programme based on high-quality textbooks
  - *moral education* for thinking and discussion based on children's own moral perspectives.
- Assessment will be used to evaluate moral learning and progress, and to improve instruction. It will not be used for examinations.
  - The particular situation surrounding moral education assessment has been explained numerous times in various fora such as parliament.
  - Assessment is for the improvement of education. In moral education, especially, it will not be used for such purposes as ranking children through numeric grades or for examinations.[2]
  - Curriculum items such as 'an attitude of love towards hometown and nation' will not be assessed. Therefore, it is not possible to assess 'nationalism'.
  - Assessment will be undertaken by carefully observing the child's progress in the way that they come to terms with their own thinking and the thinking of others; and by encouraging and stretching each child in relation to the [curriculum] criteria.
  - This kind of assessment is not appropriate for entrance examinations, and will not be included.

(Abbreviated. All Sections with underlining in the original are included.)

At a functional level, the poster provides an update on assessment, which was not concretized in the Course of Study until 2017 (MEXT, 2017b). However, it also serves as a declaration of compromise, positioning MEXT as an arbiter between the supra-cabinet council under prime ministerial leadership that had initiated the policy and the teaching community. Its usage aligns with the authority of the government, referencing parliamentary debate and the supra-cabinet council. In making promises, however, MEXT is acting as a political player. This compromise position is a bid to determine policy. The MEXT journal *Shotō Kyōiku Shiryō* (*Papers on Early Childhood and Elementary Education*)[3] is published by the (MEXT) Bureau of Primary and Secondary Education, with a largely internal readership of civil servants. It builds an official history of the reform, declaring how it 'will' be implemented and the public-facing reasons for doing so. The articles provide expositions of the policy, comparisons with the previous requirements, and case studies of 'best practice'. Besides the promise for detailed guidance on how schools might approach assessment, the history ends with the 2016 Specialist Committee Report on moral education assessment (MEXT, 2016b). This compromise position represents policy and the official line at MEXT.

7.2.3 Active Learning

Active learning is the latest name for a series of attempts to influence pedagogy in Japanese classrooms, reaching back several decades. It encourages deeper understanding through application, more relevant connections to student experiences, and child-centred pedagogies such as discovery learning. Though reference is not made in official documents, and setting aside questions of motivation, the approach encouraged can be conceptualized as a practice that responds to broadly constructivist learning theories.

Policy on active learning has its genesis in the 1970s high-profile critique of Japanese schooling by the International Labour Organization, and subsequently by the media and prime minister. The critique began with concern over Japan's 6-day school week, culminating in a (largely imagined) perception, internationally and domestically, of a school system that produced students lacking in creativity, and who were only good for exam cramming. As such, the policymaking of the day was a firefighting response, advocating a more pressure-free educational environment. This response, combined with discourses on the type of learning required for a late-modern (or 'post-catchup') society, has taken on a life of its own, expanded by subsequent Ministry reports in various guises such as experiential learning, learning with room to grow, deep learning, and active learning. When the moral education

[2] Though suggestive to this effect, this phrase stops short of saying that numerical assessment itself will not occur.

[3] 初等教育資料. The Curriculum Department and the Early Childhood Education Department, both of the Bureau of Primary and Secondary Education in MEXT, are credited as editors.

COS chapter was revised in 2015, active learning was being promoted in anticipation of the call for the CCE Curriculum Subcommittee to draft a new COS. Inevitably, when the new COS did emerge in 2017, active learning was a prominent feature of the text.

The CCE (MEXT, 2014) set out proposals 'to proactively promote the use of diverse and effective teaching methods to facilitate 'each individual child to think about and face' difficult real-world problems such as bullying, 'drawing on their own experiences, viewpoints, and values and on discussion'. The vision presented a 'process in which children examine the issues [at hand] and, deepening their individual thinking, in dialogue and debate with the teacher and other students, and through reflection and deliberation' (ibid.: 11). Such exhortations, which were expressed with various synonyms and paraphrases in early documents, became simplified under the slogan 'moral education through thinking and discussion'.

Though the spirit of active learning is taken further, such provisions in the curriculum are not new. The course of study has attempted calls for thinking, discussion or debate, exchanging ideas and expression since 2008 or earlier. The previous COS provided that:

> The goal of moral education is to foster moral sentiment, judgement, practical willingness and attitude, to be implemented throughout the curriculum, in accordance with the general provisions of the COS. (MEXT, 2008)

The moral education classroom should:

> provide ample opportunity for expression through activities such as composition and debate and, whilst coming into contact with thoughts different from one's own, for deepening one's own thinking and experiencing individual growth. (ibid.)

Prior to this, similar ideas had surfaced in the progressively minded 1998 CCE report *Raising hearts and minds for the next generation: the danger of losing heart*.

7.2.4 Curriculum Guidance

Curriculum guidance is published by MEXT alongside each COS to provide further details on content, planning, and pedagogical issues, as well as elaboration on the content of the COS. The curriculum guidance is lengthy and is written in a particular technical 'code'. As usual, a specialist panel was convened by the Bureau of Primary and Secondary Education to compile the revised curriculum guidance for moral education. Roesgaard describes the creation of a moral education coursebook by MEXT as both an official bid for contents and 'an official bid for translating the curriculum guidelines into a practice' (Roesgaard, 2016: 74). This description, however, must be shared by the curriculum guidance, which exists as an attempt to translate the curriculum into practice, or at least to provide preparatory groundwork towards that end.

The curriculum guidance for the new moral education in 2015 required the fostering of active participation for deep learning, with an expanded emphasis on

thinking and discussion. The 2015 guidance used the phrase 'moral education for thinking' alongside 'moral education through discussion' and thinking 'from various standpoints and from various perspectives' (MEXT, 2015b). The teaching community began to use these phrases during practice sharing, and 'moral education for thinking and discussion' was adopted by the CCE the following year (MEXT, 2016) in a wide-ranging report that conveyed similar aspirations for all subjects.

Thinking from multiple standpoints and multiple perspectives, according to Nagata, most likely centres on a story. 'Thinking from multiple standpoints is probing, deepening understanding and comparing one matter from numerous perspectives, making use of the viewpoints of various people' (Nagata & Matsuo, 2017: 8). 'People' here could be other characters in the story or other members of the class. 'Thinking from multiple perspectives is mainly the clarification of one's understanding of the matter and understanding of one's own way of living or decisions in dialogue and debate with others who may have differing perspectives' (ibid.). They are seen as steps, with 'recognition' of the situation leading to the 'sharpening' of one's position. There is a progression from 'questioning the situation: the characters' feelings or reasons for acting' to 'questioning the characters (their way of living)', which may realize 'thinking from multiple perspectives' but are 'safe'; to more 'adventure driving' approaches, by 'questioning the teaching materials (their characteristics or meaning)', then 'questioning the main theme or values' in the story or situation. Following active learning, the curriculum guidance opens practice up for more creative teaching, which creates a tension with the call for a 'stronger' moral education with defined textbook content.

This section has reviewed the formal responses of MEXT to the new moral education in 2015: following cabinet exhortations to implement policy, demarcating a 'red line' in the strength of moral education as a compromise position, making progress with incremental reform from within MEXT and firefighting against sensitive issues (whether real or imagined). The Ministry thus balances various interests in its formalization of education policy, whether originating internally, by the interests of the community of teachers, or driven by prime ministerial leadership. Beyond this, teachers, school administrators, members of the boards of education, textbook publishers, and independent education experts also work through the Ministry to mediate policy as they make sense of and translate it into practice, through pre-existing knowledge and social relationships in an institutionalized setting.

7.3 Working Through the Ministry of Education

Previous research has noted, but not explored, the potential for a 'soft middle layer' (DeCoker, 2002) of educational administration in Japan, composed of administrators who work with teachers in local contexts to mediate national policy based on knowledge of practice. Takayama and Lingard illustrate the latitude afforded to instructional advisors (*shidōshuji*), who are teachers 'brought in' (Bamkin, 2021) to the board of

education to work across a municipality/prefecture or on regional affairs, to influence instructional matters:

> Having been classroom teachers and worked closely with them, instructional advisors remain embedded within the traditional professional discourse where teachers' tacit and embodied forms of knowledge about children and learning are highly valued. As expert teachers, their identities are formed around their intuitive understanding of teaching and learning and deep understanding of a given subject matter. (Takayama & Lingard, 2019: 463)

Previous research has examined the work of practitioner advocates, a broader category of education practitioners who 'work to identify with, and to be identified as, teachers rather than bureaucrats or managers, utilizing horizontal personal–professional connections to support and influence practice as members of the teaching community' (Bamkin, 2021). Because of their shared knowledge and experience in instructional matters, their translations of policy into practice make sense to teachers and are thus easier to mentally accommodate (Piaget, 1972; Spillane et al., 2002). These moments of policy translation work through the boards of education.

Examples in moral education include the production of practitioner books written to translate the meanings of the reform for principals and classroom teachers, encouraging teacher development focused on group work and discussion in class, partly to enable teachers to follow children's discussion beyond the bounds of the textbook content (Bamkin, 2021). Practitioner advocates produce artefacts to shape lesson plans that encourage group work where students develop ideas in reference to textbook contents. However, whilst these interpretations grate against the control sought by the central government policy over moral education, practitioner advocates rarely advocate directly against the written form of policy (ibid.; see also Bamkin, 2019). Their interpretations are legitimized and promoted in reference to active learning and other policies. These previous examples emphasize the ways in which educators and school administrators work at the level of the school or through the local board of education. The two examples below draw particular attention to the policymaking potential of educationalists working through the Ministry of Education.

7.3.1 Making Curriculum Guidance

The curriculum guidance for moral education (MEXT, 2017b) was well suited to legitimizing and enabling some of the practices that well-known education experts had been promoting since before the reform. This is no coincidence. Curriculum guidance is drafted in the Ministry mainly by the Bureau of Primary and Secondary Education. The latter has some familiarity with school and classroom practice and relies partly upon teachers on the administrative track (Takayama & Lingard, 2019) to deliberate and work on drafting curriculum guidance. In this process, MEXT needs to be porous to ensure input from educators so that policy makes sense to school administrators and classroom teachers. In the process, however, those educationalists infuse new meanings into the guidance, not only making sense *to* teachers, but

making sense *for* other school administrators and classroom teachers. This can be demonstrated by examining the membership of the panels convened to deliberate the curriculum guidance for the moral education subject (MEXT, 2015b: 109; 2015c: 113), which works to translate policy closer to the language of practice (Ball, 2012).

The panel commissioned to deliberate and define the elementary school guidance included two elementary school principals, two vice-principals, one classroom teacher, one teacher supervisor (all municipal), one textbook examiner and three professors in fields related to education or teacher training. The two practitioner advocates examined as case studies in previous work (Bamkin, 2021) appear on this panel, as does Asami Tetsuya, who edits moral education content for the MEXT journal *Shotō Kyōiku Shiryō* (*Papers on Early Childhood and Elementary Education*), writing the history of policymaking effectively under the banner of the Ministry of Education. Numerous special collections on moral education are edited by Asami,[4] with short introductions to collate the key points. Asami served for 18 years as a teacher in municipal schools before serving as an instructional supervisor at a prefectural board of education, deputy section head and instructional supervisor at a municipal board of education, and later some years as vice-principal and principal of municipal schools.

The panel commissioned to deliberate and define the junior high school guidance demonstrates a similar composition to the elementary panel. It includes two secondary school principals, one classroom teacher, a prefectural teacher training (listed in his capacity as a MEXT textbook inspector), the deputy section chief of school education at a prefectural board of education, five university professors, and a NIER[5] researcher. The professors vary in their fields of expertise. Two are retired teachers, one promoted to instructional advisor before entering teacher training, the other serving three terms both as vice-principal and as principal of secondary schools. One is a scholar of moral education, one of psychology, one is an educational philosopher with interests in the practice and applications of Western theory in moral education. The NIER researcher is likewise interested in evaluating international models for moral education in Japan.

What is more significant than the similarity between the practices of teacher networks and the curriculum guidance is the high similarity between the guidance for elementary and for junior high schools, despite no overlap in membership of the panels proper. There may well have been correspondence, but this is not a certainty. Much of the smoothing process could only have realistically occurred through work in the secretariat of the two panels, housed in the (MEXT) Bureau of Primary and

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[4] *Shotō Kyōiku Shiryō*: January 2018: 1–41 on preparations for the new dōtoku; November 2018: 55–77 on improving the quality of dōtoku lessons; December 2018: 1–41 on what is the same, what is different and what is required for the new dōtoku; April 2019: 1–39 on linking dōtoku to content in other subjects; December 2019: 47–69 on dōtoku assessment in light of active learning; January 2021: 45–67 on education for the heart during the Covid-19 period.

[5] The National Institute for Educational Policy Research is the semi-autonomous research arm of MEXT.

Secondary Education. From this can be seen the hand of civil servants in the text of the documents. Schwartz' (1998) analysis of policy councils, in general, demonstrates the extent and regularity of direction provided to independent policy councils by civil servants in their secretariats, though this is likely to be stronger at higher levels since the expertise of panel members at lower levels is more likely to overlap with the policy content. It is important to affirm not only the smoothing effect, but the active consent of the secretariat who are effectively free to elide unsavoury passages from later versions. As an aside, the poster released by MEXT (Fig. 7.1), which signalled the compromise position between strengthening moral education and limiting strong assessment, was based on a report composed by a panel of experts also appointed by the Curriculum Division of the Bureau of Primary and Secondary Education (MEXT, 2016a), and likewise was composed entirely of teachers, school administrators, and professors in university schools of education.

7.3.2 Textbook Compilation, Approval, and Adoption

The extent to which teachers utilize or follow textbooks is a matter of debate (Bamkin, 2023) and is not discussed here. As a separate issue, the locus of control in compiling and editing textbook content is discussed. This is important because textbooks have proven an ongoing battleground in educational administration. As noted in Chap. 3, disputes over the content of history textbooks have culminated in rulings by the supreme court. Nozaki (2008) and others[6] have argued that the ministerial textbook approval system is opaque and potentially influenced unduly by politically partisan actors, if not by politicians. Over an extended period, this is thought to promote 'guided self-censorship' (ibid.). However, this position may overestimate the contemporary power (and internal consensus) of MEXT.

Peter Cave's (2013) innovative research on the compilation of history textbooks is based on both meticulous document analysis and on interviews with textbook authors and publishers. Despite critique of the opacity of the textbook approval system in the past, publishers and authors of more 'progressive' textbooks did not see ministerial textbook approval as the greatest factor determining content change. More influential in the compilation of textbooks was the textbook *adoption* process—that is, market-like demand determined by the selection of textbooks made locally (currently by 587 sub-prefectural blocks). Over the previous two decades, the selection process has evolved from one with an extensive involvement of teachers, to one led by the boards of education. This re-interpretation of responsibilities (within the pre-existing laws) was largely led by right-leaning activists. If there is strong influence from government bodies, it is from local government rather than from the Ministry. However, it is important to note that textbook publishers can capitalize on reputations for leaning either towards the conservative or towards the progressive, but that the perception of extremity either way would likely damage adoption rates. More practically, the

[6] See Cave (2013) for a review.

pattern of textbook adoption by the sub-prefectural blocks across all subjects can be observed in detailed data collected over the past five decades (Shuppan Rōren, 2020: 66–69). From this, two patterns begin to emerge. One pattern is the disappearance of smaller textbook companies between the 1960s and 1990s. The second is an overall stability of the textbook publishers with the largest shares for each subject over the whole period, especially at the elementary level.

Textbooks became a legal requirement for moral education in 2018. Many commentators expected that the new requirement for ministerial textbook screening would increase governmental control over textbooks. However, the publishers of moral education textbooks have long published supplementary materials for schools and teachers to buy to aid with moral education teaching. Amongst these, they published coursebooks (*fukudokuhon*). Though not screened by the Ministry and not mandated, they often provided a suggested course of study for moral education. It is therefore possible to compare the textbooks from any given publisher with the coursebooks it had previously published with no pressure from MEXT. On the basis of this comparison, it seems that there was little pressure to make great changes to the existing coursebooks that had long been in circulation. With some exceptions (e.g., Mitsumura, 2017), many publishers' textbooks are essentially revised editions of the coursebooks that were already in use (e.g., Tokyo Shoseki, 2017), which did not require ministerial approval. Both Japanese and US textbook publishers follow this approach (Lewis et al., 2002), and this is probably the case in most countries. For example, the popular Tokyo Shoseki (2017) elementary textbook, at sixth grade, contained 10 materials that have been included continuously in this publisher's coursebooks since 1992 or earlier; 1 since 1996; 6 since 2000; 4 since 2004; and 4 since 2010. Only ten materials were newly created for the first textbook screened by the Ministry,[7] and one more was added for the following edition (Tokyo Shoseki, 2019). This pattern holds for other grades.[8] The contents did not change much due to the requirement for textbook usage, and the rate of turnover in materials has remained stable since the 1980s. It remains possible that the direction of change, if any exists, has changed since approval became required for moral education textbooks. Unfortunately, no research has yet examined the direction of change in moral education coursebooks or textbooks.

7.4 Outcomes for Moral Education Practice

Control of content through the textbook system disincentivizes individual teachers from creating moral education content related to children's everyday lives. This is not

[7] Strictly speaking, only two of these 10 first appeared in the 2017 textbook edition, whilst eight first appeared in the preceding (2015) edition. However, the preceding edition *may* have been compiled with the forthcoming curriculum revision in mind.

[8] There was an average of 9 new materials introduced per grade in 2017 in a range between 7 and 11 through the six elementary volumes.

a great problem at elementary schools because other periods, such as 'class activities' and to a lesser extent integrated studies, allow teachers to plan in response to events between members of the class. At junior high schools, teachers are likely to miss the flexibility when issues arise in class, but conversely might appreciate the planning time saved, because the textbook provides structure around which to collaborate with colleagues in planning for routine moral education lessons.

Active learning has been leveraged to partially mitigate a narrowing of the scope of moral education. This holds potential to leverage what children bring to the classroom by considering further perspectives and viewpoints on moral issues, considering not only what is 'written' in textbook materials, but also what could be missing. Beyond analysing the events in a story, for example, active learning opens up the potential to discuss the moral value itself and conflicts between values. As has been noted elsewhere, active learning encourages constructivist and child-centred learning, but only where there is capacity and willingness. If sufficient resources and support are provided, active learning can empower the pedagogic knowledge of teachers and deepen the learning of children and students. Moreover, there are many systems of professional development built into the Japanese education system. These include lesson study, personnel rotation, board of education instructional advisors, other expert practitioners, and the Ministry's capacity to bring in expertise from amongst teachers. Augmented by these systems, it is fair to say that the pedagogically oriented effects of active learning are broader and deeper than the limitations that seek to 'strengthen' moral education.

Beyond this, however, further research is needed to explore whether there are again systemic changes broader and deeper than those of active learning, that limit the capacity of teachers to fully utilize and develop their pedagogical expertise. These include the challenges of increasing workloads (Benesse, 2016; MEXT, 2017a), questions of increasing managerialism (Katsuno, 2016), the extent to which fiscal decentralization will beget financial inequality between schools, whether administrative decentralization will empower local government offices under the direction of party-affiliated mayors and governors (Murakami, 2019), and other challenges that shape the whole structure and experience of the teacher's work. Some of these are discussed in Chap. 12. If active learning remains unrealized, then moral education will default to the changes mandated by the strengthening of moral education—syllabus planning, textbook usage, and assessment.

7.5 The Role of the Ministry of Education

The strengthening of moral education was precipitated by nationalistic impulses of the cabinet, and the now-mainstream culturally conservative wing of the LDP, to increase control over content in an attempt to bolster 'patriotic' education content. Simultaneously, at the time this policy was made, active learning was already considered current policy by the Ministry of Education. The latter policy was already being promoted as a principle of the (then) forthcoming course of study, which had not

yet entered the formal drafting stage of the curriculum revision cycle. Nonetheless, active learning was incorporated into the curriculum guidance for moral education at a lower level of the Ministry with input from both civil servants in the Bureau of Primary and Secondary Education, and from educators with experience serving as teachers and teacher educators.

The translation of policy in the local context has been leveraged by innovative teachers, by school administrators, and by both national and regional experts in moral education, presenting interpretations that make sense to teachers and which tend to encourage deeper learning, which has greater potential to question the prescribed materials. The wording of the curriculum guidance facilitated the mediation of local policy towards more progressive pedagogies, which held some potential to bypass or reformulate contents seen as disagreeable to teachers and school administrators. Textbook publishers likewise responded more to local demand than to the national (MEXT) textbook approval system. In these examples, the Ministry is implicated in multiple ways: as an arm of government fused with the cabinet; as a bureaucracy whose civil servants work to realize numerous current policies cognizant of sensitive issues and the demands placed on teachers; and as a conduit for expertise based on knowledge of education gained through classroom practice and school administration. The higher echelons of MEXT tend to follow policies driven by the cabinet, business interests, and informed commentators without experience in education, akin to the policy interests of the cabinet. Indeed, since the rise of prime ministerial leadership, the number of education experts on the CCE has declined precipitously. Representation of education experts on the second Education Rebuilding Council is tokenistic at best. At the lower levels, however, some quarters of MEXT, such as the Bureau of Primary and Secondary Education, rely on educationalists. The thawing of relations between the Ministry and the JTU allows for greater exchange. The Ministry ‘brings in’ education professors and current or semi-retired[9] teaching professionals who ‘reach up’ and create the very policy they will later translate into practice.

This is not to suggest that MEXT, or any specific part of it, is actively opposing the plans of the central government, though moral education may be an example of policy which has required more firefighting than others. A more accurate statement requires an understanding of the multiple roles of MEXT, the limits on its power and its semi-porous structure. It balances remits to implement cabinet orders faithfully, and to administer education with a vast professional workforce, and to utilize educational expertise to improve educational provision, in cooperation with other bodies. And its various departments have differing priorities. The sensitivity of moral education exposes tensions that exist in the policymaking process and in education administration regardless of the topic. Moreover, a wide range of stakeholders, such as teachers, school administrators, members of the boards of education,

[9] Established groups and processes for incorporating retired professionals dovetail with the low public sector mandatory retirement age of 65. As such, many professionals continue to work either voluntarily or in a liminal or lateral position after retirement. The participation of retired principals in the municipal principals’ meetings is one means amongst many.

textbook publishers, and independent education experts work through the Ministry to mediate policy. Focusing on the tensions between government bodies and within MEXT provides insight beyond written policy, on the interaction between policy and practice.

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Chapter 8
The Study of Elementary Science: Aspects of Excellence and Equality

Mamoru Onuki

Abstract This chapter discusses the 2017 revisions to the science course of study against historical and contemporary debates in Japan. Historically, two points have attracted debate: (1) determining the objectives of the science courses, and how the educational content should be selected, prioritised, and ordered—the scope and sequence of curriculum; and (2) determining for whom the educational content is appropriate—the question of its relation to indigenous knowledge. Analysing from the former point of view will help to clarify the quality of excellence that has been pursued within science education in Japan. The latter will help to evaluate whether excellence is equally guaranteed to all children from a curriculum perspective. The background of these debates is discussed, before examining the course of study in relation to these historic and domestic debates, alongside newer global debates of key competencies. The discussion is illustrated using examples from the new course of study in order to keep the discussion grounded in school practice. The progressive agenda for Japan's science course of study is evaluated on its capacity to simultaneously ensure excellence and equality. This will provide suggestions that will facilitate science education reform for a knowledge-based society.

Keyword Science Education · Excellence and equality · Indigenous science · Universalism and multiculturalism

Unprecedented changes are occurring in Japan. There is continued scientific and technological development, including in artificial intelligence research, with proposals such as the 'Society 5.0' concept, symbolised by a new type of knowledge society. In addition, the country faces trials consequential of the indeterminate Covid-19 virus. As for education, there are two possibilities: whilst its general path is determined by the characteristics of contemporary society and the historical era, it is also a participant in determining the fundamentals of society and the age (Nakauchi, 1988). In

M. Onuki (✉)
School of Education and Welfare, Aichi Prefectural University, 1522-3 Ibaragabasama, Nagakute-shi, Nagakute 480-1198, Japan
e-mail: oonuki@ews.aichi-pu.ac.jp

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Japanese society today, which itself stands at a turning point, basic principles of education are also faced with questions regarding a dramatic shift to accommodate these social and historic changes.

As Japan explores new principles of educational innovation, one important idea is the simultaneous pursuit of ‘quality’ and ‘equality’. An example is the Science Council of Japan’s 2010 report on policy proposals for education in 2030. This report, titled *Prospects for the Field of Pedagogy*, states the following: ‘In today’s globalising world, excellent educational quality is needed to be globally competitive. At the same time, educational reform is urgently needed to address the various risks that stem from rapid societal changes; guaranteeing the right to learn in order to help prevent social stratification and creating equal educational opportunities are also crucial’ (Science Council of Japan, 2010: 1).

In addition, the pillars of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations in 2015 include the objective to ‘ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’. In a knowledge-based society, the opportunity to learn marks the line between inclusion and exclusion. To ensure meaningful lives, society must guarantee a fair and equal opportunity for all children to enjoy high-quality education. This is an issue of global importance.

Looking back to past debates, there is a need for more than just the systematic pursuit of excellence and a guarantee of equal education (Okada, 2013). Cultural studies of the 1980s revealed that certain views and ideas about gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity, identity are woven into various cultures, knowledge bases, and institutions, that require a discussion of a ‘politics of differences’ (Koyasu, 2009). According to this perspective, the knowledge taught in schools is not value-neutral, adding complexity to the problems of quality and equality of education. Even quality educational content taught in the classroom may deprive individual children of educational opportunity if the content denigrates the culture and values of that particular child. This is an issue of fairness that calls for careful examination of educational content. A particular issue in this process is whether equal, shared, standard educational content can achieve both universality and diversity at the same time (Tanaka, 1994). What is demanded, then, is not these self-contradictory objectives of universality and cultural diversity in educational content. Instead, within each specific culture, there needs to be a re-questioning of universality from culturally diverse perspectives, to discover universal educational content that is informed by diversity and diverse perspectives. There must be a guarantee that this content will be delivered fairly and equally to all children.

It should be noted that in many countries, discussions about establishing both excellence and fairness have chiefly concerned the sciences and mathematics. The international focus on science and mathematics education originates from a recognition amongst all developed nations of the roles played by excellence in science in terms of the safety and security of a nation and its people, and efforts to improve living standards and strengthen the country in terms of international competition, etc. However, because fairness does not contribute so directly to these developmental aims, these preoccupations made the simultaneous achievement of excellence and

fairness within science and mathematics curricula a perennial issue of importance in many countries, and Japan was, and still is, no exception.

In Japan, the national government's course of study corresponds to standards in other countries. The course of study includes statements regarding the educational objectives and content of each subject ('course') of study, points of special concern for instruction in each subject, etc. This chapter will trace debates and developments regarding excellence and fairness in Japan's science education, chiefly from the perspective of educational content. From this perspective, the 2017 revision of the course of study for science is analysed to clarify its significance and the issues to be resolved. The following section sets out the debate over the educational content of the course of study for science. Section 8.3 examines the theoretical perspectives that underpin the latest (2017) revision of the course of study for science and the practices that emerge from it. Finally, the significance and challenges of them will be discussed in light of the previous discussions featured here.

8.1 Debate Regarding Educational Content in the Course of Study for Science

The curriculum organisation of elementary, middle, and high schools in post-war Japan, as a principle, is conducted in accordance with the course of study determined by the Ministry of Education (MEXT). The course of study lists objectives and content for each subject along with general rules that constitute the fundamental policies for curriculum organisation. Since Japan employs a Ministry-led approval system for school textbooks, the course of study serves as the main textbook-screening standard (Nishioka, 2017). The course of study is the near-national curriculum which regulates the school. The entrance examination system, in which the entrance exam for public universities does not include content outside of the course of study, makes them legally binding even beyond school education.

Historically two points have attracted debate: (1) determining the objectives of the science courses, and how the educational content should be selected, prioritised, and ordered—the scope and sequence of curriculum; and (2) determining for whom the educational content is appropriate. Analysing from the former point of view will help to clarify the quality of excellence that has been pursued in science education in Japan. In addition, the perspective on universality and multiculturalism provided by the latter perspective will help to evaluate whether excellence is equally guaranteed to all children from a curriculum perspective.

8.1.1 The Status of Science and the Selection and Arrangement of Educational Content

The objectives of a science course depend on the character of the courses and on the selection of educational content. In Japan, unlike in other countries, there are two close-related concepts that are often both translated to ‘science’, namely *rika* and *kagaku. Rika* is considered to be a subject that does not intend to instruct in the natural sciences. Rather, its objectives are to understand basic natural phenomena and to foster an appreciation for nature (Itakura, 2009: Kosano, 2007; Mori, 2017). The science courses we are discussing in this section sit under the umbrella of *rika* science. It is this perspective on science, which is emphasised by the course of study, oriented towards the mastery of knowledge about real, visible things, including natural phenomena, through the encouragement of observation and experimentation. The objectives here are to master scientific inquiry methods and develop the attitude needed for such pursuits.

The historical background to the emphasis of Japanese education on the understanding of natural phenomena is the postwar *seikatsu tangen gakushu*, an interdisciplinary and experiential course based on students’ life which literally translates to ‘unit for studies on life’. *Seikatsu tangen gakushu* roots learning in the lived experience of the child. The course of study published in 1947 said that the content and methods of rika science teaching must be based on the local flora, fauna, weather, and machinery that the children will experience. And through such learning, it set three goals for children to acquire: (1) the ability to see, think, and deal with things scientifically, (2) knowledge of the principles and applications of science, and (3) the attitude to find the truth and create new things (MOE, 1947).

However, many teachers criticised this approach since natural science is more cumulative. They have called for a course with knowledge-based progression. Because *rika* science structured the content of science education around life-related issues, the order of learning did not progress cumulatively, and therefore students were not necessarily using previously learnt material as tools for problem-solving. This was a criticism of the educational content and its arrangement in the course of study.

A representative group with these beliefs is the Association of Science Education (ASE), established in 1954. The ASE is a civic educational research association[1] on education in the school subject of science, mainly composed of school teachers and university researchers in education and natural or applied sciences. Having analysed and investigated the course of study, the ASE has proposed detailed course content and instruction methods that it deems necessary for all children to successfully learn the facts and laws of natural science. The most salient difference between the ASE’s

[1] Civic educational research associations are composed mainly of teachers and educational researchers, generating new knowledge in the practice of education. They cover broad topics and approaches, and have traditions outside and sometimes against government and teachers’ unions. Some associations coalesce into movements.

proposal, compared to the course of study, was its prioritisation of conceptual knowledge, over and above the acquisition of methods of scientific inquiry, learning to appreciate nature, etc.

The ASE was alarmed by the tendency to neglect disciplines in the course of study in the 1950s. For example, in the course of study of that time, teaching materials were selected from everyday life. Examples might include personal items such as windmills, making soap bubbles, or manipulating the wiring of electric lights. In line with *seikatsu tangen gakushu*, they were sequenced and organised from the standpoint of the basics of life and industry. However, ASE argued that, for example, in the study of buoyancy, concepts such as weight, density, and gravity needed to be recognised in an orderly fashion in line with the discipline (Mafune, 1962). Hisao Morikawa of the National Institute for Educational Policy Research advocated a continuation of the position that 'knowledge and content do not matter as long as they are appropriate materials for enquiry' (Morikawa, 1969: 10). This debate has continued for over half a century, with the course of study still largely aligned to *rika* science.

The differences between the ASE and the course of study appear in their respective content selections and designs. The analysis below focuses on educational content and methods of using materials to teach concepts pertaining to transformations between the three states of nature—solid, liquid, and gas. In the course of study for fourth grade science, 'The form of water changes into vapour or ice depending on temperature. When water becomes ice, its volume increases' (MEXT, 2008: 41). The main objective is to grasp the three-state changes of water, and learning proceeds using materials concerning natural phenomena with which children are familiar, such as fog, the evaporation of water puddles, etc. Here, activities are performed, including data collection, making graphs, and reporting one's thoughts using illustrations and pictures.

In the corresponding educational content set forth by the ASE, 'three states exist according to temperature: solid, liquid, and gas' (Kosano, 2007: 93). Children are to perform experiments involving changing the temperature of ethanol to confirm that both ethanol and water evaporate and solidify. On that foundation, the students' understanding is expanded with the knowledge that changes in temperature can cause liquids other than water, such as solids like tin and salt, and gases like butane, to solidify or become gaseous. Students thus learn educational content related to laws that have a wide range of applications, as all things change state according to temperature. In other words, fundamental natural science content is included. The objective is for children to acquire a 'lens' through which they can observe the physical world.

Comparing the ASE and the course of study, the latter takes up the natural phenomenon of water evaporation, emphasising knowledge, experimentation, and observation using individual materials that the eye can see. Through these, the main focus is on methods of inquiry (collecting data, etc.) and on fostering certain attitudes. Although the ASE also employs the medium of experimentation using familiar objects, the backdrop is individual phenomena that are considered to be part of *kagaku* science education, pivoting on the formation of universal laws and concepts.

Masaki Kosano of the ASE criticises the course of study approach as follows: 'In Japan's science (*rika*) education, the objective is to teach "science (*rika*) which can be used in daily life"—that is, something with no connection to future science (*kagaku*). This education is an attempt to teach "conceptual emotions," that is, a "love of science". The "way of thinking" and "methods" aimed for have nothing to do with actual scientific content. The result is that students learn contents that are actually "distant" from those of natural science' (Kosano, 2009: 103). According to the ASE, practices based on the course of study pay insufficient heed to the systematic academic study of educational content. The course of study of the natural states limits discussions of the three states to water and only offers materials pertaining to water-related changes. These practical methods have been denounced and 'removed' from natural science (*kagaku*) academic content on the premise that their end result is short-sighted learning with no connection to the formation of concepts that would actually lead to a deeper appreciation for nature.

In contrast, the main axis for the ASE is the formation of systematically related concepts. Returning to the example of the three natural states, the abovementioned educational content is studied, partly as preparation for the study of states of matter and molecular motion in junior high school. Taking a balloon filled with liquid alcohol and a balloon filled with water and submerging each in 90 °C water, students compare the relative expansion of each balloon. During this exercise, students learn that liquids other than water can boil and that different types of matter have different boiling points. Students learn about the transformation of states by melting a solid, such as tin or salt, solidifying a liquid like mercury, sublimating dry ice, etc.

The ASE makes a clear distinction between educational goals and educational content and subject matter and tools (Mafune, 1962). The ASE thus proceeds with systematic academics, arranged in a sequence that considers students' cognitive abilities, so that all students may grasp these basic concepts. This approach systematically organises an abundant variety of subject matter content, allowing students to experience and acquire a scientific worldview that is common to contemporary natural science. A secondary effect is that scientific attitudes and methods are intricately linked with these experiences.

In this way, the ASE emphasises the mastery of universal core scientific concepts, whilst students learn about the fruits of modern science. In accordance with the orientation of each course, educational content and materials are systematically arranged to accomplish these objectives. In the course of study, the first priority is understanding familiar objects and phenomena, with the objective of acquiring scientific methods and a scientific attitude. The result entails the risk that it may fail to make important connections with core universal natural science concepts, thus creating an accumulation of superficial, miscellaneous knowledge about individual phenomena departing from children's lives.

8.1.2 The Educational Content of **Rika** *Science and Diversity Aspects*

From the viewpoint of critical pedagogy[2] findings in Japan and overseas, a question arises regarding educational content, such as in the course of study, which is considered common official knowledge: whose cultural values are given top priority? (Apple, 2000). The natural science content taken up either in *rika* or *kagaku* science are thought, as opposed to literature or social science content, are thought to be 'value-neutral' (Kosano, 2018).

On this point, Masataka Ogawa's idea of 'science as a foreign culture' is suggestive. Ogawa, a proponent of 'pluralistic science education', considers science (*kagaku*) from three dimensions. First, there is (a) 'individual science', with understanding on an individual level. Next, there is (b) 'indigenous science', with understanding on a village community level. Finally, there is (c) 'Western science', with understanding based on the beliefs and norms shared by a group, namely the community of scientists (Ogawa, 1998). For example, (a) a child explains rainfall as 'the sky is crying'; (b) another child from Nepal says that the gods are breaking water-filled vessels; and (c) a child explains how water and ice gather and form clouds, with the water and ice eventually falling to earth due to gravity. These examples demonstrate that different people may conceive the same natural phenomenon in different ways. At this point, there is a division in science, and Ogawa says that individuals use this multilayered world of science as they go about their daily lives.

At first glance, it may seem that 'indigenous science' is equivalent to folktales and myths, but indigenous science is not necessarily only a product of the imagination. The 'Oriental science' of China and the Yupik people of Alaska are examples of cultures where there is a different systematisation of knowledge concerning climate and seasonal changes (Kawagley, 1998). When the village community hunts and gathers, stories are passed on at local sites. Whilst there is no guarantee of validity or objectivity, these stories contribute to the preservation of ecosystems. In this way, science (*kagaku*) is seen to have multiple origins and practices; each society and culture possesses a unique (indigenous) science, functioning to maintain that society and/or culture.

Ogawa uses this perspective to analyse *rika* science described in the course of study. He points out that this does not present the science (*kagaku*) that is considered in many countries to be the sole universal science (i.e., Western science); instead, *rika* presents a complex science that is actually (and implicitly) a delicate balance between indigenous and Western science (Ogawa, 2006). For instance, Ogawa uses the dissection of a frog as an example. From the perspective of Western science, dissecting a frog is an opportunity to see and learn about the inside of an organism's body. In Japanese schools, in addition to this, the frog is buried after the dissection

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[2] Critical pedagogy is defined as broadly seeking to expose how relations of power and inequality, (social, cultural, economic), in their myriad forms combinations, and complexities, are manifest and are challenged in the formal and informal education of children and adults (Apple et al., 2009: 3).

exercise is completed, and a ceremony is performed, demonstrating an animistic value system (here, Japanese views on life and death). Ogawa argues that there is therefore a coexistence of Western and indigenous science (Ogawa, 2006).

The course of study takes the position that science (*kagaku*) is a culture that relies on Western science: 'Science (*kagaku*) can be thought of as a culture, established over a long period of time by humans. The fundamental condition which makes science distinct from other cultures is considered to be its verifiability, reproducibility, objectivity, etc.' (ibid.). In other words, in the course of study, Western science is seen as the one and only science, as it is not oriented towards local indigenous science, which may lack reproducibility and objectivity. The result is that the course of study discards much of the indigenous science that is inherent to students' society and culture, creating the risk of functioning as a cultural assimilation mechanism, whereby the local culture is assimilated into this hybrid type of science (*kagaku*).

This problem of indigenous science is not always overlooked in science (*kagaku*) education. The Polar Method Association (極地方式研究会 *Kyokuchi Hoshiki Kenkyukai*) was formed by members of the existing ASE in 1971. This new group emphasised the importance of introducing children to universal concepts through the study of locally indigenous organisms in the classroom (Polar Method Association 1971). Take the newt for example. In Japan, there are newts with different patterns and tails, such as the Tokyo newt, the Niigata newt, and the Kyoto newt. In the method advocated by the Polar Method Association, children bring examples of these local creatures to the classroom and introduce them. This is intended to 'shake' the children's concept of newts and lead to a deeper understanding of newts. It is to be commended that the Polar Method Association has attempted to make people look at the environment around them and connect the concept of universality by taking up endemic, and thus indigenous, cases in this way. However, this only positions the indigenous cases as a means of reaching a deeper understanding of universal concepts and does not necessarily mean that the value of the indigenous cases is evaluated or that the value of the universal cases is re-examined through local knowledge. In this respect, they can be also considered fragmentary additions to the dominant culture.

Useful as a reference on this point is the idea of Clinical Epistemology, proposed by the late philosopher Yujiro Nakamura. First, Nakamura states that the three characteristics of modern science—universality, logicality, objectivity—also serve as tools for its proponents to convince others of its value, even to the exclusion of other knowledges. With this knowledge, Nakamura (1992) argues, phenomena of the living world can be extracted, 'materialised', and divided into parts, thus enabling a detailed investigation of each part of the natural world. Nevertheless, it is rare to find any causal relationship which is singular, even for simple natural phenomena. phenomena of the living world are complex systems with, at best, vast networks of causal relationships. For example, the movement of a falling ball is influenced by a variety of factors in addition to gravity and air resistance. Consideration must be given to the individual time, place, and other circumstances of each phenomenon and to their mutual interactions. When examining psychological processes or human experience of an event, the number of factors required for a 'universal, logical, and objective'

analysis become unrealistic. In this way, Nakamura contrasts Clinical Epistemology, incorporating knowledge of the specific, with scientific knowledge.

Western science advocates generality and universality, and has objectives related to factual knowledge, with wide-ranging predictions and applications. Western science does not readily provide appropriate responses for individual cultures, traditions, and problem states. Instead, dynamic interactions between indigenous and scientific knowledge, as described by Ogawa, enable solutions to a variety of problems, from the local site to the international level. This signifies the acquisition of knowledge that has universality, tempered by its application to multiple different cultures. It is therefore necessary to examine the concepts that are thought to be universal, such as principles and laws, from a multicultural point of view and to identify what is of shared value to culturally and linguistically diverse children, rather than just focusing on the acquisition of these concepts.[3]

'Indigenous knowledge' is found in local cultures within Japan. Generally, however, the term 'multicultural' conjures the image of a culture formed from people of different races and ethnic groups, genders and social classes, sexualities and disabilities. One also sees efforts to question science, hitherto written by men, from the standpoint of women. One example is the position of an American female researcher in primatology, who focuses not on the control of primate groups by aggressive males with territorial behaviour, but instead on the roles of females who cooperate to preserve the stability of their societies (Schiebinger, 1999). In this way, the 'facts' of scientific research, once considered 'universal' using the concepts and methods proposed by men, are undergoing questioning from the cultural and positional perspectives of women. Knowledge systems, then, are being reconfigured, and the detailing of hitherto unknown facts and principles is contributing to existing cultures, thereby further enriching and enhancing these cultures.

If the selection and arrangement of educational content do not reflect the cultures of these diverse groups, then said content shows a biased 'universality', which makes the systematic nature of the depicted academic disciplines seem outmoded. If indigenous science is not sufficiently incorporated into education, then children with foreign relational ties and women may become further marginalised despite being given the chance to participate in formal science courses.

Of course, this does not mean that unconsidered efforts should be made to reflect indigenous science within education courses. For example, in some foreign countries, there are regions where, traditionally, urine is used for medicinal purposes by applying it as a salve for wounds. This is different from the indigenous science discussed above, in that a person who relies on Western science would consider this practice unscientific and would thus consider the practice 'opposed to reason' rather than 'complementary'. Here, then, a cultural confrontation emerges. Moreover, adding this practice to educational courses would invite overgeneralisation and

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[3] In this respect, the Polar Method Association was oriented towards teaching a science that was more universal than the laws in the name of a high level science. For example, instead of teaching Hooke's Law, which focused on springs, the Polar Method Association focused on the fact that everything is elastic (Takahashi & Hosoya, 1974).

curriculum ‘bloating’. Such points remain problematic when considering policies for reflecting a multicultural perspective within educational course content.

To summarise, in science (*rika*) education, the objective is to achieve both fairness and excellence, and doing so requires the accomplishment of the following three points regarding educational content.

1. Content should be selected and arranged so that it has a high degree of universality.
2. Debate involving multicultural perspectives is necessary for the concepts selected in (1), together with careful consideration of details.
3. Content selected must be clarified in terms of its universality, tempered with multicultural aspects, and there must be a guarantee of fairness.

8.2 Theoretical Background for the 2017 Revision of the Course of Study and Concrete Practices

8.2.1 Theoretical Background for the 2017 Revision of the Course of Study

From the beginning of the 2000s, the fostering of general abilities under the rubric of ‘competencies’ has become an international priority in education. The engine behind this shift is the OECD’s Definition and Selection of Competencies (DeSeCo) Project (Matsuo, 2015). These are qualities and abilities beyond the mere mastery of knowledge and techniques. They include the ability to use knowledge and techniques to solve problems.

In Japan, calls for education competencies began in the latter half of the 2000s. The backdrop for such calls included the following. (1) With the development of artificial intelligence and information and communications technologies (ICT), there was a growing demand for highly creative work utilising high-level cognitive functions (economic demand). (2) Due to increasing trans-scientific issues and problems, there was a need for individual citizens to have a rational and critical understanding of decisions made by scientific experts, etc., as well for said citizens to themselves explore optimal solutions (societal and citizen-related demands). (3) The development of various sciences, including the so-called ‘learning sciences’, clarified the role of competencies, such as metacognition, etc., as a means of effective learning (Ishii, 2015; Nishioka, 2016).

Prior to the 2017 revision of the course of study, an Investigative Commission was established with the mission of studying optimal educational objectives and content, as well as assessing said objectives and content, all in the goal of fostering competencies. This Commission had as its objectives (1) the clarification of the structure of required competencies within elementary and secondary education in preparation for said revision, and (2) the clarification of educational methods for realising said structure, with the aim of fostering competencies (MEXT, 2014).

The Commission drew three conclusions regarding competencies. First, there should be an awareness that educational objectives for core competencies must guarantee every individual's right to grow and develop, as well as give them the abilities they need to live and prosper in contemporary society (Nishioka, 2016). Second, the Commission indicated guidelines and instructions for arranging objectives for each educational course, in line with the course of study revision. Specifically, this would be achieved by having students and teachers participate in authentic assessments, with the objective of promoting a deeper understanding of the core concepts of each course, such as, for example, 'What is energy?'. And third, the Commission recommended instruction methods for enabling the comprehensive and contextual use of general skills in addition to core competencies by means of participation, that is, having students and teachers engage in completing authentic tasks. The results of the Investigative Commission informed a more formal report of the Central Council of Education entitled *Improvement of the Courses of Study* (2016).

The aims of the existing (2008) course of study were to develop students' abilities to think, make judgements, and express themselves. These aims did not move far from having students memorise and recall individual and concrete knowledge-related facts. The report thus presented new objectives, whereby academic achievement would encompass the active use of acquired knowledge, so that students would be able to apply their knowledge to specific situations and circumstances (Central Education Council, 2016: 15). The report further proposed a revision of existing learning methods, such that instruction could help students to achieve the academic levels required to actively use and apply their knowledge, with said instruction being based on the perspectives of 'proactive, interactive, and authentic learning', which is often referred to as 'active learning'.

On this foundation, the report laid out educational objectives in preparation for the revision of the course of study. The policies stated therein would foster 'three pillars of competencies', and 'ways of thinking and considering [that are] appropriate for each academic course, etc.' The three pillars under the course of study are for schools to foster the following competencies: (1) mastery of the knowledge and techniques needed for students to ask themselves 'What do I understand now?' and 'What can I do now?'; (2) fostering the ability to think, make judgements, and engage in self-expression, so that students may learn how to actually apply and use what they currently understand and are able to do; and (3) fostering non-cognitive aspects, including students' ability to orient themselves to learning and to an understanding of how they can live meaningful lives, whilst participating in and contributing to their societies and to the world (Central Education Council, 2016: 28–30).

Regarding (3), the emphasis on fostering competencies involves the danger of slighting educational content. To overcome this hurdle, perspectives and ways of thinking are introduced for each course. This indicates that perspectives and ways of thinking may differ due to the unique characteristics of each course; hence, there is a clear statement about what perspectives should be used to observe things and events, and as to what specific styles of thinking are needed for each course. This fostering of competencies in tandem with such perspectives and ways of thinking is designed to stimulate authentic learning in each course, enabling the realisation of proactive, interactive, and authentic learning within the classroom setting.

This report, produced by the same body that oversees the formulation of the course of study, was the main point of reference for the drafting of the 2017 revision of the course of study.

8.2.2 *The Specific Case of* Rika *Science*

Based on this report, the course of study for *rika* science also incorporates policies for using scientific perspectives and ways of thinking that are appropriate for each class type, so as to foster general competencies. In elementary school science, it is stated that 'the aim is to develop the competencies necessary to solve problems related to natural things and phenomena through familiarity with nature, application of scientific perspectives and ways of thinking, and carrying out observation and experimentation with a clear perspective' (MEXT, 2017: 12).

Three abilities are included in the course of study that could be interpreted as competencies for *rika* science.

1. Fundamental techniques for measuring, observing, and experimenting are to be acquired for the understanding of natural things and phenomena.
2. Problem-solving abilities are to be cultivated via the performance of observations, experiments, etc.
3. An attitude is to be fostered that includes emotional aspects such as the love of nature, as well as the 'can-do' attitude needed for solving problems independently.

These three facets correspond to the three items stated above, namely (1) mastery of knowledge and techniques; (2) fostering thinking, decision-making, and self-expression abilities; and (3) competencies regarding students' ability to properly orient themselves towards learning and be emotionally competent (humane, etc.). These are illustrated in Box 8.1. Here, the three pillars of competencies in the course of study for science seem to continue the tradition of the past. That is, the first and foremost priority in the course of study is understanding familiar objects and phenomena, with the objective of acquiring scientific methods and a scientific attitude.

Box 8.1 Objectives of the course of study for science, illustrated through the example of the sixth-grade unit 'Energy and Matter' (MEXT, 2017: 105)

Energy and Matter

1. Students will be able to understand the mechanism of combustion, the properties of aqueous solutions, the regularity of leverage, and the properties and functions of electricity, and will be able to acquire basic skills in observation and experimentation.

   [Corresponds to pillar of competence 1: knowledge and skills]

2. ‘Students will be able to create more reasonable ideas about the mechanisms of combustion, properties of aqueous solution, regularities of leverage, and properties and functions of electricity through their pursuit of them’.

   [Corresponds to pillar of competence 2: competence in thinking, decision-making, and expression]
3. Students will develop an attitude of independent problem-solving through the pursuit of the mechanisms of combustion, the properties of aqueous solutions, the regularity of leverage and the properties and functions of electricity.

   [Corresponds to pillar of competence 3: attitude orientated to learning and humanity]

The key to fostering these competencies is instruction in appropriate scientific perspectives and ways of thinking, which have been defined as follows: ‘In the process of fostering competencies (qualities and abilities), these ways of thinking about and perspectives on things and events, which students can work with and apply’ (MEXT, 2017: 13). Such scientific perspectives and ways of thinking are determined to be incorporated into the *rika* science learning processes in particular. Thus, for *rika* science, a specific framework has been constructed to foster the understanding of natural things and phenomena from a scientific perspective as well as to foster thought processes that contribute to problem-solving.

Firstly, for scientific thought processes, a framework has been set for each school year that includes specific points (facts and events) that are to be given instructional priority. Tasks include making comparisons (3rd grade), thinking about things from multiple diverse perspectives (6th grade); and at junior high school, proposing solutions, analysing, and interpreting results (8th grade), and finally, reflecting on investigative processes (9th grade). By completing each of these tasks, students gain complex metacognitive abilities for reflecting on their own engagements. These can be considered extensions of the items referred to as ‘problem-solving skills’ and ‘scientific inquiry-related skills’ in the former course of study.

From elementary school through high school, scientific perspectives have since 2008 followed fundamental scientific concepts, such as energy, etc. This was part of the reverse course on ‘Pressure-free schooling’ (*yutori kyoiku*) (CCE, 2003), under the rubric of fostering ‘solid academic ability’ (*tashikana gakuryoku*). The establishment of such a conceptual way of looking at things is a further step forward in the policy of a concept-centred curriculum organisation, along the lines advocated by the ASE. Regarding energy-related areas, for example, both relational and quantitative perspectives are used to understand natural things and phenomena.

Table 8.1 summarises scientific perspectives and ways of thinking intended for the content for energy, matter, life, and Earth, respectively, examples of scientific perspectives and ways of thinking, plus specific learning activities, are shown. For

energy, the table provides various activities that enable verification via experimentation under controlled conditions. For example, the strength of an electromagnet's magnetic force is made visible by counting the number of paperclips each magnet can pick up and by analysing, from quantitative and relational viewpoints, such things as the strength of the running electric current and the number of coil turns.

These scientific perspectives and ways of thinking provide an 'entranceway' into the observation of facts and phenomena, constituting a means of fostering competencies (qualities and abilities), even though they are different from these end-objective competencies. These are means of proceeding with inquiries in the learning process, and they have been set so that they can be used simultaneously with learned knowledge and techniques. By articulating the perspectives and ways of thinking that have been unconsciously used by those participating in inquiry, it will be possible for all children to participate in inquiry-based activities that are proactive, interactive, and authentic learning. However, if these scientific perspectives and ways of thinking are not positioned as a goal, there is a concern that it will remain unclear where such perspectives and ways of thinking are to be cultivated.

Table 8.1 Scientific perspectives and ways of thinking intended for the fifth-grade unit science 'energy and Matter' (Central Council for Education 2016)

	Energy	Matter	Life	The Earth
Perspective	Quantitative and relational	Qualitative and substantive	Diversity and commonality	Temporal and spatial
Ways of thinking	Students control variables when they predict the factors that they believe influence natural phenomena or events and investigate which factors influence them (control variables)			
Specifically envisioned learning activities (5th grade)	Students investigate conditions that affect the magnetic force of an electromagnet in order to increase the number of clips that attach to the electromagnet	Students will conduct a controlled experiment to determine the regularity of salt dissolving in water. They will also focus on mass to gain a substantive understanding of the fact that matters don't disappear when matters dissolve	Students will investigate the conditions necessary for the germination of green beans. Students will also discover the similarities and diversities amongst organisms by comparing the continuity of life and how it grows with other organisms	Students will examine land formation and changes in land formation from a temporal and spatial perspective. In addition, students will examine the conditions that influence those changes

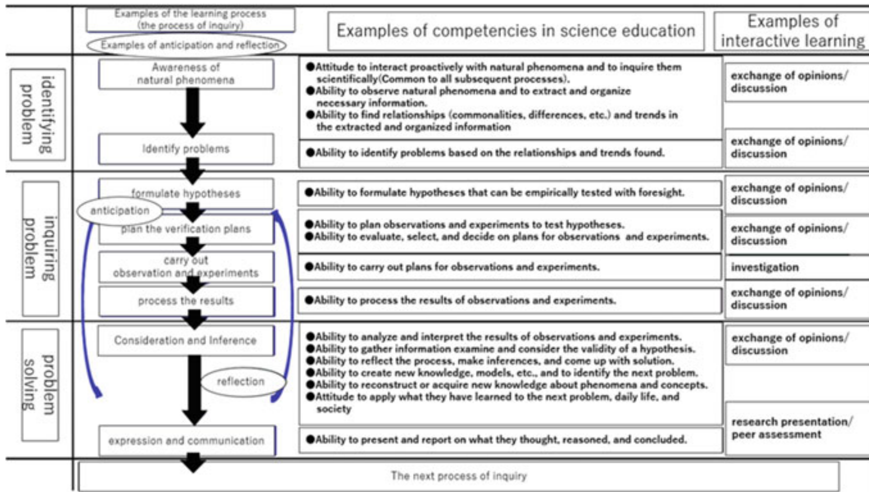

Fig. 8.1 Image of the learning process of science in the course of study (Central Council for Education, 2016: 37)

8.2.3 *Learning Processes in* Rika *Science that Foster Competencies*

A model of the learning processes in *rika* science that foster competencies is presented in the course of study (Fig. 8.1), intended for all grades. Towards improved *rika* science instruction, the aspects of grasping problem-based tasks, inquiry, and resolution are considered, with the objective of fostering appropriate competencies in this science. To correspond with these, aspects such as the ability to identify problems (3rd grade) and devise solutions (5th grade) are clearly stated in the list of problem-solving abilities that are to be prioritised in each school year (see Fig. 8.1).

Here, we will look at an example for Grade 6 elementary school students concerning the 'mechanisms of combustion'. This case is taken up in example cases created by the National Institute for Educational Policy Research (NIER, Japan) for instruction and assessment in accordance with the course of study. In this unit, the objectives are as follows. First, students identify their questions about the mechanisms of combustion. They then make hypotheses and explore solutions, coming up with ideas that are appropriate for obtaining results. Finally, students express their findings (ability to think, make judgements, and express themselves). Through these activities, students understand that oxygen in the ambient air is used for combustion, resulting in the production of carbon dioxide. They are also taught how to use apparatus and equipment that are appropriate for their target observations and experiment (knowledge and skill). As they pass through these processes, students engage in autonomous (self-driven) learning, fulfilling the objective of fostering attitudes

Fig. 8.2 Children's placement of odour bottles in the experiment

that will enable them to utilise the knowledge they learn in school in their daily lives (attitude of proactive learning) (NIER, 2020).

The unit proceeds according to the learning processes shown in Fig. 8.2. In the first class hour, students observe candles burning within two closed-lid gas collection bottles, one large and one small. Here, students pose the question of how they can get the candles inside each bottle to continue to burn and hypothesise accordingly (this is the setting of problems and hypothesis portion). Students compare the changes that occur in the bottles and share their observations of the events: perhaps they notice that the candle in the smaller bottle is extinguished more quickly or that the flame of the candle in that smaller bottle reduces gradually until it goes out. Their hypotheses may be that the big bottle contains more air, so the candle in that bottle burns longer, or that adding air to the bottles may influence the length of time for which each candle burns, etc.

In the second class hour, based on the students' hypotheses from the first class hour, experiment plans are made, and experiments are then performed. Suppose that some students hypothesised that for a candle to continue to burn inside a bottle, air needs to be introduced. They will first discuss their plan and decide whether it is a good way to test their hypothesis. They will then execute their plan by adding air to the bottle and watching what happens. Here, the students set a lit candle in clay and determine sites at which holes can be made so that air can be introduced. They use the method shown in Fig. 8.2, with a gas collection bottle that has no bottom. To see the flow of air, the students let smoke from a burning incense stick come close to the site where they presume air will enter the bottle.

In the third class hour, students process the experimental results they obtained during the second hour, and then participate in reasoning and inference activities. One student raises the possibility that the candle will continue burning no matter where air enters the bottle. However, by trying different holes in the bottle, the students find that the location of the hole does in fact affect how long the candle burns. As the students consider this gap between their conception and reality, they

become aware that not only is additional air needed so that the candle will continue to burn, they also recall that hot air rises, and thus they determine that the hole is best placed at the top of the bottle. The teacher's role is to guide the students as they come up with the correct answer independently.

During this third class hour, it especially emphasised that the students themselves should reflect on their investigation processes in light of a variety of facts. For example, the teacher may ask, 'When the candle is burning and when it goes out, is there any difference in the location of the hole or in the movement of air?' In this way, students are prompted to compare their test results with other groups' results, possibly changing their predictions and/or experimental method, and carrying out another experiment with the knowledge gained from these comparisons. Here, one sees how students reflect on the processes they used in their investigation. In addition, the class collectively considers their thought processes, and students use others' results and considerations to record their thoughts in their notebooks. Through review, reflection, and discussions, students learn procedures they can use to solve problems. They also think of their tasks from a variety of perspectives, fostering ways of thinking that are appropriate for the task at hand. The intention of these strategies is to stimulate ways of thinking about *rika* science in Grade 6 elementary school students.

For each unit, there are also activities intended to help students connect their learning with daily life. For example, students consider how to build a campfire using parallel crosses that allow the passage of air. This idea, that opening paths to accommodate the flow of oxygen will help wood to burn better, comes as the result of having learned the basic principle in class.

In this way, abilities are fostered that enable students to use the knowledge and techniques of *rika* science in their actual daily lives. Especially, to foster academic achievement, learning processes are arranged so that students can actively use their existing knowledge (ex. mechanism of combustion) and skills (ex. designing investigation) according to each context, with the objective of developing the ability to solve problems in daily life and in society in general (ex. building a campfire). These problem-solving processes are described so that they can be undertaken in multiple ways and with various orientations, as in the actual inquiry-like situations students encounter in their daily lives. Forecasted (simulated) solutions and repeated reflection are given special emphasis.

8.3 Significance and Issues Concerning the Science Course for the 2020s

As examined in Sect. 8.1, to achieve both fairness and excellence in science (*rika*) education, the conflict between universality and multicultural diversity of educational content must first be resolved. Towards that end, educational content must

be investigated according to the three points summarised at the end of Sect. 8.1—content selected must be clarified in terms of its (1) universality, tempered with (2) multicultural aspects, and there must be (3) a guarantee of fairness.

The course of study points to the fostering of competencies, with abilities rising to a level where they are usable (i.e., applicable in daily life, etc.). To do so, the course of study includes policies that incorporate proactive, interactive, and authentic learning. However, reducing learning to merely ensuring that 'an activity is done' must be avoided. To ensure that activities are geared towards authentic learning, elements of knowledge (but not fragmentary knowledge) must be included, and thus organised and structured by means of general concepts and principles (Ishii, 2015). That entails that students acquire not only knowledge regarding natural phenomena, as was the case in the past, but also that they grasp universal laws and concepts related to that concrete experience.

The Investigative Commission proposed the fostering of scientific perspectives and ways of thinking within courses. This advocates the gaining of an enduring understanding that corresponds to the essential question raised by Wiggins and McTighe (2005) in their theory of 'backward design'. Relying on this essential question, the new course of study implies new possibilities for questioning the structure and system of existing science (*kagaku*), through which there can be qualitative restructuring, and a discarding of outdated knowledge. Through these efforts, students can understand the universal concepts at the core of science (*kagaku*). This path is expected to allow students to gain a uniform grasp of broad-ranging knowledge.

These expectations are betrayed by the following two points. First, the guidelines in the revised course of study consist of qualitative improvements to learning processes, with the objective of instilling a high-quality understanding without reducing the amount of knowledge students must acquire. This suggests that without any cuts to the learning content from the former course of study, changes have only been made in terms of learning methods towards the objective of providing children with higher-quality understanding. However, the educational content in the unit on combustion has been reduced. The facts that combustion is a typical chemical reaction and the three elements necessary for combustion to occur (fuel, heat to the ignition point, and oxygen), which are required for a deeper understanding of combustion, are not taught. In the end, the burden placed on teachers and children becomes heavier, as they are expected to cover a broader range of multifaceted knowledge in addition to the core concepts.

At the time of the Investigative Commission's proposal, it was stated that perspectives and ways of thinking in courses would provide systematic connections between the views on matter, life, and the universe held by contemporary natural science and its core concepts. This approach would converge not only with the mastery of knowledge and techniques (skills), but also be a key to the systematic reconfiguration of educational processes towards fostering an overall viewpoint for conceiving nature (Onuki, 2019). In fact, in the unit on combustion, students learn that one aspect of chemistry is the extraction and analysis of unknown substances through the changes in the properties of substances before and after the chemical reaction of combustion. Nevertheless, the fact is that perspectives and ways of thinking as finally depicted

in the course of study for *rika* science reduced these to only one means of studying natural phenomena. There was no connection with the careful selection and systematic education revision proposed by the Investigative Commission, along the lines originally advocated by the ASE.

The result is the risk that rather than learning deeply about axial concepts that are considered universal in *rika* science, there may be excessive coverage of shallower content. This can be understood through the example of learning about combustion, as previously described. The learning here involves only a superficial understanding of combustion gained by persistent work on solving the problem of how oxygen moves and noting its effects. Classes may become stereotypical, with learning stopping after students memorise the names of the gases that comprise ambient air. As ASE member Eizo Ono has indicated, there has been an insufficiently careful selection and arrangement of knowledge and skills. Consequently, classes become insubstantial efforts at problem-solving, which is an approach that sacrifices any maturation of students' knowledge and skills (Ono, 2017).

On the basis of this indication, the classes on combustion described above can be reconceptualised as follows. First, there is the highlighting of core concepts, including the fact that three elements are needed for combustion, and that combustion is a phenomenon (chemical reaction) whereby oxygen and other matter combine to form a different substance. Next, is the careful selection and arrangement of the materials needed for these developments (such as investigation of the structural configuration of the paper hotpot used in the experiment, etc.). Finally, a structural analysis of the elements for combustion is necessary, as well as content on measures that can be adopted to prevent fires at home and learning about the principles of fire extinguishers as well as other aspects of this science, as it is incorporated in the culture and daily life. This would lead to a questioning of knowledge regarding daily life and would serve to mature and ripen knowledge and skills—learning which students can actively use in their daily lives. Here, the application to daily life builds on scientific principles.

What about the multicultural aspects of educational content? For example, in the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) for all grades from kindergarten to high school, seven groups are specified as introducing diversity, including disabled students, students whose native language is not English, and female students (NGSS Lead States, 2013). Then, through case studies about teaching to each of the seven groups, evidence-based teaching strategies are proposed for each, such as using the cultural knowledge that students from major racial and ethnic communities develop through belonging to a community. Acts that attach a stigma to these groups risk making the diversity within each group opaque. However, such children have been indicated as a main part of public education (Takahashi, 2020), and one can find conscious engagements related to the issues of intergroup differences and disparities.

In Japan's course of study for *rika* science, students with disabilities are not only mentioned in the General Principles, but responses for disabled children are incorporated into the sections for each science (*kagaku*). In the General Principles, there are also statements regarding responses for children with relatives in foreign countries, as the number of such children in Japan continues to increase. This is one engagement aimed at including all children in course classes, and it can be

assessed positively insofar as these are considerations regarding students' diverse backgrounds.

Nevertheless, the course of study does not contain enough direct statements on other pertinent issues. One example is the problem that female students are in a minority position in *rika* science classes, as has been indicated both abroad and in Japan. One factor hindering female students in *rika* science classes is the fact that they are too often given supplementary roles, such as the task of recording data, meaning that they are not fully involved (Yumoto & Nishikawa, 2004). Research has shown that there is a gender bias in teachers' words and actions, and policies have been shown to improve instruction methods (Inada, 2019). In certain foreign countries efforts have been made to promote science learning amongst female students, including improving the selection and arrangement of educational content via systematic revision in consideration of the linkages between science, the human body, nursing science, and other topics. Moreover, efforts are being made to ensure that arrangements and instruction methods accord with female students' experiences and interests (Inada, 2019). There are research findings on the inclusion of people who have been relegated to the periphery in traditional science education. However, the current course of study for *rika* science only reflects a fraction of these findings.

Considered from the point of view of equality in education, the course of study also lacks sufficient policies to support students with disabilities and students with relationship ties to foreign countries. For example, in the course of study for *rika* science, the following is stipulated:

> In regards to students with disabilities, etc., there shall be planned and organised engagements regarding instruction content and instruction methods to ensure that these are appropriate for the difficulties that may occur for these students in the performance of study (learning) activities.

However, these efforts have not been pinpointed to changes in learning content nor have they been applied to the substitution of activities. Instead, teachers have arranged apparatus and equipment so that they are easier to use vis-à-vis each student's specific disabilities, and then these students carry out their experiments, etc., under the teacher's watchful eyes.

The situation is similar for students with foreign relatives. The General Principles of the course of study go only so far as to propose that these students' daily life experiences should be taken into consideration in the classroom, with the encouragement of interactive activities. In the United States, research has suggested rethinking the educational content in terms of 'participation', 'equity', and 'diversity' (Onuki, 2017; Rodriguez, 2015). But in Japan no concrete perspectives are delineated to determine what viewpoints should be incorporated into educational content.

Certainly, the classroom is a key site of cultural transmission. Nevertheless, this is not intended to mean that a singular orientation should be made towards any specific culture. Children are not only the recipients of culture; they are also contributors to their culture (Martin, 2002). Culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) children, that is, children from different races, social classes, genders, etc., contribute to the mastery of a universality that is tempered with multicultural diversity, as they strive

to unravel and cope with the strengths that majority groups have and weaknesses that minority groups have in relation to educational concepts.

The objection can be made with regard to said indications that the course of study is first and foremost a guideline that is edited to present only general educational processes and is not intended to cover and include local knowledge. Moreover, the course of study for *rika* science is meant to emphasise the mastery of tried-and-true methods from the past. It is true that by experiencing the processes shown in Fig. 8.2, students may acquire the ability to make self-inquiries, thus moving towards the mastery of local knowledge. However, the methods proposed in the course of study are, after all, effective methods for acquiring a culture (i.e., educational content) that the mainstream has considered valuable and universal.

To break through the current limitations of the course of study, it has become necessary to propose a diversity of methods. Nevertheless, the fact is that the current 'flat' (uniform for all) inquiry method style makes no organic connections with individual knowledge and abilities nor with specific situations for application. Toshio Umehara (2018) has found that the current course of study offers only one-dimensional methods and has indicated that this point is problematic.

Although in terms of instruction methods, the course of study promotes proactive, interactive, and authentic learning, there is no recognition of the roles played by CLD children, who are subjectively and dynamically involved in the generation of culture in the classroom. In one sense, educational opportunities guaranteed in the name of social fairness have meant nothing more than a regression to the pathway on which there is mastery of the educational content that has been set within the existing school systems under the umbrella of specific values (i.e., assimilation). The path is thereby closed to CLD children's participation in the selection of educational content. There is no guaranteed way for such children to add to arguments regarding educational opportunities and their quality to allow these children to contribute to cultural transformation.

One way to overcome these problems is to rethink knowledge learned in the classroom from multicultural perspectives. For example, it is said that Inuit people have words for 20 different types of snow. This reflects practical aspects and knowledge interests that are encountered in their culture and daily lives. In this way, each student's culture (for example, their conceptions of snow) can be introduced into the classroom via authentic tasks. For cultures considered to be minorities, different types of scientific content and methods are introduced within the classroom setting, enhancing respect for that culture. In this way, students become newly aware of previously unknown scientific content and methods; not only do they learn the characteristics and limitations specifically considered in the classroom, but they also become aware of how this learning can be connected when considering and studying any new phenomenon they encounter. This conjunction with multicultural viewpoints, realised via authentic tasks, helps the students to reconsider their own assumed scientific knowledge and systems. At the same time, it serves to prevent fragmentation of multicultural individuals' and communities' different qualities and characteristics.

Presenting children with the opportunity to learn educational content that reflects multicultural aspects, including indigenous science, does not mean that all children

are forced to adopt those viewpoints in their understanding of natural phenomena. Rather, it is no more than providing children with a new 'lens' through which to see the world, and it simply gives the children an opportunity to directly experience that way of seeing things (Ogawa, 1998). Enabling children to discover the existence of a variety of such 'lenses' means that when they come to participate in debates in the public sphere, they will be aware that others have different lenses, and they will understand that within their shared rationality, there are also illogical ways of thinking and acting. All this will contribute to reaching satisfying mutual agreements. The fact that these future sites can be secured here and now within the classroom means that by working together, students will find universal knowledge that contains values they can all share (co-creation).

8.4 Conclusion

In a knowledge-based society, persons must have the ability to deal with existing knowledge, which, compared to the past, has greatly expanded in both quantity and quality. Just as in the past, when Herbert Spencer (1861) asked 'What knowledge is of most worth?', education constantly faces the tasks of refining its selection processes and revising its structural configuration, so that it can deal with—especially today—the enormous expansion of knowledge and its role in social and economic life. In foreign countries, these efforts are made in parallel with the setting of standards, wavering between the desire for universality and the need for multicultural diversity.

In Japan, however, there has not been sufficient investigation into how the course of study system can achieve both universality and diversity in terms of educational content. This is partly because natural science has not been traditionally seen as the primary outcome of *rika* science, and partly because the government has maintained the myth that Japan is a mostly monoethnic and monocultural country. The result is that in the name of science, content that relies on certain majority groups' values are impressed upon students, resulting in the inclusion and exclusion of specific groups. The end result is that both excellence and fairness are sacrificed.

As globalism continues its expansion, there is an ascendent logic that places importance on universal knowledge that is shared across global sites. However, as in the example of primatology research, which has presented the roles of women as making a significant difference, there is an increasing focus on indigenous knowledge, for example, in regional environmental studies. There are also questions regarding the comparative nature of local knowledge and, indeed, with respect to knowledge hitherto considered to be 'universal'.

Moreover, this questioning of universal knowledge can be connected to the guarantee of securing fair and just educational opportunities for children who have been marginalised in learning about science in the past. Nevertheless, despite the inclusion of diverse children within the classroom via the improvement of the education system and instruction methods, and even with the participation of all in proactive, interactive, and authentic learning under the new course of study, little meaning will

be derived if teachers are not afforded sufficient chances to consider and debate the political aspects of the educational content incorporated into the course of study. Without such opportunities, children who do not share the knowledge that is considered to be universal will consequently be forced to assimilate into a culture which is not their own. This exclusion puts fairness at risk.

There is a need for such questioning of universalism from multicultural viewpoints, especially as provided by CLD children, for the co-creation of new values. Value creation will in turn promote processes for guaranteeing fairness in knowledge that strives towards excellence. To realise these objectives, efforts need to be made to explore ways of incorporating into the framework of the course of study policies and viewpoints that will enable schools and teachers to also question their past and present educational content. These are the tasks that lie before us.

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Chapter 9
Japanese-Language Education at Junior High School: Post-*yutori*, the PISA Shock, and the Abe Administrations

Asuka Ohagi

Abstract This chapter discusses the development of Japanese-language education in Japan over the preceding decades and under the second Abe administration, paying special attention to the 2017 revision of the junior high course of study for Japanese-language education. The primary source material used includes the relevant courses of study as well as a selection of MEXT-approved junior high textbooks. I identify three major flows that coalesced in changes that can be observed in the revised course of study as well as in school textbooks published throughout the last few years. Firstly, whilst the revision in many ways was intended as a reversal of the earlier *yutori*-style approaches, many of these aspects remain intact. Secondly, the so-called PISA shock motivated MEXT to stress the need for technical mastery of language and the pursuit of better functional reading literacy according to the PISA model. Thirdly, the reform drive of the second Abe administration motivated a greater emphasis on traditional language culture and classic literary works. Although the Japanese-language textbooks now in use may not have been approved based on criteria from the newest course of study revision, it is evident that they pre-empt and reflect similar policy intentions. The chapter concludes with some comments on both the value and the limitations of studies of the course of study and of coursebook materials.

Keyword Japanese-language education · Course of study · Academic ability · *Yutori* education · PISA · Policy reform

This chapter discusses the development of Japanese-language education in Japan over the preceding decades and under the second Abe administration. To this end, I pay attention to the courses of study (COS) as guidelines for curriculum and lesson design issued by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT), and to textbooks, since they both reflect the government and ministry's

A. Ohagi (✉)
Directorate for Education and Skills, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Paris, France
e-mail: asuka.ohagi@oecd.org

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policy intentions and directly inform schools and teachers of what is expected of them. The textbook approval system is briefly outlined in Chap. 6. My focus in this chapter is on the junior high curriculum since that is an age group especially relevant for PISA, which I argue had a considerable impact on the 2017 COS revision.

I will start by considering the background and likely influences that shaped the most recent COS revisions. I identify three significant influences, namely the introduction of solid academic ability, the PISA shock, and the Abe administration's reform drive. After that, I go through the latest COS revision from 2017 to investigate what traces there are of these aforementioned influences. I consider the PISA shock an especially significant influence for Japanese-language education. Next, I examine a selection of MEXT-authorised junior high textbooks as a case study to explore in what ways the COS revision may be implemented in the classrooms. The summary of the finding is followed by a few concluding remarks.

9.1 Revising the Course of Study for Japanese-Language Education

The first COS was adopted in 1947 following the enactment of the Fundamental Law on Education (FLE; *kyōiku kihonhō*), which signalled the start of Japan's post-war education system. Since then, it has been revised roughly at ten-year intervals, the three most recent revisions taking place in 1998, 2008, and 2017. Since the early post-war period, a host of factors have influenced these revisions, ranging from political and economic causes to pedagogical influences from the USA and domestic concerns about scholastic achievement. This section will identify and discuss three influences that have likely played a key role in shaping the 2017 COS revision.

*9.1.1 Post-*yutori *and the Introduction of Solid Academic Ability*

The current developments in Japanese education policy cannot be understood without briefly revisiting what has come to be known as *yutori* education, which aims for a less pressured education with 'room to grow'. The 1990s saw the proposal of a 'new perspective on academic ability' that moved away from memorisation of facts and strictly technical learning to the cultivation of interest, motivation, and attitude. Thus, the role of the teacher was meant to shift from transmitting knowledge to helping students acquire knowledge by themselves (Yamamoto, 2017). This came to colour the 1998 revision of the COS in particular. An important change was the addition of 'Life Skills' (*seikatsu-ka*) as a primary-school subject, which was part of the work to enable students to live 'rich lives', but the overall revision was more significant as it decreased the total number of school hours and promoted teaching in line with

the new perspective on academic ability (MEXT, 1998a, 1998b). However, it did not take long before a new concept gained favour.

In 2003, the Central Council for Education, which is the foremost advisory body within MEXT, started discussing what it called ‘solid academic ability’ (*tashika na gakuryoku*), defined by MEXT as a broad range of competencies that includes not only basic knowledge and skills but also a desire for learning and the ability to think, decide, and express oneself (MEXT, 2005). This became the foundation for the 2008 and 2017 revisions of the COS.

Now, this development tends to be presented as part of the backlash against *yutori* education that mass media outlets unleashed in the 2000s. However, this is only half of the story. It would be unfair to consider the new concept a reversion to pre-*yutori* ideas since subsequent courses of study retained many of the central elements of the ‘new perspective on academic ability’. Rather than rolling things back, a core aim seems to have been to clarify the meaning and implications of the new perspective by identifying knowledge and skills as functional tools to be utilised rather than things to be possessed (Yamamoto, 2017). As we shall see, the 2008 and 2017 COS revisions also did not negate what came with the 1998 revision. Nonetheless, it did reintroduce more classroom hours, especially in subjects like Japanese, social studies, and mathematics (Tasaki, 2017). It attempted to balance the need for both individual inquisitiveness and the acquisition of basic knowledge. Of course, other additions were made as well for other reasons, which we shall return to, but at this point I just want to point out that the general thrust of the revisions that stemmed from the introduction of solid academic ability was not really a negation of what came before.

9.1.2 The PISA Shock

Somewhat separate yet simultaneously and very much intertwined with this movement towards ‘solid academic ability’, was another factor that influenced the most recent COS revisions to a significant degree. This was the so-called PISA shock, which is a label applied primarily to the reactions of politicians and media outlets in response to Japan’s apparent drop in PISA rankings in 2003.

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a worldwide large-scale comparative education study conducted by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in many countries across the world. The first study was conducted in 2000 and it has been undertaken every three years since. The stated purpose is to measure the academic ability of 15-year-olds, which in Japan’s case means students in the third grade of junior high school, in mathematics, science, and reading. PISA has increasingly made efforts to measure students’ problem-solving ability, creativity, and other skills suitable for life in modern society, collectively referred to as ‘twenty-first century skills’. Since the publication of the first report in 2001, PISA has been the ‘global gold standard for education quality’ (Sjøberg, 2016: 3). As such, it has been a frequent topic in education policy debate across the world, and Japan has not been an exception.

Now, although I will not dwell on it here, I will just briefly mention that PISA is not without its detractors. Whilst its importance and influence with regards to national education policy across the world is undisputed, researchers and experts have long taken issue with aspects of the survey, or even its underlying philosophy and method. Famously, an open letter signed by nearly 100 education professionals was addressed to Andrea Schleicher, director of the OECD's Education and Skills Department in 2014. It criticises the OECD and PISA for having escalated the over-reliance on standardised testing and quantitative measurement, putting the focus on too narrow a range of educational metrics which consequently means that other aspects of schooling are ignored, and instigating excessive competitiveness between countries in ways that ultimately damage education (Andrews et al., 2014).

Now, as mentioned, the PISA shock was triggered by an apparent drop in Japan's PISA rankings. This happened in all categories, but for the purposes of this chapter, the most relevant drop was in reading. Japan ranked 8th (score 522) in 2000 but fell to 14th (score 498) in 2003 and then to 15th (score 498) in 2006.[1] The drop between 2000 and 2003 was the biggest amongst all participating countries for the same period and was quickly identified as a cause for alarm (Fuji, 2008). Japan was still above the OECD average but ended up far behind nearby Asian participants like South Korea and Hong Kong as well as some countries in Europe and Oceania.

To clarify, the OECD defines reading literacy in the PISA context as 'understanding, using, reflecting on, and engaging with written texts, in order to achieve one's goals, develop one's knowledge and potential, and participate in society' (Mo, 2019). This is a functional definition of literacy, described by Matsushita (2014) as 'a globally shared and imaginary functional literacy that disregards contents and knowledge related to political perspectives'. She argues that it is necessary for individual countries to restore these disregarded perspectives when devising educational approaches on the national level. This is concerned with all the ways students may be exposed to texts in their everyday lives and encourages them to engage with and make use of them to realise their own goals and aspirations. This broader understanding of literacy is something Japanese policymakers paid special attention to.

In December 2005, MEXT formulated what was termed the Programme for the Improvement of Reading Literacy (*Dokkairyoku kōjō ni kansuru puroguramu*) (MEXT, 2006a), which became the start of a variety of measures that aimed to improve Japan's PISA ranking, including the rolling out of nationwide academic achievement testing.[2] MEXT made an effort to identify what was lacking in Japan's conventional literacy education and proposed that reading literacy, as envisioned by PISA, differed from how it had been defined in Japanese language education. They emphasised that this PISA-style reading literacy was not just about 'extracting information' but it also involved interpretation and deliberation. Likewise, it went

[1] Since then, Japan ranked 8th (score 520) in 2009, 4th (score 538) in 2012, 8th (score 516) in 2015, and 15th (score 504) in 2018.

[2] It is important to note here that MEXT did not simply react passively to the outrage and concern voiced in media outlets, but actively capitalised on this as a way to reassert its legitimacy as the country's central education agency, something that had been challenged and hollowed out through fiscal and structural reforms initiated by the Koizumi administration since 2001 (Takayama, 2008).

beyond just grasping texts to also thinking about how they can be used. The texts should not be considered just for their contents, but also for their structure, form, and expression. Finally, texts include not just conventional written work but also includes things like figures, graphs, and tables that mix words and visuals to varying degrees (MEXT, 2006a). MEXT speculated that any education reform would have to take into account this broader understanding of reading literacy if Japan was to improve in the PISA ranking.

An extension of this was the creation of the Meeting of Collaborators on Fostering Language Ability (*Gengoryoku ikusei kyōryokusha kaigi*) in June 2006. This committee, which consisted of numerous education experts and practitioners (university professors, research institute directors, school headmasters) and MEXT representatives, met on eight occasions in 2006–2007 to discuss various approaches to improve students' language abilities, ranging from initiatives to specifically improve 'PISA-type reading literacy' to more interdisciplinary approaches (MEXT, 2007). For example, the committee proposed:

> From the viewpoint of fostering PISA-style reading literacy, as an example, it would be possible to change the emphasis between "extracting information", "interpretation", "deliberation" and "statement", in reference to the objectives of the PISA survey; but the question is how to concretely improve the teaching contents for Japanese language.

It is clear from this passage and others that they perceived a need for enacting a teaching reform to improve Japan's international standing, thinking of PISA requirements as a reasonable standard by which to measure the performance of Japanese students.

Their insights were meant to be incorporated in the 2008 COS revision (Tanaka, 2013). In reality, however, the 2008 revision does not seem to reflect their conclusions fully. At the very least, no significant changes were made to the junior high Japanese-language course; most likely it was already too late for their incorporation into the 2008 COS, planning for which had already begun some years earlier. A similar observation can be made about other changes pursued by the first Abe administration.

9.1.3 Revisions Under the Abe Administration

Another aspect that should be taken into consideration for our discussion about the more recent COS revisions is the political desire that has existed on the side of the Abe administrations. Prime Minister Abe has been known for his intention to reinterpret Japan's Constitution, but his administrations were simultaneously engaged in other educational projects. Most notable for our purposes is the revision of the Fundamental Law on Education that was conducted by the first Abe administration in December 2006. This was the first time that the law was revised since its initial ascent in 1947, so it was largely motivated by the need to update its contents to suit more recent developments and challenges in Japanese and international society,

ranging from population ageing to globalisation and technological advances. It introduced general references to the importance of communal spirit, rich humanity and creativity, tradition, and future-orientation. It also included new paragraphs about lifelong learning, provisions for students with disabilities, equal treatment of all students, and other aspects that reflect values and practices today (MEXT, 2006b). It is very likely that the administration had hopes for this revision to be translated into more concrete education policy measures from the outset, but this work was interrupted when Prime Minister Abe Shinzō resigned in September 2007. Nonetheless, the new FLE makes up part of the background of the drive to revise the COS.

Seen from this perspective, we should identify this more general concern about preparing Japanese students for the future globalised and technologically advanced knowledge economy as a third driving force for the most recent COS revisions. To this, we can also add a parallel nationalist and conservative motivation, which is evident in the new FLE's emphasis on tradition, for example. The political game and the processes by which political intentions are translated into education policy are summarised in Chap. 2. As such, there are changes with regards to Japanese-language education and otherwise that do not directly stem from either the introduction of solid academic ability or the PISA shock. However, it is important to emphasise that these changes in Japanese-language education emerged not in the 2008 course of study immediately after the revision of the FLE. There were few material changes between the 1998 and 2008 courses for Japanese-language. The debate in Japanese-language filtered into the regular curriculum cycle and emerged in the 2017 course of study (Yakura, 2017).

To conclude this section, we have discussed three important developments that culminated in the 2008 and 2017 COS revisions. These were the introduction of solid academic ability in the post-*yutori* period, the PISA shock, and the Abe administration's drive for revision. It goes without saying that these were not discrete influences but that they were intimately intertwined and interacted continually. They were part of a greater general flow or social mood that forced education policy to enter a post-*yutori* phase, although those ideas were not substantially discarded, as we have seen. Having established this, the following section examines whether these policy intentions of the many actors described above can be found in the current (2017) COS.

9.2 The 2017 Course of Study

In this section, I will examine the differences between the 1998/2008 and 2017 editions of the junior high COS in some detail. I will treat the 1998 and 2008 editions as the same for the most part since no significant changes were introduced in the junior high Japanese-language chapter.

9.2.1 First Grade

The first major change that we should note is the new teaching objectives for year 1. The 1998 and 2008 editions set the objective as:

> Enhancing the students' ability to value their own ideas as well as speak and listen accurately in accordance with their aims and the situation, as well as nurturing an attitude of valuing the spoken language. (MEXT, 1998b, 2008)

This was replaced with the following in 2017:

> Equipping students with the ability to speak about topics that relate to everyday life whilst considering how to organise the composition, the ability to listen whilst considering the speaker's intentions, and the ability to talk together with others whilst grasping the topic and direction, so as to suit their aims and the situation, as well as nurturing an attitude of organising thoughts by speaking and listening. (MEXT, 2017a)

We may notice the inclusion of 'everyday life' as a key reference point. This is a wording that can be seen throughout the document and suggests a shift to increased 'functional literacy'. Likewise, whilst the previous first grade objective emphasised that students should 'value their own ideas', the new one encourages them to consider the intentions of their interlocutor and the direction of the conversation. This raises the bar for interpretive ability by asking the students to think actively about the overall structure and flow of a conversation.

Several items have been added to the contents that the teacher is supposed to teach their students. Again, the course of study says that the students should be able to speak about topics from everyday life. It is also expected that they can adjust the speed, volume, and style of speaking to ensure that the other person understands and so that it suits the situation. An item has also been added to encourage students to ask questions and consider other people's opinions that accord or differ with their own. On the other hand, some content items are removed. The earlier edition said that students should be taught to pick topics that are suitable for them to express their own ideas and feelings accurately, but this is absent from the later edition.

A completely new section has also been added immediately after the speaking and listening portion. It lists suggestions for language activities that can be used to practice the learning objectives. A list like this has been added to all the sections, meaning speaking and listening, writing, and reading, and for all grades. In this case, the suggested activities encourage engagement with everyday topics through reports, presentations, conversations, and debates. The earlier editions did have some suggested activities towards the end, for example listing a couple of activities that could be used to teach speaking and listening in general (all grades), but the new edition is more specific and makes suggestions for all grades.

As regards writing, reference has been added to topics from everyday life. An item has also been added about categorising and organising materials as well as considering the role of paragraphs when writing text. A small addition has also been made about considering how clear the grounds for an argument are when reading texts that you have written to each other. Similar to the previous section, an item about

selecting appropriate materials to accurately express your own ideas and feelings has been deleted. The suggested activities include writing about an artwork that the student enjoyed, using figures and tables to explain something in writing, and presenting an event.

Comparatively, with regards to reading, students are to be taught to pay extra attention to how story developments and characters are depicted as a conduit to better understand the contents. Students should also think independently about the composition and development of texts as well as what characterises the expressions. The earlier edition also mentioned taking note of the development of the text but was less specific. Likewise, the earlier edition has an item about collecting required information from a text, but the new edition adds that it should be done to suit the specific goal at hand. The suggested activities include reading different types of texts aloud, reading texts whilst considering the relationship between text, figures, and tables, and presenting a recently read book whilst citing its content appropriately.

Next comes a section titled ‘Matters relating to traditional language culture and the special qualities of the Japanese language’. It corresponds to the section ‘language matters’ in the earlier COS. I will return to this later when more relevant, so for now I simply note that this subheading appears for all grades. It also includes some information about the *kanji* that the students are expected to learn. Generally, the new COS prescribes a higher number of characters than previously.

9.2.2 Second Grade

A rather significant change arises in the fact that the part previously covering grades 2 and 3 has been divided into two parts, one covering each grade. This seems to follow a more general trend of clarifying details of the COS specifically. Grades 2 and 3 have in common that they build on the focus on everyday life in grade one to be more concerned with what is termed ‘life in society’, but the new edition also specifies what progression is expected.

The overall objectives for grade 2 refer to life in society in the same way that the grade 1 objectives talked about everyday life. The new edition introduces explicit mention of the importance of taking into consideration differences in position and ideas when speaking to others as well as of respecting the other person. It also specifies that students should be taught to adapt their writing to suit the situation and make it easy for others to read. They should also pay special attention to the content and ways of expressing emotions in texts. There are no notable deletions from the earlier editions, but certain elements are only included in one of the grades but not the other.

With respect to speaking and listening, students are encouraged to find topics from life in society. An interesting addition is that students should organise their thoughts whilst anticipating that others may be in different situations or have different ideas. The suggested activities include presenting findings from an investigation and debating topics from societal living.

On the subject of writing, a line has been added about choosing topics from life in society. The new edition also elaborates on an item about effectively conveying information (facts, opinions, sentiments) by adding the use of concrete examples and depictions adapted to the situation where the earlier edition had made more vague reference to reasoning and logical development. It also says that students should aspire to write texts that are easy to read and understand. The suggested activities include writing poems and stories, arguing certain standpoints about debatable topics in writing, and writing letters needed for life in society.

As regards reading, the items have been changed quite substantially, even when accounting for how the earlier edition covered both grades 2 and 3. The direction has not changed, but the new items are more specific. Students should be taught to pay extra attention to words and phrases that express abstract concepts or sentiments and should consider the overall structure of texts; the effects of different elements, such as examples and depictions; and the meaning of characters' actions in works of fiction to better understand the contents. They should also associate what they read with their own knowledge and experiences to allow them to form their own individual opinions. Something that has disappeared are two mentions of using things previously read to develop the student's own way of using words. The suggested activities include sharing impressions of poems and stories with others, presenting your own ideas about the contents and expressions of explanatory or critical texts, and comparing information gained from different sources like newspapers, the internet, and the school library.

9.2.3 Third Grade

The objectives for grade 3 require more interactivity from the students. They are expected to gain skills for solving problems with others by talking and a desire to deepen their own thoughts by talking and listening. They should also learn to read more critically by evaluating how a text develops or the expressions that are used. Moreover, the teacher should foster a desire to improve themselves through reading. The last point also existed in the earlier edition, but it only applies to grade 3 in the new one.

As regards speaking and listening, the teacher is asked to teach the students to speak persuasively on topics from life in society whilst organising their thoughts based on previous experiences and knowledge, using grammar effectively, and using materials. Something that was not part of the earlier editions is the suggestion that students should be able to adapt their way of speaking to steer conversations effectively as well as make good use of both their own ideas and those of interlocutors in problem-solving. The suggested activities include giving speeches according to the time and place, then giving their opinion on a topic of social life with the intention of persuading another person.

With respect to writing, it is not so different from grade 2 although the students are now supposed to write persuasive texts rather than just easy-to-understand texts.

Also, unlike earlier editions, words to the effect of ‘evaluate’ and ‘assess’ are used to indicate that students should reflect more about how arguments are developed and expressions are used for effect. The suggested activities include writing a critical text about something you are interested in and editing several texts that you have gathered for a certain purpose.

As regards reading, there is also added emphasis on teaching the students to compare different texts in an effort to evaluate composition, development, and expression. The suggested activities include reading and criticising stories, reading, and comparing information to be found in things like editorials and news reports, and reflecting on how you have been choosing books and reading in your own life as a reader.

9.2.4 Other Points of Note

The sections outlined above are followed, in both the old and new courses of study, by a few sections discussing the organisation of the teaching plan and use of teaching materials. Many parts have not been changed significantly. Though the section appears shorter in the new edition at first glance, numerous parts have simply been moved into other sections. Nonetheless, the new edition exhibits some important changes, such as a higher number of hours recommended to teach the subject. As I mentioned previously, this is a general trend in the 2017 COS in multiple subjects and signifies a move away from the attempt to reduce the number of classroom hours that was a prominent feature of the *yutori* period. We may also note the new status of ‘moral education’ (*dōtoku kyōiku*) as a formal subject, which is relevant here since the new edition asks the teacher to consider connections between the two subjects and to adapt their teaching in accordance with the special features of Japanese-language teaching. The section about teaching materials is largely intact, but two new items can be found. One asks the teacher to introduce students to representative works of modern literature so that they might be familiarised with Japanese literary culture. The other asks them to include the original text, a modern translation, and commentary when using teaching classics.

I noted above the renaming of the subheading ‘Language matters’ to ‘Matters regarding traditional language culture and the special qualities of the Japanese language’. This does not so much add content but rather ties together certain elements that were more disconnected in the earlier COS editions. It emphasises exposing the students to classical works of literature and fostering an understanding of their themes, characters, and style. More than in the earlier editions, teachers are asked to stimulate students’ interest in such works and increase their understanding of past literary conventions and their historical background. This may perhaps be interpreted as an expression of the Abe brand of nationalism, but that question goes beyond the scope of this chapter.

To conclude this section, I want to note that the various examples discussed reveal rather substantive changes that have been made to the COS in some instances. Overall,

the objectives and contents prescribed have become more specific and more technical. There is added emphasis on understanding how the structure of speech and writing changes the message. Students are to be taught how to adapt their language to achieve specific aims and to take into consideration all aspects of a text when interpreting it. Importantly, this is clearly not a reversion to an earlier time of memorisation and formal knowledge, but the addition of a more technical dimension to the *yutori*-era 'new perspective on academic ability' approach of the student formulating their own opinions on all kinds of topics. That is, it is characterised by the syncretic nature of solid academic ability that seeks to combine *yutori* ideas with the acquisition of basic knowledge and techniques. Moreover, it emphasises the need to understand that multiple perspectives are possible and that language needs to be adjusted to communicate effectively when there are differences in opinion. It is evident that this draws on the work of the Meeting of Collaborators on Fostering Language Ability as the document espouses a type of functional literacy that is for using texts to achieve specific goals and living a good life in society, which we previously termed 'PISA-type reading literacy'. Finally, I also noted that there is a stronger focus on Japanese traditional language culture and classic literary works, which hints at a lineage straight from the revised FLE, finally realised under the auspices of the second Abe administration.

9.3 Implications in Teaching and Textbooks

Having looked at the various changes introduced in the 2017 COS revision; we should ask ourselves how this affects teaching in the classroom. As a window into this debate, I will introduce the findings of a small case study in which I compared a small number of Japanese-language textbooks that are either currently in use or were previously used.

I limited my inquiry to textbooks published by Mitsumura Tosho, one of Japan's leading publishers of school textbooks, with a large number of school districts in the Tokyo area and elsewhere using their books in teaching. As we shall see, they are very sensitive to changes in national education policy and their website contains a wealth of reference materials for teachers and schools to help them accommodate current and future policy demands.

Now, the 2017 COS was scheduled for full implementation at junior high school in 2021, with 2018–2020 designated a transition period for the junior high curriculum. Meanwhile, the Mitsumura junior high Japanese-language textbooks currently in use were approved in 2015, for use in schools from the following year onward.[3] Thus, they do not reflect the 2017 COS revision but rather the 2008 revision, which we

[3] Japanese elementary and junior high schools are required to only use textbooks that have been authorised by MEXT. Exceptions can be made in special situations, but schools generally choose textbooks from a pool of authorised books that is updated by the major textbook publishers every few years. The authorisation is to ensure that the books fulfil the requirements set forth in the COS and other relevant regulations.

have already concluded were not substantially altered from the course of study before that. Nonetheless, a look at some of the textbooks do suggest that a shift had already begun in anticipation of the then-forthcoming revisions, in reference to preparatory discussions. I believe the organisation of the latest (2016) textbooks corroborates the findings in the previous section.

I wish to start by comparing the Mitsumura Japanese-language textbooks for junior high school 2nd grade as they reveal some hints of the developments previously discussed. The books were published in 1997, 2012, and 2016.[4] They have many similarities in terms of themes and topics as they include texts meant to encourage the students to think about the richness of language, their own culture, and their connections with others.

Each textbook was approved the previous year and used from the school year beginning in its year of publication. It consists of seven chapters: (1) 'With a Fresh State of Mind' (*shinsen na kimochi de*), (2) 'The Richness of Expression' (*hyōgen no yutakasa*), (3) 'Our Culture' (*watashitachi no bunka*), (4) 'Grasping Bonds of the Heart' (*kokoro no kizuna o toraeru*), (5) 'Learning from Culture' (*bunka ni manabu*), (6) 'Getting Familiar with the Classics' (*koten ni shitashimu*), and (7) 'What It Means to Live' (*ikiru koto wa*). The book mixes prose and poetry with commentary on grammar and Chinese characters.

The two other books are fairly similar to each other but also have important differences. The 2012 textbook also consists of seven chapters: (1) 'Broadening Learning' (*hirogaru manabi e*), (2) 'Taking a Point of View' (*shiten o sadamete*), (3) 'Reading and Information: Imparting a Technique' (*dokusho to jōhō: waza o tsutaeru*), (4) 'Reading Bonds' (*kizuna o yomu*), (5) 'Visiting the Minds of Old' (*inishie no kokoro o tazuneru*), (6) 'Grasping Logic' (*ronri o toraeru*), and (7) 'Gazing at Oneself' (*jibun o mitsumeru*). The current 2016 textbook consists of the following seven chapters: (1) 'Toward Broadening Learning' (*hirogaru manabi e*), (2) 'From Multiple Perspectives' (*tayō na shiten kara*), (3) 'Facing the Words' (*kotoba to mukiau*), (4) 'Relating to Others' (*kakawari no naka de*), (5) 'Visiting the Minds of Old' (*inishie no kokoro o tazuneru*), (6) 'Grasping Logic' (*ronri o toraeru*), and (7) 'Watching Expressions' (*hyōgen o mitsumete*).

It is not difficult to find correspondences between the three books. All of them have a chapter on relating to others and considering the minds of people of the past, for example. However, we should also note that the 1997 textbook dedicates a chapter to the question of 'what it means to live'. This chapter contains one story about how a song inspires different emotions in different people because of their life experiences (Oh Pattering Rain; *Parapara ochiru ame yo*) and one poem about a man on an evening train who is reminded of a life lesson when observing a fellow passenger (Afterglow; *Yūyake*). The book explains that the main learning objective of the chapter is to have students deepen their own thinking and to think about how

[4] The 1997 textbook was used in schools 1997–2002. The 2012 textbook was used in schools 2012–2016. The 2016 textbook was used in schools 2016–2021. Between 2002 and 2012 there were two intervening editions which are not discussed here. The new edition for 2021 onward has recently been approved, but is not discussed here.

people live their lives. In other words, it is about learning how to express feelings and thoughts to others.

By contrast, the chapters unique to the latter two books are of a different character. For example, the 2016 book has a chapter titled ‘Reading and Information: Imparting a Technique’. It contains four short texts: ‘In Order to Get along Well with the Media’ (*media to jōzu ni tsukiau tame ni*) by popular TV news educator Ikegami Akira, ‘Looking up “that Person” Who You Are Curious about’ (*ki ni naru ‘ano hito’ o sagurō*), ‘The Travelling Painter: A Letter from Paris’ (*tabi suru ekaki: Pari kara no tegami*), and ‘Why Doesn’t the Five-Story Pagoda Collapse?’ (*gojū no tō wa naze taorenai ka*). The stated primary aim of the chapter is to help students think about the features of online and media sources as well as approaches to look up and find information from such sources. That is, the chapter is concerned with practical skills for information gathering in the modern age.

Likewise, the 2016 textbook has a chapter titled ‘Watching Expressions’ that includes a longer text by famous author Dazai Osamu (‘Run, Melos!’; *Hashire Merosu*), a shorter text titled ‘Science Is Within You’ (*Kagaku wa anata no naka ni*), and a poem titled ‘Key’ (*Kagi*). There is also an extensive section about how to adapt your expression when writing a narrative to effectively communicate the setting and feelings of characters. As indicated by the chapter title, the focus of this chapter is how literary expression is varied and employed variously to get different effects. It discusses the many aspects that influence how a text is interpreted, going beyond the simple communication of facts or basic information.

All in all, although we should be careful not to exaggerate the differences between these books, the overall impression is that the 1997 textbook encourages students to reflect more on various life topics and global affairs. The latter two talk much more about effective composition, logical argumentation, and the employment of multiple perspectives, encouraging the students to actively think about how to devise sentences and texts for specific purposes. Although there is no drastic shift in this period, there seems to have been a movement away from *yutori*-style contemplativeness to more instrumental and technical use of language. Moreover, since the changes we see here in many ways mirror the changes we saw introduced in the 2017 COS revision, it also indicates that COS revisions are not necessary for changes in teaching practices since policy intentions can be communicated in many ways even before they are formalised in the COS and other documents.

To further emphasise the last point, as well as to give an idea of how the textbook material can be pre-emptively adapted for use in the classroom, I want to briefly discuss the special guidance issued by MEXT in June 2017. The special guidance was created to instruct teachers and schools about considerations to be made in teaching for the sake of ensuring a smoother transition to when the new COS is implemented (MEXT, 2017b). The main contents of the guidance are the inclusion of new Chinese characters, especially those used in the names of the Japanese prefectures. However, aside from this concrete guidance, MEXT also encourages schools to ‘actively facilitate the initiatives in the new course of study’.

Textbook publishers can incorporate new policy directions ahead of time and, in this case, it would appear that textbook publishers stand at the forefront of anticipatory

adaptation. Mitsumura Tosho issued their own guidance material to help teachers adjust their teaching to the new guidelines when using the Mitsumura textbooks (Mitsumura, 2017), without changing the contents of said textbook. For example, the guidance materials from Mitsumura cites the revised COS's emphasis on student understanding of the various ways that relationships between pieces of information can be expressed and lists the parts of the textbooks that are most relevant and where such lessons can be taught. It also supplies a revised teaching plan for the year with suggested exercises to achieve the new teaching objectives, again, without altering the content of the approved textbook.

9.4 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, we have briefly examined the background and contents of the most recent COS revision that took place in 2017, studying the case of junior high Japanese-language education. We identified three major flows that coalesced in the changes we observed in the revised COS as well as in school textbooks published in the last few years. Firstly, this revision followed one of the major trajectories of Japanese education policy in the twenty-first century, namely the trend usually termed 'the reverse course on *yutori* education'. We noted, however, that this was not so much a departure as an amendment. Many elements that we associate with *yutori* and the new perspective on academic ability are very much present in the revised COS still, although they have been tempered by various additions.

This takes us to the second influence, which was the so-called PISA shock, which I consider the foremost influence on the changes for Japanese-language education in the COS revision. In parallel with the general post-*yutori* trend, this motivated MEXT to stress the need for technical mastery of language and the pursuit of better functional reading literacy according to the PISA model. This means that teachers are instructed to foster students' ability to engage with texts in diverse ways by going beyond the simple extraction of information and into interpretation and deliberation on overall structure, use of expressions, and phrasing to gain a more nuanced understanding of the text. Such considerations are emphasised in all aspects of language usage: speaking, listening, writing, and reading.

Finally, although this is not a core concern of this study, we also saw the influence of the Abe administration's culturally conservative reform drive that was primarily symbolised by the 2006 FLE revision. The 2017 COS revision has a greater focus on familiarising students with traditional language culture and classic literary works as well as encouraging them to understand the mindsets and expressions of the people of the past.

Although the Japanese-language textbooks in use now were not approved based on criteria from the newest COS revision, it is evident that they reflect similar policy intentions, which have been present in educational politics since at least 2006. The textbooks now include more contents on effective communication to achieve specific goals, such as the structuring of logical arguments and employing literary techniques

to achieve desired effects in the reader. We have also seen that publishers are able to prepare for the implementation of new guidelines by making suggestions to schools on how to incorporate new key areas in their teaching. It is safe to assume that these trends will become more pronounced in future textbooks screened by MEXT under the 2017 COS.

Now, this study is only preliminary and needs to be expanded to analyse this development more precisely. The COS is an important source for understanding policy intentions, but it does not provide the full picture. Firstly, there exists a rich accompanying literature that interprets and expands the COS in various ways to make it easier for teachers to implement the guidelines. It would be informative to study those in greater detail to get a more detailed picture of the ideas expressed in the COS. Likewise, it would be valuable to go both upstream and downstream from the COS to better contextualise the findings of this chapter. Upstream, we have MEXT and political decision-makers whose actions and motivations we need to study in greater detail to better understand the policymaking process. Downstream, we have the schools and teachers that act as the final implementers of education policy. Textbooks tell us something about how COS revisions change teaching, but not much can be said with certainty unless we gain insight into what is happening inside the classrooms.

Future studies should also expand the scope of this study by looking at elementary-school Japanese-language education. I decided to focus on junior high school in this study because that is the age group that takes the PISA test, but it goes without saying that if MEXT intended to improve reading literacy, they would implement reforms all the way down to the early school years.

Moreover, as mentioned earlier, I regret that space precludes discussion of the politics behind these education reforms in any detail. The reform initiatives promoted under the Abe administration, so long-lived in the Japanese context, certainly cannot be explained with reference to MEXT intentions alone. The connection between this political context and Japanese-language education reform ought to be studied more.

Finally, I mentioned that Japan once again dropped in the most recent 2018 PISA ranking for reading literacy. There are many possible explanations for this, but regardless of what reasons are identified, this will motivate further changes and reform initiatives, and so it is something we should follow with great interest.

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Chapter 10
Traditional Art Education: The Case of Tea Ceremony (*Chadō*)

Kaeko Chiba

Abstract This chapter examines current issues surrounding traditional arts education in Japanese compulsory education. The historical background of traditional arts education is discussed to elucidate its interaction with issues of nationalism, gender, and social class. Rather than being offered as a regular subject in Japan, traditional arts tend to be taught in class time dedicated to non-subjects, particularly integrated studies (*sōgō gakushū),* moral education class (*dōtoku),* and special activities (*tokubetsu katsudō)*; and as curricular club activities (*kurabu katsudō)* or extracurricular club activities (*bukatsudō*). The chapter further analyses two case studies to consider regional variation. In order to explore effective teaching styles, the chapter shares comments from teachers and administrators of traditional arts education in public schools. These case studies are then discussed in relation to issues of gender and class, before summarizing the potential for traditional arts education in Japanese compulsory education and its future challenges.

Keywords Traditional arts education · Tea ceremony · Class · Gender · Cultural nationalism

10.1 Introduction

Traditional arts, such as tea ceremony, *ikebana*, Japanese dance, and *noh* have been practiced for centuries, sustained by the *Iemoto* system in Japan, which refers not only to the grand master of a school of art but also to the structure and hierarchy amongst students and teachers[1] the systems of Japan's schools of art (Hsu, 1975;

[1] In this chapter, tea ceremony 'teachers' are advanced practitioners with non-governmental certification to teach tea ceremony. Typically, they teach adults and young people in private classes, though this chapter discusses their (less common) activities in schools. To avoid ambiguity, in this chapter, full time school teachers are consistently referred to as 'school teachers'.

K. Chiba (✉)
Faculty of International Liberal Arts, Akita International University, Yuwatsubakigawa, Okutsubakidai, Akita 010-1292, Japan
e-mail: kchiba@aiu.ac.jp

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Mori 1991; Nishiyama, 1982). These traditional arts have enjoyed great attention from tourist industries fuelled by foreign interest. In Japanese higher education, there has been an emergence of opportunities to study traditional arts courses for international students. In contrast to increasing interest from foreign tourists and international students, the number of practitioners with sufficient expertise to hand down traditions is drastically decreasing due to a lack of sustained interest from the younger generations permanently resident in Japan.

This chapter focuses on current issues surrounding traditional arts education in Japanese compulsory education. It will first introduce the historical background of traditional arts education; how it has been valued and guided in relation to issues of nationalism, gender, and social class. The focus of this chapter is traditional arts education in compulsory education. Traditional arts education is not offered as a regular subject in Japan but tends to be taught in class time dedicated to non-subjects, particularly integrated studies (*sōgō gakushū),* moral education class (*dōtoku),* and special activities (*tokubetsu katsudō)*; and as curricular club activities (*kurabu katsudō)* or extracurricular club activities (*bukatsudō*). Based on two case studies, the chapter analyses how this education differs according to varying teaching styles and regions in Japan. To best explore effective teaching styles, the chapter shares comments from teachers and those who engage with traditional arts education in public schools. Along with direct insights given by tea ceremony teachers, school teachers, school staff, and students, the chapter will conclude by introducing the potentials of traditional arts education in Japanese compulsory education, in relation to the previously discussed issues of gender and class.

As discussed above, there are several traditional arts practiced in Japan. Besides calligraphy, perceived as an extension of the Japanese Language subject (*kokugo*) (Beomjin, 2012), tea ceremony is the most actively taught in compulsory education, and is thus leveraged as the primary focus of this chapter.

10.2 Tea Ceremony for Ideal Women, for a Strong Country

Traditional Arts, including tea ceremony, were established and practiced before the Meiji period (1868–1912), with tea ceremony being formalized in the 16th century by Sen no Rikyū (1522–1591). These art forms were practiced in private lessons by upper middle-class or middle-class male practitioners, but rarely taught in educational institutions until the Meiji Period (Varley, 1989; Corbett, 2018).

The Japanese tea ceremony was first taught at girls' schools (*jogakkō)* after the Meiji period (Sen, 1979; Varley 1989). The Meiji government first perceived traditional arts rather negatively, as they resonated with outdated feudalistic ideals, but then due to a lack of finance caused by the loss of patrons, the grandmaster (*Iemoto*) of the Urasenke School, named Gengensai (1810–1877), convinced the Meiji government to open tea ceremony courses to girls' schools (Anderson, 1991; Kumakura, 1991; Sen, 1979). In reference to two principles of governance promoted by the government of the day, Gengensai convinced the Meiji leaders that tea ceremony

practice would encourage girls to learn how to embody the 'good wife, wise mother' (*ryosai kenbo*) ideal, and would in turn demonstrate the notion of 'rich country, strong military' (*fukoku kyohei*) (Chiba, 2010; Kato, 2004; Stalker, 2018). He emphasized that tea ceremony practice provides appropriate etiquette, manners, and mental discipline (*seishin shugyo*) to students and insisted that this training would produce and promote ideal wives and mothers who would support their husbands, sons, and the nation (Corbett, 2018). Stalker (2018) also states that the support of the Meiji government to encourage teaching girls arose from the desperate desire for Japan to be recognized as a developed nation by leading men in the USA and Europe, where Japanese traditional arts were already regarded as feminine pursuits.

Atomi School was founded in 1875 as Japan's first private girls' school. Tea ceremony and *ikebana* were taught as compulsory subjects along with Japanese, Chinese, math, calligraphy, painting, and sewing (Kido, 2007). Atomi Kakei (1840–1926), the founder of this school, offered these traditional arts lessons and students learned not only how to serve tea and sweets but also how to accommodate guests in a befitting manner. At first, Atomi started Etiquette and Manner classes in the Ogasawara style (Ogasawara, 1999), but later changed it to Tea Ceremony class. She strongly believed that tea ceremony was a practice more suitable for promoting girls' talent in multiple ways, including their mental discipline (Sekine, 2007). The Atomi School greatly influenced other schools of a similar nature, such as Gakushūin, Keio Girls, and Seiken Girls schools in Tokyo and the Horikawa School in Kyoto, all of which also established tea ceremony classes. Tea ceremony classes were offered for the first time at a public girls' school in 1888 in Kyoto. Yukako Sen, the wife of the 12th *Iemoto* of the Urasenke tea house and daughter of the 11th *Iemono*, taught the class. Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835–1901) commented on the importance of tea ceremony education for girls and encouraged families to let their daughters engage with this art form for as long as they could in his book *Women's learning* (Fukuzawa 1899). Supported by the well-recognized advocacy of Fukuzawa, tea ceremony education for girls began to be adopted elsewhere in Japan. However, it is significant to note that not every child in Japan went to elementary school, thus only a limited number of upper-middle and middle-class girls were able to attend a girls' school (Sugimoto, 2015). Whereas mixed compulsory education started for those aged 6–12 later in the Meiji period, *jogakkō* was considered as optional subsequent education (Andressesn & Gainer, 2002).

After the Pacific War, the Japanese education system was reformed and became universal (Hendry, 2019; Hirota, 2004). Many traditional arts and cultural values were re-examined, under the fear that elements of the traditional culture might reignite nationalistic and feudalistic sentiments. *Terakoya no dan* is one example of a kabuki play forbidden by GHQ (General Headquarters of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers) out of concern that it promoted absolute loyalty to outdated feudalistic sentiments. As a result, the Ministry of Education ascribed less importance to the teaching of traditional culture (Kokubun, 2007; Ozaki, 1999).

Although traditional arts education was not promoted in compulsory education, the image of *ryosai kenbo* was upheld through the continued practice of tea ceremony. It was perceived as bridal training (*hanayome shugyo*), for upper and middle-class

women and taught mainly at the houses of tea ceremony teachers (Plutschow, 2001). It was common that women in their early twenties would practice tea ceremony for a couple of years before their arranged marriage (Chiba, 2010; Kato, 2009). It was commonly understood that a lot of time and patience is needed to acquire and understand the skills and philosophy required to perfect the art. In addition, it also costs a substantial amount of money to become a licensed practitioner (Mori, 1991). By stating that a person was engaging in tea ceremony practice was to affirm their social standing and so tea ceremony became categorized as high culture for the upper and middle-classes.

A woman who practices the art maintains a good social standing and can therefore hope to be selected by a commensurate family to marry into (Chiba, 2010). As a result of tea ceremony upholding these social expectations, more opportunities arose during the 1950s for tea ceremony practice to be undertaken as an extracurricular club activity, particularly in private girls' schools. For instance, at Toshimagaoka Joshi Gakuen Junior High School for Girls, based in Tokyo, the school has offered *bukatsudō* tea ceremony instruction since 1960. A graduate student, Haruyo Yashiro, was asked to teach tea ceremony *bukatsudō* in 1959 by the school and since then, she has taught this art form with five other graduate supporters (Kokorocomyu, 2019). Iwaki Public Junior High School in Akita prefecture offered tea ceremony education as one of its *bukatsudō* activities from 1950 (Tankokai Akita Branch, 1981). It is significant to note that there were only a limited number of schools offering this education. At the time, there was only one junior high school out of around 100 in Akita which offered tea ceremony instruction (Akita Prefectural Government, Compulsory Education Division, personal communication, 2020).

So far, the historical background of tea ceremony education has been explored. It has been valued and guided by Japan's complex relationship with its own nationalism. The notions of *fukoku kyohei, ryosai kenbo*, and *hanayome shugyo* variously reflect: skepticism towards feudalism and nation-building from the Meiji period, marriage politics, and gender and social class issues in the post-war period. As described above, these traditional arts were taught at schools only for upper-middle or middle-class girls and women. During the post-war period, tea ceremony education was mainly available as an extracurricular activity, *sadō-bu* (tea ceremony club), targeted predominantly towards middle-class girls' schools. How has this tendency changed? The following section focuses on current trends of traditional arts education in Japan to explore the different approaches towards it, drawing on the cases of Kyoto and Akita City, supported by seven interviews.

10.3 Special Occasion

Through the latter half of the twentieth century, the rapid decline of interest towards traditional arts became ever more concerning. Kokubun (2007) suggested that Japanese people had stopped hearing the Japanese harp (*koto*), and guitar (*shamisen*)

in their daily lives. However, a revision was made to the Fundamental Law on Education in 2006, which provided that 'Japanese education aims to respect its tradition and culture, respect the other nations, and promote peace and development to the globalized community'. The same statement was inserted into the School Education Law in 2007, and into the 2008 course of study. Thereafter, the Ministry of Education began to provide extra support for traditional arts education, together with other educational reforms, from 2006 onwards (Kokubun, 2007). The subsequent course of study required an emphasis on education related to tradition and culture to promote the desired Japanese person for a globalized society. It further described traditional arts related education in detail, with reference to Japanese instruments in music class, traditional lifestyle and culture in home economics, and Japanese painting in art class. Moreover, the guidance states that every local board of education should create their own education plan considering the local conditions. The increased emphasis on traditional arts was well received in tea ceremony circles (Yoshida, 2016).

Kokubun (2007) argued to the Urasenke Tea Ceremony Practitioners' Conference that this reform was related to the significant concern that the traditional arts were at risk of dying out. He also states that the reform was relevant to the global context: Japanese traditional arts promotion for increasing the number of foreign tourists. He suggested that the government emphasized the significance of Japanese identity to interact with global business and trade (Kokubun, 2007). Due to this reform in 2006, music classes were encouraged to teach more traditional music forms including Japanese harp, guitar, and drum (*taiko*) music in compulsory education, as only western music had been taught since the Meiji period (Yoshida, 2016).

And what of tea ceremony? It is not designated as a subject in compulsory education. However, traditional arts classes have gradually offered it as a part of integrated studies, special activities, as a club activity, and in moral education class (Kido, 2016). Integrated studies were promoted under the *yutori* education philosophy, which encourage a form of education with 'room to breathe', by MEXT from 2000. Club activities are held once per week for 45 min from 4th grade in elementary school and students can select their favourite club activities offered by their school. Moral education is a compulsory subject for every year group. It is offered once per week for 45 min at elementary school. Students are encouraged to learn respect towards rules, justice, family, groups within society, local communities, the nation, international groups, and traditional arts (Yoshida, 2016). There are numerous *bukatsudō,* extracurricular activities, especially in junior high schools in Japan and it is common for students to attend. Japanese students are well known to engage with these *bukatsudō* after class and during weekends and holidays. There are several sports and art *bukatsu* clubs: baseball, soccer, tennis, basketball, *judo, kendo*, art, science, and music. Some of the schools also include a tea ceremony club as an option (Hendry, 2019).

According to Kido (2016), the number of schools teaching tea ceremony has not changed much at the junior and high school level, but this number is increasing in the elementary school and preschool levels. Kido (2016) states that about 6,500 educational institutions are engaged with tea ceremony education, of which more than

300 began this education in 2011. The latest revision to the course of study renewed its emphasis on education related to traditional arts, along with new pursuits such as computer programming and more hours for English education (MEXT 2017).

10.3.1 Kyoto

The number of traditional arts club activities and classes varies depending on the region. Kyoto, recognized as Japan's centre of the traditional arts, emphasizes teaching traditional arts and offers more traditional art classes than other regions. Kyoto City constructed a strong volunteer system using local communities to provide traditional arts instructors and supporters. With these support systems, the city provides traditional arts classes (Kyoto City Board of Education 2020). As an example, in 6th grade elementary integrated studies, students were taught about tea ceremony, *ikebana*, and the '*sumi-e*' ink painting style based on their history studies of the Muromachi period, by instructors and supporters from the local communities (Tooyama, 2016).

20% of National treasures, 15% of cultural heritage sites, and numerous headquarters of temples, shrines, and traditional arts are based in Kyoto City. Considering these facts, the Agency of Cultural Affairs is due to relocate from Tokyo to Kyoto in 2022. Because of this relocation, the Kyoto City Board of Education decided to offer tea ceremony classes to all elementary school students and flower arrangement classes for all junior high school students in Kyoto City schools in 2019 (Kyoiku Shinbun, 2019). This will be a pilot project until 2021, after which these traditional arts classes are likely to become mandatory subjects in compulsory education. The Kyoto City Board of Education has a budget of approximately ten million yen for equipment and hiring instructors. These traditional arts are taught as part of moral education class. There are 163 public elementary schools in Kyoto City, 32 of which had begun offering tea ceremony classes by March 2020 (Kyoto City Board of Education, personal communication, 2020). Nationally the imperative for school teachers to follow textbook content in moral education has increased, making it difficult for school teachers to find content by themselves. However, the example of Kyoto suggests potential for local variation to infuse local characteristics into the curriculum.

According to the Kyoto City Board of Education, elementary children take a 90-min lesson, with about 30 students in each group. A tea ceremony instructor hired from the local community is assigned to teach the philosophy of tea ceremony, how to partake of tea and sweets, and how to make tea. It may seem unusual to ascribe this aesthetic learning to moral education class, but the primary purpose is the fostering of a respect for traditional culture. The Board of Education (2020) states that the class also aims to enrich students' mental health and their creativity by learning the philosophy of tea ceremony.

10.3.2 Akita

Akita City, located in the Tohoku area, is the capital city of Akita Prefecture. Although this place is well known as a rice-producing farming community, 80% of its residents are now engaged in tertiary industries, which include wholesale and retail trade and services (Akita Prefectural Government Statics Division, 2015). Akita Prefecture compulsory education has been ranked as the one of the highest in Japan in results of standardized tests (Akita Prefectural Government Compulsory Education Division, personal communication, 2020). The question thus is what kind of traditional arts education has been offered in Akita City?

Akita City offers tea ceremony classes as part of integrated studies, club activities, and *bukatsudō,* but the numbers of the activities are limited. There are 41 elementary and 23 junior high schools in Akita City, five and two of which, respectively, offered tea ceremony education in 2020 (Urasenke Akita 2020). The current state of tea ceremony and traditional arts in Akita City are shared by the director of Akita City Board of Education, Tomoko Sato, and a retired junior high school teacher: Wakamatsu-sensei.

According to Sato, Akita City tends to focus on local festivals, farming culture, traditional art works, and historical events in *sogo gakushū.* For instance, Hiroomote Elementary School offers local festival studies as part of integrated studies for third grade students. Students first learn from the local residents about the history and meaning of a particular festival during the first couple classes. They also attend the festivals and carry a float to the shrine with support from the local community. This festival was historically open only to males but is now open to everybody. On the other hand, Tsuchizaki elementary school offers local history classes in integrated studies. The Tsuchizaki area is well known as the last place to be attacked during the Pacific War and the local students learn about their local history by visiting a museum and interviewing the residents who experienced the attack in preparation to make presentations. In Akita City, there are only two junior high schools offering classes in tea ceremony, which are the two combined (junior and senior) high schools. Akita Minami Combined High School offers tea ceremony education as *bukatsudō* and Goshono Gakuin School offers tea ceremony class in integrated studies.

Though the forms of traditional arts in Akita are specific to their locality, their significance resonates to many non-metropolitan areas, each of which has specific histories and forms of local traditions. Though some are discussed more than others, all regions have distinct histories, traditions, and arts.

10.3.3 Combined Junior and High School Style

Tea ceremony education seems to differ depending on the type of high school, more likely found in six-year combined high schools, than in three-year junior high or three-year senior high schools. According to a survey (Valxl, 2020), 20% of combined

high schools in Kansai and 60% in the Tokyo metropolitan area offered a tea ceremony club in 2020. This data indicates that teaching traditional arts is more accessible in combined high schools than junior high school. For example, Hakuo Public School in Tokyo changed to a six-year curriculum from 2004. This school offers traditional arts education, including tea ceremony and *ikebana*, as elective subjects (Valxl, 2020). Goshono Gakuin, in Akita City, was opened as a combined high school in 2000. It offers local studies (*kyodo-gaku*) as biweekly 100-minutes classes, for which all students select a topic from 13 choices including Chinese, computing, pottery, Japanese harp, and tea ceremony. Keiko Kawaguchi, a retired school teacher and presently a tea ceremony teacher, teaches tea ceremony for about 20 students in the school's *tatami* floored room. Local studies are offered to all students except final grade seniors. Sato states that this exception is due to the high school entrance exam. Junior high schools in Japan generally start to prepare entrance exams from the autumn semester of second grade. Combined high schools' curriculums are more flexible and have more time to offer traditional arts education because the transfer to senior high school is internal and thus has no formal exam.

10.3.4 Private Girls School

99% of elementary schools and 93% of junior schools are public schools in Japan (Valxl, 2020) and most private schools are based in the Kansai area and the Tokyo Metropolitan area. According to the survey from Valxl, 53% and 52% of private schools in Kansai and the Tokyo metropolitan area, respectively, offered a tea ceremony club in 2020. For public schools, the proportion is zero and 9%. This data indicates that traditional arts education is more popular amongst private schools than public schools. Sawako Kadowaki is an elementary school teacher in Akita City who suggests that this disparity indicates that tea ceremony is still perceived as a pursuit that enhances social status in Japan.

In terms of gender, 31% and 7% of boys schools and 56% and 70% of girls schools in Kansai and in the Tokyo metropolitan area, respectively, offered a tea ceremony club in 2020 (Valxl, 2020). This indicates that tea ceremony continues to be associated with girls and women. It is significant that tea ceremony club or class is attended by more girls than boys in mixed schools. For instance, Kawaguchi-sensei commented that tea ceremony class of the mixed Goshono Gakuin in Akita had 22 students in 2020, all of whom were girls. Moreover, most of them are girls every year. Wakamatsu-sensei comments that 16 students joined the tea ceremony club at Akita Minami Junior High School in 2020, and again all of them were girls. According to Wakamatsu-sensei, the school never comments that it is only for girls but, commonly, students and their parents have a strong mental image that tea ceremony is only for girls. Takumi Yamamoto, a student taking the Traditional Art Course at Akita International University shared his experience of school sometimes pushing the image that this art form is only for girls. His private junior high school in Kobe City established a Japan Culture Club, in which students can learn tea ceremony, calligraphy,

flower arrangement, and cooking. For the first year, the school clearly stated that this club is only for girls.

This section has described how traditional arts have been taught in Japanese compulsory education. These art forms tend to be taught mainly as special classes, aside from compulsory subjects. Additionally, the number of the traditional arts classes are varied depending on the region in Japan. Some extent of education content and policy are decided locally by the board of education. The case studies reveal that more opportunities are provided in private schools leading to a class gap, and more opportunities are offered in girls' schools leading to a gender gap. Where opportunities are offered to both genders, girls are significantly more likely to participate, with some indication of differentiated encouragement favouring participation by girls.

10.4 Teaching Style

10.4.1 Anedeshi and Anideshi: Senior Apprentices

The Goshono Gakuin tea ceremony classes first explain calligraphy, flower arrangement, and other elements for about 15–20 minutes, then they practice tea procedure for the rest of the class. When students practice tea procedures, Kawaguchi-sensei comments that the more advanced students help the beginner students. Traditional arts and martial arts training tend to assign the learning of some basic styles and techniques from advanced students instead of their teachers (Cox, 2003). This training style is also seen in tea ceremony practice and other *bukatsudō.* Senior learners are called *senpai* in school and in the workplace; and *anedeshi* or *anideshi* in the craft workshop, traditional arts, or martial arts school. However, the principles permeate Japanese learning, and manifest in *bukatsu* and to a lesser extent in other extracurricular activities. Thus, students also comment on a tight bond developing not only with teachers but also with other students.

10.4.2 The Spirit of Tea, cha no kokoro

Tea ceremony club teacher Yashiro-sensei, at Toshimagaoka Joshi Gakuen Junior-High School for Girls, commented in an interview that the most important element that she offers in the class is the spirit of tea (Kokorocomyu, 2019). Tea ceremony is considered a composite art form that consists of learning the correct tea procedure, manner, etiquette, and the philosophy of tea ceremony (Tachiki, 1998). During the class, the spirit of tea, *cha no kokoro* is emphasized. It is considered as a disposition giving respect to others, represented towards those who prepared the tea, the tea bowl, and respect towards nature; a part of tea ceremony emphasized in moral education class. *Cha no kokoro* is related to the Zen Buddhism training style *seishin shugyo*, which can be seen in other martial arts training.

10.4.3 One Directional Teaching

Most traditional art classes are conducted only as a special event in schools, rather than as a continued class. Most of the class is focused on teaching how to bow and how to receive tea and sweets. *Bukatsudō* also tends to focus on teaching the tea procedure. Goshono Gakuin in Akita offers continued classes, in which the primary focus is tea procedure. Thus, the teaching style is one directional; students listen to the instructors' guidance, and imitate their performance. This is the typical teaching style in traditional arts influenced by Zen Buddhism. Such training largely requires practitioners to learn the style of procedure in the form of 'how to' (*kata*) from observation, imitation, and repetition (Chiba, 2010; Cox, 2003). The traditional art teaching style emphasizes bodily discipline: learning through the body by simple repetition. Students are discouraged from asking questions to masters and teachers.

Continued classes, however, have some scope for learning beyond procedures. Details such as history, aesthetics, and architecture can also be explored. Here, an active learning style can be used involving discussions directed by and continued by students. Students constructing their own research questions can be introduced here. Asking questions to teachers is here encouraged to deepen students' knowledge. From a practitioner perspective, many questions arise about the continuation and possible expansion of traditional art education in Japan.

10.5 Future Agenda

10.5.1 Ryūha (The Various Schools of the Art)

Traditional arts, including tea ceremony, have numerous schools of teaching and are based on the *Iemoto* system (Nishiyama, 1982). The *Iemoto* system has a rigid hierarchy and its training style, skills, and information are, to a significant degree, closed to the public. The partly closed system promotes division between *ryūha*, the schools of the art. Nonetheless, the Agency of Cultural Affairs (2018) states that the networking system between *ryūha* should be improved to promote traditional art education more broadly. Such collaboration would require adaptation (Nishiyama, 1982), and ironically would require a break in certain traditions. There are at least fourteen schools of tea ceremony in Japan (Kato, 2004: 39). Urasenke (mentioned above), Omotesenke, and Mushanokojisenke are the branches of tea ceremony which have descended from the family of Sen no Rikyū. To promote further education, a tight network, information sharing, and collaboration projects between the various *ryūha* should be encouraged.

10.5.2 Instructors

The Agency of Cultural Affairs (2018) states that the lack of instructors for traditional arts presents a problem. Kobayashi (2003) and Shiroma (2013), discussing the possibility of teaching Japanese traditional performing arts, also highlight this issue. For this reason, Kyoto City organizes an elaborate volunteer system. Around 8,000 local residents are registered who can teach not only tea ceremony, but also *ikebana, noh, kabuki*, art works, and festivals, many of whom offer to teach these art forms at schools (Kyoto City Board of Education, personal communication, 2020). On the other hand, NPO Musubinokai offers similar support. The latter was founded in 2010 and aims to promote traditional art education at schools and has organized with researchers, school teachers, and local residents who can teach traditional arts (Morita, 2020).

In terms of improving instructor quality, the Urasenke *ryūha* offers training for those who teach in schools in Kyoto. Since the Meiji period, this school has provided training which includes, for example, how to teach a large number of classes. This provides a significant advantage in the public education system since traditionally the traditional arts, including tea ceremony and *Ikebana*, are generally taught to small groups of apprentices in the instructors' private home.

There is disagreement in the tea ceremony community, including within Urasenke, when evaluating current policy trends of local boards of education. The promotion of traditional arts coincides with the interests of tea practitioners. Moreover, Yoshida (2016) comments that the current compulsory education policy promotes engagement between schools and local communities. On the other hand, Sekine (2016: 99) calls for increased support for traditional arts education. He criticizes the insufficient financial support given to each traditional art institution which supports this policy. Indeed, seemingly committed policies without funding are perpetuated by the binding of traditional arts teaching in schools to volunteer mobilization, as is the case in both Akita and Kyoto.

10.5.3 Continuation

Tea ceremony *Iemoto* are concerned about the lack of continuation after engaging with tea ceremony education in compulsory education. According to Sekine (2016), there are about 200,000 practitioners registered as members of Urasenke school, and 130,000 students engaging with at least one tea ceremony class or club activities in 2016. Amongst this large number of students, hardly any students continue practicing tea ceremony after their graduation. In fact, most traditional arts courses are one-time events, hence some instructors are concerned about communicating the art sufficiently in such a short time and are discussing possibilities for expanding the number of classes.

10.5.4 Parents Understanding of Traditional Arts

A survey was conducted in Kyoto City to investigate parents' ideal weekend activities for their children. Based on responses from 2,700 elementary school parents and 700 junior high school parents in 2016, traditional art activities including tea ceremony and *Ikebana* ranked 21st out of 23 selected activities including sports and outdoor activities. Tooyama (2016) stated that even in Kyoto City, which has a strong connection with traditional arts, parents have less interest in these art forms. Cross (2009) claims that this lack of interest in tea ceremony is related to the 'cyberpunk generation', who lives on efficiency and productivity with less interest in slow culture and aesthetics. Tooyama (2016) comments that, regardless of these preferences, schools should engage with the subject which they believe is appropriate for students.

10.5.5 Comparing with Other Traditional Arts

Calligraphy is practiced as part of the compulsory subject Japanese-language (*kokugo*) in elementary and junior high school (Beomjin, 2012). Generally, this class starts from the 3rd grade, once a week for 45 minutes in elementary school. Calligraphy was amongst the traditional arts discouraged after the Pacific War owing to the fear that it might reignite nationalistic and feudalistic sentiment, and only rehabilitated from 1971 onward. Other traditional arts such as *noh* and traditional dance are rarely taught as subjects or club activities in compulsory education. Mihoko Chiba is a tea ceremony teacher involved in the Tea Ceremony Teaching Association (*gakkō sadō*), which organizes tea ceremony education at academic institutions in Akita prefecture. Chiba-sensei explains the tendency to omit other art forms from compulsory education as more of a historical contingency. These art forms were not introduced as subjects for girls' schools during the Meiji period. The Tea Ceremony Teaching Association was established on this assumption of a lack of teaching experience close to and adapted for the public school system.

Other traditional arts are also searching for means to maintain traditional forms whilst innovating to enter school education. Yoshimura (2013) reports on an elementary school in Nara prefecture which incorporates *noh* into English class, where students learn the *noh* movements with basic English. Sato-sensei comments that school teachers in the compulsory education system struggle to find class topics in English and moral education classes. As such, school teachers of English welcome such innovation, which simultaneously provides teaching in aspects of traditional arts.

10.6 Discourses & Analysis

10.6.1 Discourses

There have been various discourses supporting traditional art education in Japan. The Agency of Cultural Affairs (2018) emphasizes the risk of traditional arts dying out, due to a lack of interest from the younger generations in Japan. This is closely connected to the commitment of statements made by the Agency of Cultural Affairs (2018) on the importance of traditional art education at schools. Ishii (2016) stated that due to the education style established after the Pacific War, Japanese students are not acquiring the appropriate discipline, for example in attitude, etiquette, and manners. Ishii (2016) insisted that the traditional arts, which consist of a way (*dō*) to train the spirit, would improve the quality of Japanese students. Kita (2015) emphasizes the importance of *kata* in traditional arts, which encourages mental discipline. Kita (2015) also explained that traditional arts education is necessary to generate students' awareness of being Japanese and their ability to survive in the globalized society independently. He also claims that this is achieved by having an interest in culture and tradition, deepening one's understanding towards them, and nurturing attitudes of respect. Sumioka (2016) further emphasizes that traditional arts education promotes students to acquire an appropriate identity. Does this constitute cultural nationalism?

10.6.2 Cultural Nationalism?

Applying Befu's (2001) characterization of cultural nationalism as focusing on a national identity shaped by cultural traditions and by language, it appears that this education is related to cultural nationalism. Traditional arts education is related to identity. As stated above, the course of study from 2010 requires traditional arts education to promote the ideal *Japanese person* in the globalized society. Prof Toyota, a public university professor (personal communication, 2020) states that traditional arts education is indeed relevant in constructing a Japanese student's identity. To explore these identities, the concept of *dō* philosophy in tea ceremony is also highlighted to enhance its 'Japaneseness'.

Discussions of the connection between traditional arts and national identity have continued for a long time. As discussed above, the Meiji government was seeking to establish mainly a forward-looking 'modern' and possibly Western-like identity, at a time when modern discourse discriminated between male and female roles. The Meiji government attempted to utilize arts and language to unite national identity (Surak, 2012). It appears that similar tendencies are seen in this Reiwa period. Organizations such as the Japan Conference have argued for traditional arts to instil national identity. The Nippon Kaigi was established in 1998 and works to promote cultural nationalism (Fujiu, 2017). Former Prime minister Abe is a special advisor to

Nippon Kaigi. According to Fujiu (2017), Nippon Kaigi has six major goals. One of them is to promote Japanese identity through education. Their promotion of tradition dovetails with the reinforcement traditional gender roles (Fujiu, 2017) to an extent which is seen as discriminatory to some contemporary sensibilities. Nonetheless, they were a visible and effective vehicle promoting the 2006 to the Fundamental Law of Education, which emphasized the respect of the nation. Abe also used the idea of tradition to castigate alternative educational reforms proposed by the Japan Teachers' Union (Fujiu, 2017). The Japan Teachers' Union, for its part, gathered 8 million signatures to oppose the education reform.

10.6.3 Reproduction of Class and Gender

Tea ceremony and other traditional arts can be analysed as reproducers of class and gender. Oya (1999) argues that tea ceremony is categorized as what Bourdieu (1984, 1987) calls high culture, defined as the taste of the dominant class. He further states that this cultural form is used as a tool of social distinction. The analysis in section three illustrates that access to tea ceremony is dominated by private schools, elite combined high schools, and girls' schools, which support the analysis based on Bourdieusian cultural capital. The learning of tea ceremony will allow others to distinguish girls and young women with a higher-class pedigree. Kadowaki-sensei comments that parents of private school children have more understanding of culture, such as traditional arts, which does not directly contribute to the market economy. Bourdieu (1984, 1987) also comments that middle-class people tend to engage with tastes which do not directly improve their financial position. Regarding gender reproduction, the term *hanayome shugyo* is dying out. However, Japan is still recognized as a society which continues to hold clear gender role assigned roles and concepts of ideal masculinity and femininity (Bullock, 2018; Chiba, 2010; Liddle, 2000; Miyajima & Tanaka, 1984). As can be seen from understanding the term *joshi ryoku,*[2] ideal Japanese femininity is related to a girl or young lady who has substantial etiquette and manners, skills for cooking, sewing, cleaning, and other domestic work (Chiba, 2010; Kondo, 1990; Roberts, 1994). This ideal femininity seems to remain, however, as a catchphrase for tea ceremony education in private girls' school which can *josei no hinkaku wo sodatemasu*: 'cultivate dignified femininity'. Indeed, traditional art education seems to be related to gender and elitism.

[2] This phrase literally means 'girl power' or 'girl's strength', which should not be misinterpreted as gender empowerment. It defines what a girl's strengths *should* be, limiting those outside that sphere.

10.6.4 What Is Tradition?

This phenomenon also highlights how the ‘traditional’ is perceived differently in different regions of Japan. Though MEXT states that a local board of education has to provide education promoting ‘tradition’, it appears that their interpretation to ‘tradition’ is varied. As discussed above, Kyoto City clearly recognizes traditional art, tea ceremony, as ‘their’ tradition. Akita City seems to identify their tradition in the festival and farming cultures. How about in Okinawa, where their culture and history are distinctive from mainland Japan? Do they perceive tea ceremony as their ‘tradition’? Do they consider Okinawan dance (*Ryukyu buyo*) in relation to their identity? Further research would be required to address such questions when time allows and when COVID restrictions decrease. Conducting fieldwork and building networks becomes more important for educational research in Japan as regional variation increases. Sato-sensei and Wakamatsu-sensei states that even though there is a moral education textbook and guidance from the MEXT, the content of *sogo gakushū*, club activities and moral education in local communities are different from the national standard, though these are not always documented.

10.7 Conclusion

This chapter focuses on current issues surrounding traditional arts, and especially tea ceremony in compulsory education, drawing on the voices of people who engage directly with this education. Numerous issues related to traditional arts education, including the contents of integrated studies and moral education, are not officially recorded or documented at the local board of education. Thus, direct voices from tea ceremony teachers, school teachers, school staff, and students were crucial for this study. I am deeply indebted to my informants.

Traditional arts education is not offered as a regular subject in Japan. It tends to be taught in integrated studies, moral education, special activities classes, club activities, and extracurricular activities. Tea ceremony education is increasing after the revision of the Fundamental Law of Education and related reform efforts since 2006. Using the example given by Kyoto City, it appears that this education has increased to a significant extent. However, the approach towards traditional arts education varies greatly depending on the region and style of school. Tea ceremony is practiced more at combined high schools, private schools, and girl schools in Japan. For this reason, it can be argued that this traditional art education still serves reproduction at the intersection of class and gender. Attempts are also made to connect traditional arts to cultural nationalism.

Nonetheless, despite concerns, there are few who wish to see tea ceremony disappear. It is interesting to consider how traditional art education will be maintained or be developed in the future. It appears that the number of classes will increase in the short term. Whilst the current trend is towards one-time events, practitioners

are working towards continuation. Current tea ceremony education is supported by local senior residents who learned tea ceremony in relation to their bridal training, though tensions exist in the current symbiosis between traditional arts education and volunteer mobilization. Training qualified teachers for the next generation in traditional arts will be a significant agenda to consider in the future. Will this traditional art education in schools serve to preserve the traditional arts? Will we still see these art forms in 100 years' time? And if so, which traditions will remain and where will innovation be found?

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Chapter 11
Equality of Educational Opportunity: Inequality in Japanese Education

Akito Okada

Abstract This chapter considers the extent to which the adoption of active learning might exacerbate disparities in educational achievement along class lines. The Ministry of Education constructed the new course of study to better prepare children for the new knowledge society, but also made explicit reference to the need for the new curriculum to better provide 'equal opportunities' of education. The new course of study resulted in reinvigorated core subjects, active learning, and key competencies for the twenty-first century. Whilst many scholars welcomed the ideals underpinning active learning, the revision has raised questions over whether it is conceivable to require all students, without support from outside the school, to gain proficiency with both the knowledge required by the course of study and the competencies for applying knowledge that are now required. This chapter examines the increased weight placed on active learning from a sociological perspective, to question whether the new curriculum is likely to achieve the aim of equal opportunities of education. Recent sociological theories of class and education have found that, whether or not 'accumulated knowledge' is important, 'learning motivation', the willingness and acceptance of study as a worthwhile pursuit, is constructed more consistently in the home environment, varies by class, and predicts attainment. This is discussed in the context of specific changes promoted under the banner of active learning and the Ministry's slow recognition of disparities along class lines. Ultimately, for the new course of study to live up to expectations, it needs to provide a quality education to all children equally, by avoiding the creation of, or at least mitigating, social stratification along class lines.

Keywords Equality of opportunity · Active learning · Incentive divide · Disengagement from achievement · NAAT · Class disparity in Japan

A. Okada (✉)
Graduate School of Global Studies, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 3-1-1 Asahicho, Fuchu-shi, Tokyo 183-8534, Japan
e-mail: aokada@tufs.ac.jp

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11.1 Introduction

The Ministry of Education constructed the new course of study, focused on aspiration, for a new education system to prepare children for the new knowledge society. Though the new knowledge society is discussed widely, its definition remains contested. Nevertheless, all definitions share the foundational view of knowledge and competencies as capital, and its increasing importance as the source of both economic growth and sustainable society. The standard definition of a knowledge-based economy is one 'based on the production, distribution and use of knowledge and information' (OECD, 1997). A 'knowledge society' advocates changes to facilitate better uses of data, information, and knowledge in a world in which the future is increasingly unknown.

As the policy was debated through the early years of the curriculum cycle, widespread changes were championed in the name of two aspirations. First, the approach of the course of study should directly serve the needs of global economic development. Second, it should include 'equal opportunities' of education, alongside the pursuit of excellence. Based on these two ideals, three foundations were determined for the course of study: reinvigorated core subjects, active learning, and key competencies for the twenty-first century. Rather than separate revisions, these three foundations overlap and inform the content, pedagogy, and knowledge valued for assessment.

Whilst many scholars welcomed the ideals underpinning active learning, the revision has raised questions over whether it is conceivable to require all students to gain proficiency with the full curriculum contents without support from outside of school. Needless to say, if a supplementary 'shadow education' is required to compete, then disparity between the more and less advantaged will be exacerbated by the cost of supplementary education. Whilst important, however, this is only one connection between the direction of the new course of study and social disparities. The necessary skills called for may themselves be more difficult to teach in schools and easier to foster in certain family environments. As such, additional connections between the new course of study and social disparities are discussed in this chapter. Moreover, this crisis of 'quality' and 'equality' deepens through primary, secondary, and higher education and into lifelong education, which risks weakening the financial base, the administration, and the entire system of education.

Section 11.2 reappraises active learning not only as a shift in pedagogy, but as a parallel strand of learning required of students above and alongside the study of knowledge. Section 11.3 more broadly discusses theories of social stratification in Japan in reference to ongoing reforms of its education system. Section 11.4 overviews the responses of MEXT to findings on the wide class disparity in attainment within Japan, followed by a discussion of the failure of active learning to address issues of equality. The concluding section places the course of study within these wider debates and draws attention to the urgent need for a continued debate on its contents, and schooling more broadly, which fully considers both the quality and equality of education, and some considerations that must form the basis of this debate.

11.2 The Weight of Active Learning

The 'new knowledge society' has become a key term in the reform process. Policy-makers, enterprises, and scholars around the world agree that knowledge is becoming a more important driving force for national success (Powell & Snellman, 2004). However, it is not an uncontested concept. For the central government, it means that reforms are needed to compete and succeed in the changing economic and political dynamics of the modern world. It also refers to societies that are well educated, and who therefore rely on the knowledge of their citizens to drive the innovation, entrepreneurship, and dynamism of that society's economy (MEXT, 2013a).

Active learning aims to reconsider the nature of learning in terms of the traits and talents that can be developed through it. As a result, active learning has an impact on the theory of educational goals, which is concerned with what qualities and talents should be cultivated in students, in addition to the dimension of an educational method that conveys the goals and content of each topic. However, whilst constructing active learning, MEXT was under concurrent pressure for the retrenchment of scholastic basics. Educationalists are quick to recognize that 'basics' and rote 'cramming' are difficult to separate. MEXT sidesteps this conundrum by claiming to 'escape from the binary opposition' between learning for understanding and learning for knowledge. Nonetheless, it leaves the translation into practice up to schools and teachers on the ground, where choices need to be made.

However, several researchers have questioned whether this is really a complete shift from knowledge to competences or constitutes a doubling of the weight of expectations—that *both* knowledge and competencies are now expected. Scholars have questioned whether it is possible to demand all children to master the whole of the COS' contents without additional support whilst also developing the abilities embodied in active learning (Kobari, 2018). Many children and students are unable to keep up with their coursework, resulting in or exacerbating a disparity in academic competence between more and less advantaged pupils. Such a divide then widens over the course of a child's education.

Though on the surface it seems that any additional weight would affect all children equally, more privileged families can afford supplementary shadow education, which is hugely accessible in Japan (Entrich, 2018) and often considered a normal part of the elite track of education. Additional family expenditure on educational activities such as cram schools (ibid.), athletics, and other extra-curricular clubs (Blackwood & Friedman, 2015) has been shown to predict a major portion of children's academic ability in previous studies. There is a fear, for example, that the attainment gap between pupils who learn at supplementary English language schools, or engage in supplementary 'shadow' education to understand the topics of the course of study, and those who do not will widen. Over and above the quantity, the type of skills measured are also expected to contribute to great inequality. This is discussed after outlining some concepts and the landscape of educational equity in Japan.

11.3 The Myth of Merit and Learning Motivation

The concept of active learning can be seen as progressive and child-centred. On the other hand, it can be seen as overly individualizing. Since the 1980s, when neoliberal education advocated vehemently for deregulation and school choice, whilst enhancing competition, development, and differentiation between schools, the argument over equal educational opportunity has become increasingly prominent (Fujita, 1997). The discourse of choice pre-supposes entrepreneurial individuals who act rationally in their own interests—the myth of the 'rational person', whether the rational person is conceived of as the child or as the family members who make decisions about the child's education. It also constructs a myth of merit, where those who succeed have access to a story that they deserve to have won in the race towards exam success. For example, school choice is often a luxury or an entitlement reserved for wealthy families, but the student at an elite school still needs to work hard and compete with peers, creating a sense of achievement.

Sociologists have long conceived of merit as a function of two aspects: ability and effort. It has long been assumed, and recently demonstrated, that attainment is predicted by class in Japan. Mimizuka (2008) confirmed that educational attainment is influenced by parental education, parental profession, household income, and additional education expenditure in rural, suburban, and metropolitan areas. This research confirmed a substantial socio-economic gap being transmitted across generations—that is, social stratification mediated by education. The research moreover suggests that the attitudes, deportments, and philosophies within certain families mirror academic institutions which further support the children of those families to advance academic aptitude and attainment. Family environments closer to a school environment were seen to facilitate attainment. However, to understand exactly what it is about these families that mediates greater attainment and to demonstrate statistically that such effects are in operation (over above the financial and knowledge-based effects), further theoretical resources and sociometric analyses are required.

Takehiko Kariya is an educational sociologist at the forefront of debates on declining academic attainment, the class disparity in attainment, and the stratification of Japanese society mediated by education. Whereas ability has long been the object of sociological study, Kariya was amongst the first to study the role of effort in social stratification. Kariya's works (1995, 2000, 2001; Kariya & Shimizu, 2004) utilize socio-econometric methods to demonstrate that even 'learning time' and 'learning motivation', which are benchmarks of efforts that influence children's academic achievement, are associated with the academic backgrounds and occupation(s) of their parents.[1] Kariya (2001) thus theorizes an 'incentive divide' as a fundamental academic crisis in Japan. Kariya emphasizes that, despite the power of socio-economic status to predict these factors, the problem cannot be addressed by considering financial factors, such as income, alone. The effects are mediated by parental culture and philosophical values. Both of these factors correlate with class. As such, Kariya's work demonstrates that the class gap, most crucially in children's

[1] See Kariya 2012 for an extended discussion in English.

learning motivation and learning effort, is widening, alongside an overall decline in learning motivation and interest across the population.

Previous research shows that the middle class is diminishing in Japan, and thus modern Japanese society is becoming increasingly polarized (Genda & Maganuma, 2004; Miura, 2005; Sato, 2000; Tachibanaki, 1998). Students with lower social status tend to carry less expectation of serious achievement, regardless of their study effort, and thus come to feel that they should relegate themselves to a lifestyle and set of goals that embody the ethos of 'wanting to enjoy life in the moment' instead of studying patiently. In other words, they enhance their self-confidence and find self-affirmation by 'disengaging from achievement'. On the other hand, students with greater privilege remain motivated by the dream of later rewards in life depending on achievement at school. The gap in learning motivation arises due to class at an early stage of life. Because the process is cyclic, the gap thus retrenches and increases stratification in contemporary Japan.

In reference to learning motivation, Kariya reiterates that, whether or not 'accumulated knowledge' is important, 'learning motivation', the willingness, and acceptance of study as a worthwhile pursuit, is constructed in the home environment, varies by class, and predicts attainment.

11.3.1 Relationship between Effort, Academic Achievement, and Family Background

Kaneko (2004) elaborates the connection between student effort and attainment. The findings from four analyses are relevant here. Firstly, Kaneko explores how student effort and social class influence student attainment. Her research reveals that the longer 6th grade students studied maths, the higher their average test performance was, and that this trend became more pronounced as their grade advanced. The greater the student's effort (measured in hours of study), the greater their attainment. This is not surprising. Secondly, study time is higher for those whose father received higher education, and that the division ascribed to the difference of a father's scholastic background increases along with age (measured by school grade). However, the third and fourth findings are more significant. By incorporating measures of social class into the analysis, Kaneko finds that, even for students with the same amount of study time, students with university graduate fathers regularly achieve a higher percentage of correct answers on maths tests. Moreover, the research revealed that even by confining the analysis to those students who 'do not study at home', students with university graduate fathers still correctly answer an average of 10% more than those whose father did not graduate university. These studies show that, in addition to the amount of study time, the method of learning is also important. This research demonstrates both that social class and effort are tightly connected, and that class effects on attainment exist apart from effort. Merit consists of both ability and effort, both of which are predicted by class.

11.4 Analyses of MEXT Data on Attainment and Class

The above studies stimulated further research, which validated the existence of an education divide in Japan, principally with inequalities in attainment due to the socio-economic status (SES) of the parents. With the goal of accumulating research on class disparities in Japanese education, MEXT belatedly set out to collect data on the issue in 2013.

Japan's national attainment examination for 6th grade elementary students and 3rd grade junior high school students is known as the National Academic Achievement Test and Study Environment of Students Questionnaire (NAAT) and has been conducted by MEXT every April since 2007. This test provides data on the scholastic aptitude of a cross-section of the population, as well as data on school and home locations' academic environment. The stated purpose of NAAT includes the advancement of education guidelines along with the improvement of academic/study environments. The test contains 'type A' problems evaluating knowledge and 'type B' problems necessitating the application of that knowledge in maths, the Japanese-language, and science.

Survey questions in 2013 additionally collected data on parents, teacher work, and local boards of education (MEXT, 2013b). For the first time, statistics on household income and family educational background were collected, which could be correlated with attainment. This was intended to underpin the study of relationships between student attainment and some measures of socio-economic status. It was these statistics on parents that also drew the most scholarly consideration. After the datasets were released almost two years after the survey, it became possible to scrutinize correlations between students' scholastic aptitude and SES. The data also allowed the analysis of various aspects of school administration, specifically in cases of educational institutions where students were attaining higher academic success despite detrimental study environments.

More than the provision of data, however, the design of the survey faced the issue of class disparity almost head on. The initial analyses would soon demonstrate an undeniable correlation between attainment, household income, and parental education. The conclusions on household income predicting the existence and degree of scholastic inequality were established by a MEXT survey in cooperation with local governments and school administrators. They amounted to an admission of class-based education inequality by the Japanese government.

However, numerous studies had already shown such results, and citizens already recognize the effects of such disparity in their daily lives. As such, it was highly likely at the time of planning the survey that these correlations would arise. Therefore, it seems that the Ministry was already committed to responding with educational policies from before the moment the decision was made to implement such a survey. In due course, the MEXT data did demonstrate that the issues were nationwide and thus systemic, resultantly establishing it as a national problem on the policy agenda.

Because of the importance of this survey, it is valuable to examine its analysis in depth. MEXT contracted Ochanomizu Women's University to analyse the results

prior to the release of the full datasets. The report was published the following year (Ochanomizu Women's University, 2014). The report was historic as it presented features of family, community, school, and policy both directly and indirectly interrelated with student scholastic attainment. In addition to merely acknowledging the disparity in student academic achievements, as an advisory report to the government, it also sought correlations with policies that predict lower disparities to underpin recommendations of 'good practice'.

11.4.1 Correlation Between Children's Academic Performance and Their Family Background

The survey's most prominent data reveals the strong association between family income and achievement test results. As illustrated in Fig. 11.1, there is an average variance of approximately 18 to 25% in the percentage of correct answers between students from households in the highest income band and those in the lowest. As a national average, the higher the annual household income is, the greater the student test scores. With the difference between students from households with the highest annual incomes and lowest annual incomes also approximately 20%, it is clear that test results for Japanese (language) exhibit analogous outcomes.

Consistent with this investigation, students from higher SES households tend to achieve higher average scores in each subject. The SES was calculated by separating

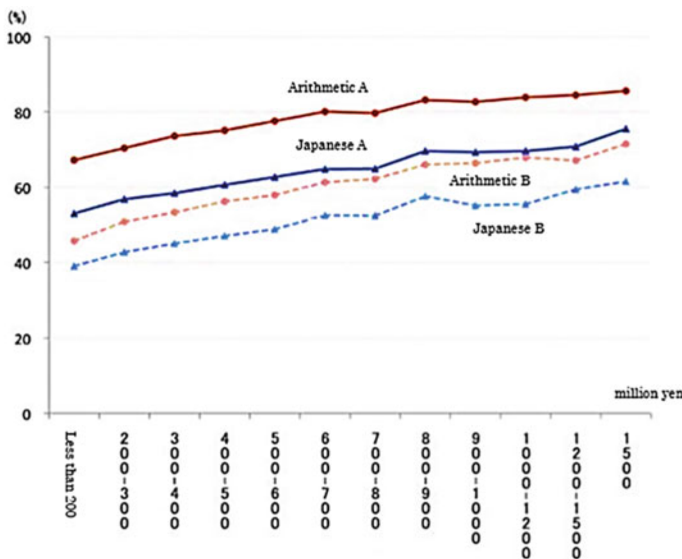

Fig. 11.1 Average correct answer rate by household income (6th grade elementary school) (*Source* Ochanomizu Women's University 2014)

Table 11.1 Students with a higher socio-economic background of home (SES) tend to have a higher average correct answer rate for each subject

	Elementary school				Junior high school			
	Japanese A	Japanese B	Arithmetic A	Arithmetic B	Japanese A	Japanese B	Maths A	Maths B
Lower SES	53.9	39.9	68.6	47.7	70.7	59.8	54.4	31.5
Lower middle SES	60.1	46.1	75.2	55.1	75.2	66.0	62.0	38.8
Upper middle SES	63.9	51.4	79.2	60.3	78.6	70.3	67.5	44.9
High SES	72.7	60.0	85.4	70.3	83.6	76.7	75.5	55.4

Note Socio-Economic Status (SES) is a composite constructed from three variables: family income, father's education, and mother's education, based on the results of a survey of parents. The index is divided into four equal parts and analysed by dividing them into Highest SES, Upper middle SES, Lower middle SES, and Lowest SES
Source Ochanomizu Women's University (2014)

the three factors of household income, fathers' scholastic background, and mothers' scholastic background into 4 distinct levels (Table 11.1). There was a 22.6% variance between students in the highest and lowest SES bands on the elementary school Maths B test. Correspondingly, there was also a 23.9% variance on the Maths B test in junior high. A strong and clear parallel can be drawn between student attainment and spending on extra-curricular education such as cram schools. The possibility of higher scholastic achievement increases for students from households with increased extra-curricular education disbursements. Moreover, the higher the household income is, the higher this extra-curricular education spending tends to be.

11.4.2 Encouragement from Parents to Promote Their Children's Academic Performance

Though a clear association between educational accomplishment and household SES demonstrably exists, it does not exactly follow that the scholastic achievement of all students from households with low SES is also low. This is not always the case. Time spent on study affords an avenue to mitigate opportunities to learn in the family social environment. Irrespective of household SES, all participating elementary school students who studied thirty minutes or more responded correctly to over 50% of the Japanese A questions.

Because of the many dimensions of data collected, the investigation revealed features of students who have increased attainment under detrimental and prejudicial

conditions that would have otherwise hindered them. Along with the fundamental research pursued, the investigation also defined five techniques for parents to better relate with their children and encourage greater attainment irrespective of SES:

1. Encouraging healthy life habits. Setting regular sleeping, waking, and breakfast routines; limiting 'screen-time' such as with video games; setting up rules about cell phone usage
2. Encouraging reading. Inspiring children to read books and newspapers; proposing occasions to discuss and share impressions about books they read; reading children's books to young children
3. Encouraging studying. Assisting children with their homework on a regular basis; encouraging children to follow study plans; increasing their acquaintance with English and other foreign cultures
4. Encouraging activities to gain cultural, artistic, and natural experiences. Visiting arts and science museums, libraries, galleries, and theatres together
5. Communicating with children. Talking with children about their day at school, their studies and grades, their futures and careers, and their friends, social events, and news.

Nonetheless, the recommendations regarding cultural activities reflected traditional class-based analyses that cultural practices transmit knowledge and ability to children. For example, time spent reading books with young children (quantity of reading time), discussion with children about the content of books (quality of reading), and acquaintance with English and foreign cultures all predicted high results and were lower in households exhibiting lower measures of SES. The higher SES the household exhibited, the more frequently they tended to prioritize and actively encourage the activities listed above, which mediated attainment. Parenting practices that did not correlate with SES are also noteworthy. The survey observed variance in issues of non-scholastic socialization, such as practices to foster empathy or of scolding for misconduct.

11.4.3 Approaches of Schools That Have Succeeded in Raising the Academic Performances of Children Despite Challenging Home Environments

The survey also examined instruction tactics of schools succeeding in increasing student attainment despite the students' challenging SES as indicated by home circumstances. The local schools displaying greater scholastic achievement, despite an elevated percentage of their student bodies residing in households with less than favourable, or even prejudicial, learning environments, share the following attributes in common:

- providing family support for studying at home
- cooperative activities between elementary and junior high schools

- acquiring sufficient time for fruitful language activities (such as speaking and writing)
- encouraging knowledge of and acquaintance with foundational materials; and small class size teaching (incorporating aptitude grouping)
- school management with constructive leadership; and team working
- Homework methods such as writing comprehensive directions in red pen in students' notebooks.

Of equal importance are: corresponding after school study support, small class sizes for learning maths, and joint knowledge and information sharing amongst instructors on how to assign homework, all seem to diminish low SES influences on student attainment. Furthermore, these household and education institute elements, when applied in combination, prove effective in alleviating SES impacts on student achievement.

Nevertheless, the efficiency and effectiveness of these schools and their methods remains mixed depending on the local conditions. Although rural areas tend to display minor variances in enrolled student household environments, the study indicates that education institutes in larger municipalities have great variances in household environments, and yet, the general benefits and hindrances are not constant. Significantly, this investigation employed very large datasets, such as NAAT, which were undeniable to the government, prompting the government to explore techniques of increasing student attainment adapted to learning institutions and endorsing them amongst instructors. In short, student attainment is not necessarily improved by merely blindly endorsing replication of learning institutes that perform well nor simply giving directives or offering directions to learning institutes that do not perform well.

11.5 The Failure of Active Learning

Active learning initially looked likely to be hailed as a success. The PISA shock in 2003 came after the publication but before the implementation of the COS that was blamed for the apparently lower PISA scores could have taken effect. As such, the curriculum revision of that period was probably blamed prematurely. The converse situation is occurring in the case of active learning. Active learning enters the COS at a moment of upturn in Japan's PISA results. In particular, Japan was ranked second in PISA 2015 in the area of 'collaborative problem-solving activities', designed to assess precisely the key competencies that active learning targets. Though active learning in its current form became 'current' only in 2020, it is likely to bask in the glow of recent high PISA scores. However, a closer look at the PISA results shows that, even if the measure is accepted, the higher average scores have come at the cost of further polarization in scores along class lines, deconstructing one historic strength of Japan's PISA scores that were, and still are, lauded by politicians and by the OECD. Moreover, as the information society progresses, advanced knowledge is

required in order to lead a stable professional life. Those who do not make progress on the academic ladder are increasingly excluded. Moreover, the route to acquiring such abilities, as recognized by the credentialised school system, not only includes school education but also expensive education at cram schools. Many are excluded from this shadow education because of their parents' low ability to pay. Not only is their academic attainment affected directly by poorer schooling resources and fewer hours of instruction, and indirectly through lower learning capital transmitted outside of study hours by parents, but also a gap emerges in their learning motivation, as discussed above. The path of giving up, of escaping from learning, becomes more attractive. Active learning has been touted as a passport into the new knowledge society, providing flexible skills to enter jobs that do not yet exist. However, it can be questioned whether this potential for excellence will come at the cost of equality.

11.5.1 Impact of Family Cultural Capital on Active Learning

Active learning which fosters thinking skills and other skills that are emphasized in the revised COS may even be disadvantageous to children with low family financial resources. The National Academic Achievement Test survey data on teachers and school organization demonstrates this increasing stratification. The 2014 survey asked teachers, 'Have you improved and devised teaching methods that look at the learning process of acquisition, utilization, and exploration [of knowledge]?' The responses correlate with student test scores. At schools that reported that they 'did active learning well', students' average test score was 79.8%; for schools that reported they 'did rather well', students averaged 78.4%; whilst those that reported that they either 'did not do well' or 'did not do well at all' averaged 76.4%. This trend was observed for all tests in both elementary and junior high schools. As such, it is possible that active learning facilitates high test scores, however, the difference is small. A closer look reveals that the gap is better explained by family background, which also correlates with the quality of school, which correlates with teacher enthusiasm and ability for implementing active learning.

Amongst the schools that reported that they 'did well' implementing AL, those with more financially disadvantaged students performed worse than those with advantaged pupils. Taking the test Japanese A as an example, the schools that reported that they 'did well' with more than 30% of students receiving state aid averaged 74.7% compared with 80.2% in schools with less than 5% of students receiving state aid. In other words, in schools where AL is actively implemented, academic performance is higher in schools with more children from families with higher economic resources, whereas it is achieved lower in economically poor families.

Although there are high expectations for active learning in the new Courses of Study, there are concerns that the same educational disparities that existed under the 'new perspective on academic achievement' of the 'relaxed education' era will remain, or even deepen. The cause is firstly economic power and knowledge resources in the home environment. It is also due to knowledge and ability acquired through

the home environment, as illustrated by Kaneko's analysis of children who do not study at all at home. Engaging in hands-on learning experiences out of school, such as nature experiences since childhood, having newspapers and books at home, enjoying supportive and logical conversations with parents, discussing social issues at home, etc., can be called academic capital, developing scholastic-like abilities in children. Scholars such as Kariya have moreover argued that these skills have been presented as more important in the active learning era than knowledge-based study. Speaking of the 'new perspective on academic ability' of the 1990s, Kariya (2012: 174) writes:

> [L]earning driven by "intrinsic motivation" may be easier for students from higher class backgrounds. A certain amount of prior learning experience and intellectual preparedness are essential preconditions for finding "joy" in learning. In doing the same arithmetic drills, some children will be able to develop an interest by looking at their task as a sort of game, while others may find nothing in them but a painfully repetitive exercise. Similarly, in "hands-on learning", the quality and quantity of the education gained differs according to the extent to which children get involved, in addition to past learning experience and basic scholastic ability already acquired. The greater the degree to which control by the instructor is weakened and self-motivated learning by the child demanded by an education method, the greater is its affinity to the culture of the new middle class.

The active learning model relies even more on students' interests and resources for selecting, utilizing, and synthesizing knowledge. Previously scholastic examinations assessed the knowledge learned, which may or may not be partly facilitated by these skills. New assessment, however, directly assesses these new competences themselves. It is not clear that schools are equipped to teach these additional skills whilst struggling to cover all the content of the course of study. As Kariya demonstrated in the era of knowledge-based exams, not only does study require motivation, but motivation itself is a disposition learned at home. Herein lies the risk of more directly assessing motivation, as a competency of the new knowledge society.

11.6 Conclusion

Beginning before the turn of the millennium and expanding with the 2011 revision, the COS focused on the establishment of a substantial and strong knowledge base to underpin 'creative' and 'critical' thinking. The PISA shock had fuelled the call for raising academic standards, but it had also prompted a parallel debate on what sort of education is best and for what kind of society. This course of study thus sought to build 'solid academic basics and key competencies' by:

- escaping from a binary opposition-like argument *yutori kyōiku* or 'cramming education';
- reconsidering core subjects;
- introducing 'Active learning' for fostering new nature and the ability of students (MEXT, 2013b)
- Introducing 'twenty-first century competencies' and 'assessment for growth'.

In making these alterations, education policy makers held that they were attempting to meld the finest qualities of both Japanese traditions with innovation to better prepare students for the nation's future knowledge society. Rather than appealing to progressive pedagogy, MEXT turned to global discussions of the new knowledge society. 'PISA-type' open-constructed tasks were introduced into Japan's national assessments in an endeavour to validate the importance of key competencies considered integral for the new knowledge society. Active learning sought to substantiate the teaching of these key competencies whilst retaining the demand of the learning of basic knowledge.

This chapter has overviewed a broader context in which the course of study and assessment operate as a selection mechanism which largely determines the likely future track of students' education and into working life. Socio-economic disparities have led to differences in children's educational environments, creating disparities in their motivation, and inequality mechanisms have further solidified class structures. As the course of study seeks to bolster the quality of Japanese education, we should not lose sight of the importance of equality. This chapter has overviewed some of the studies that have contributed to the view that differences in children's motivation to learn due to their home environment appear at an early stage. Stratification by class is increasing (1) because of differentiation between schools. Though direct school selection is declining, the increased mobility of wealthy parents provides access to better schools. Simultaneously, (2) assessment is more directly evaluating academic capital, allowing selection of those predisposed to better learning without going through a selection process based solely on study. Finally, (3) attainment is mediated not only by ability, but also by learning motivation which is itself also predicted by class.

However, despite the prominence of such problems, there remains a widespread attitude amongst the general public that 'the educational gap is unavoidable'. The notion of 'self-help' has long held currency in Japan but has recently been more egregiously exploited by the means of more explicit apportionment of the blame for poor attainment on the 'choices' of parents, and especially those parents without financial and academic capital. Simultaneously, this serves to reduce the imperative on the government to act. Moreover, such attitudes certainly benefit the private education sector who can sell price-differentiated solutions.

In parallel with the revision of the COS, therefore, there is an urgent need to create a learning environment that avoids the creation of, or serves to reduce, social stratification along class lines. A new approach is needed that has the potential to prevent widening inequalities. Such approaches include: the enhancement of learning support for children who have difficulty learning, the development of teaching methods that enhance children's motivation and self-efficacy, the development of a flexible learning environment according to the career aspirations or opportunities, and the assessment of skills that can be obtained through study at school. The discussion needed will take full account of the data produced by MEXT in the 2013 NAAT and its analysis along class lines. It will need to engage with the existence of cram schools and their effects. And it will need to invest in schools and support services seeking a quality education for all.

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Chapter 12
From Enthusiasm to Caution: Remaining Questions Surrounding the New Curriculum

Sam Bamkin

Abstract In lieu of a conclusion, this short closing chapter expands on some of the remaining questions surrounding the new curriculum and its implications. In particular, despite enthusiasm for the new curriculum and its potential to respond to a certain conception of the new knowledge society, uncertainty and the need for caution arise from the wider policy landscape and overall context of education. Evidence suggests that the new curriculum was drafted in reference to well-established pedagogic principles and genuinely aims for a child-centred education, building on previous attempts by the Ministry of Education. This trajectory of change is adjusted based on the global consensus of a shift towards a 'new knowledge society'. In doing so, MEXT tends towards a humanistic position on the new knowledge society. Simultaneously however, the curriculum operates in a broader policy context which has incorporated decentralization and performativity mechanisms related to examination results, along with their potential to 'activate competition' between prefectures and perhaps at lower administrative levels. Nonetheless, study of the curriculum remains important as a signal of intent of the Ministry of Education, and as a set of guidelines for teachers, school administrators, and educators in local settings. Further research is needed 'on the ground' in schools to better understand how these translations are unfolding.

Keywords Educational reform · Structural reform · Education administration · Japanese education · Course of study

This book set out to examine

1. The reasons for reform and prescriptions of the 2017 course of study.
2. The implications of its call for 'active learning' pedagogy for schools and classroom teaching in a range of subjects.

S. Bamkin (✉)
Graduate School of Education and Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia, University of Tokyo, 7-3-1 Hongo,
Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo 113-0033, Japan
e-mail: sbamkin2@gmail.com

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3. The main debates arising from the revised course of study against the broader context of Japanese education, including:
    (a) Implications for equality
    (b) New insights into the policymaking process
    (c) Its suitability for learning in the new knowledge society.

The background of the educational policymaking process in Japan and recent reforms of the course of study are discussed in Chaps. 2 and 3 respectively. The reasons for reform and its prescriptions are discussed throughout Chaps. 4–10. Chapters 4 and 5 provide an overview of the main tenets of the new course of study (COS), which will form the basis of Japanese compulsory education through the 2020s. Chapters 6–10 discuss the implementations of its call for active learning pedagogy and assessment for growth in a range of school subjects. Turning to wider debates intertwined with the COS and its revisions, Chap. 11 discussed the implications for equality of opportunity in education provision and, by extension, in Japanese society. These chapters together have highlighted, on the one hand, enthusiasm for the progressively-minded curriculum rooted in pedagogical theory and, on the other, caution over its place in an increasingly competitive education system, greater pressure on teachers and students, and its potential to exacerbate growing inequalities. These tensions are examined in relation to the new knowledge society in the wider domestic and global contexts, before looking forward towards future research on the new curriculum.

12.1 The Rationale and Potential of the 2017 Curriculum

The overt rationale for active learning is to move from the acquisition of knowledge to the integration of knowledge for understanding whilst fostering competencies such as ‘learning to learn’ and creativity, developing the ability to transfer learning into new domains and adapt it for jobs and practices that may not yet exist. The key pedagogic features can be summarized under the rubrics of active learning and assessment for growth. Early policy formulation (MEXT, 2014) cast the net wide, suggesting that active learning could encompass such approaches as learning through discovery, problem-solving learning, learning through experience, and learning through investigation, as well as group discussion, debate, and groupwork in classes. Classroom examples in the various subjects in Chaps. 4 and 6–10 discuss responses to these exhortations on the ground.

There is an extent to which this new curriculum for the 2020s breaks new ground, incorporating competencies, and reinvigorating efforts towards child-centred classroom pedagogy. It is likely that many policymakers and educationalists in the Ministry of Education (MEXT) subscribe to pedagogic aspects of the rhetoric espoused by international government and non-governmental organizations that such learning will enrich the lives of children attending school in Japan, providing strong scholastic foundations whilst reducing exam pressure. Progressive educationalists have tended towards enthusiasm for such curriculum content.

Enthusiasm is also warranted because of the resources enjoyed by the Japanese school system and amongst its community of teachers. Teachers in Japan are well positioned and resourced in many important ways to rise to new pedagogic challenges. Schools have adapted around successive policies to fulfil requirements whilst continuing to provide instruction to meet their professional standards. Even without top-down intervention, Japanese teachers have initiated countless innovations. Many teachers are committed professionals who co-create knowledge of teaching partly in semi-professional communities. The long-established practices of lesson study and other civic education research associations have allowed innovation to take root (Fernandez, 2002; Lewis, 2002). Creativity is what Kanae Nishioka calls the 'gem of Japanese education' (Tanaka et al., 2016: 147), though this quote was taken from a study working in the context of a laboratory school most likely operating with a differing context to the majority of public schools (Cave, 2018). Local boards of education have also operated as a 'soft middle layer' (DeCoker, 2002), in which policy can be softened by their staff who operate on the basis of experience on the ground because they are generally promoted from teaching positions (Bamkin, 2021; Chap. 7).

On the other hand, MEXT has been taking smaller steps towards child-centred 'learning for understanding' over multiple decades. The Ministry of Education defined a 'new perspective on academic ability' in 1993:

> It is important for teachers to see children as willing to improve themselves to live [their lives] better, and to possess a range of unique qualities and potentials for their individual growth. Children's self directed learning must be respected to realize their unique qualities. These are supported by intrinsic motivations for learning. (MOE, 1993: 14)

The CCE in 1996 called for:

> an ability to identify problems, learn and think independently, make autonomous judgements and act accordingly, and solve problems; self-discipline, cooperation with others, empathy for others, emotion, and rich humanity; and health and stamina for robust living. (MOE, 1996)

Policies along these lines can also be found in the experiential elementary science curriculum of the 1990s and the *yutori* 'education with less pressure' of the turn of the millennium. The genesis of the Ministry's concern with exam pressure was much earlier and lay in international pressure against the six-day week, led by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and other bodies. Soon afterward, Japanese politicians were ready to announce the 'end of catch up' with the West, prompting (a return to) a conception of schooling not solely for economic development, but working to underpin fulfilling individual lives. Speaking of the Ministry of Education, Takayama summarizes that it was in the late 1970s when a:

> major shift in educational reform discourse was registered, where educational changes for quality over quantity, flexibility over bureaucratic rigidity, individuality and freedom over conformity, and spirituality over materiality were called for. (Takayama, 2021: 230)

As such, 'active learning' can be seen as a new term brought into policy discourse to further an agenda that pre-existed in some quarters of MEXT. Along these lines,

Kobari's (2018) disillusionment with the prospects for active learning are based in the historical perspective, which finds similar child-centred ideas proposed regularly since as far back as the Meiji era. Whilst not averse to active learning, his caution towards the possibility for real change rests on the actual lack of change in what he sees as prior iterations of similar policies.

Moreover, curriculum policy filters into the wider social and policy context. Indeed, despite the enthusiasm of theorists and practitioners considering active learning in the school and classroom, and the resources available in the education system, it can be questioned why educational inequality continues to increase in Japan (Chap. 11). This can be partly explained by zooming out to see curriculum policy against a broader education policy landscape, in which competing policies override or divert attention and time from active learning and assessment for growth; and is partly due to complex global influences which shaped these policies, infusing them with economized notions of education.

12.2 The Broader Education Policy Landscape

Not all policies are made equal. They overlap and enter the school with relative differences in importance, where they coalesce, 'cluster, override, clash and confuse' (Ball, 2012: 7). Active learning and assessment for growth thus enter a policy landscape of the school awash with countless (Braun et al., 2010) other policies with relatively more or less coherence and strength. The three broader issues of decentralization, competition, and the concept of performativity are overviewed briefly to illustrate the importance of wider policy debates to the implementation of active learning and assessment for growth under the new course of study.

Power has shifted from MEXT towards the central government under prime ministerial leadership. The early 2000s also saw a simultaneous shift towards the empowerment of local government. The relative advantages and drawbacks of decentralization in relation to MEXT were discussed in Chap. 2. Executive local governments (particularly at the prefectural level) are increasing their leverage over boards of education, which are *de jure* legally independent bodies. Such decentralization could incentivize greater competition in education, both by rich localities providing additional financing for education and by 'activist' mayors and governors hoping to boost educational performance along the measurable scale of exam results. Boards of education are at risk of being subordinated to political interests at the local level. In recent years, municipal boards of education offices have been increasingly relocated into town hall buildings. This is symbolic of experiments with organizational overlap in various configurations.

Prefectural and municipal boards of education, particularly when under pressure from a strong governor/mayor or their appointed superintendent of education, have latent or actual potential to pressure principals and teachers to achieve politically beneficial results, such as test scores. The political 'currency' (Ball, 2018) of test scores has been known to corrupt educational decision-making at every level in

Anglo-American contexts (e.g., Koretz, 2017) once competition is 'activated', e.g., through the use of test scores for league tables or performance-related pay. In these situations, teacher activities are diverted away from pedagogy and towards those activities which increase the most valuable metrics and toward the counting of those metrics. Ball has explained some of the micro-level processes that exert power over teachers to perform in circumstances where comparisons are activated through the notion of performativity.

Performativity is the exertion of social technologies that cause teachers and school administrators to feel they need to compete for a centrally governed series of rewards and sanctions, allocated in accordance with end-goals defined outside of the instructional field of knowledge. The restructuring of education around the value of exam results in Anglo-American contexts currently stands as the archetypal example. In Ball's terms, performativity is:

> a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change – based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic). The performances (of individual subjects or organisations) serve as measures of productivity or output, or displays of "quality" or "moments" of promotion or inspection. As such they stand for, encapsulate or represent the worth, quality or value of an individual or organisation. (Ball, 2003: 216; quoted in Katsuno, 2016: 3)

This latent potential exists through the board of education, which is vulnerable to target setting and political intervention by the executive local government.

A large-scale survey by Benesse (2016: 11, 13) showed, amongst mixed results, trends towards more formulaic teaching. 'Individualized learning' in class, as reported by teachers, dropped steadily between 1998 and 2016 at elementary school (ES), and remained about the same over a similar period at junior high school (JHS). Cross-curricula activities drop slightly throughout compulsory education. Particularly relevant to the active learning debate (and to its predecessors) is the indication in the same data that the proportion of lessons 'following the textbook' increased dramatically between the first survey in 1998 and 2007. This is the opposite of what curriculum policy, as expressed in the course of study, intended. Since 2007, results for this measure have reduced slightly, but despite the strengthening of active learning policy, the results show no sign of dropping back down to the level of 'following the textbook' reported in 1998. Along a similar trend, reported hours spent providing individual help to students at desks *in class* remained stable between 1992 and 2007, then reduced dramatically between 2007 and 2016 at ES; and steadily decreased since 1998 at JHS. Tellingly, teacher working hours between 1997/8 and the latest results illustrate a relentless climb (Benesse, 2016; also see MEXT, 2017). Teachers are spending more time working, but also less time on the complex pedagogic tasks called for under successive curriculum revisions. Though speculative, research on Anglo-American suggests that this might be explained in reference to performativity, that teachers are working for test preparation, other peripheral work, or externally imposed targets alongside efforts to teach to (their) professional standards.

Whilst the decision-making in schools in Japan was historically centred on the relatively democratic teachers' meeting, MEXT has bolstered the directive power of

the principal over the past two decades or more. Simultaneously, many prefectures have implemented teacher evaluation policies through the office of the principal. Unfortunately, the only study on performativity in Japanese schools of which I am aware (Katsuno, 2016) focuses on the work of senior high schools. This cogent and rigorous study finds that the enactment of teacher evaluations drives a wedge between teachers, partially isolating them and activating competition, ultimately refocusing teachers' attention on student test scores. As demands on teacher time are increasing, staffing at schools is decreasing (Katsuno, 2019), following a neoliberal logic that more can be extracted for less investment through deregulation.

On the other hand, the Japanese education system incorporates limitations on the scope for performativity in the sense theorized in Anglo-American contexts (Ball, 2003, 2012), by limiting the extent to which competition is 'activated'. In public elementary and junior high education in Japan, there are no disaggregated exam datasets to facilitate quasi-market school choice in public education, even in the regions of Japan that allow school choice. Teacher employment by the prefecture moderates the capacity of schools to accumulate talent capital. Classroom teachers rotate every 3–6 years and school administrators rotate more frequently, orienting individual educators' allegiance primarily to the municipality or prefecture (where promotion and placement decisions are made) rather than to the school. Performance pay is currently linked to teacher evaluation. In turn, the extent and consistency with which teacher evaluation is connected to student performance data remains an open question.

The increased concern for exam attainment may seem surprising alongside a curriculum whose 'unprecedented' reform includes a clear commitment to assessment for growth, rather than for grading children. This makes sense only when the curriculum is placed into the broader policy landscape. Assessment to underpin children's growth is a soft policy, whereas policies to increase exam results are more aggressively promoted, at least at the junior high level. Otherwise stated, one is an exhortative policy, the other is imperative and potentially disciplinary (Ball, 2012). The call for assessment for growth occurs alongside discourse on the value of exam attainment. This is valuable to teachers, principals, boards of education, and local politicians because it feeds the national political desire for a high rank in the international rankings, economizing education as a currency for political accolade. The discourse on the economization of education can be traced to global flows of policy.

12.3 Global Policy Influences: Humanist or Economized

Powerful intergovernmental organizations reached a consensus on the school curriculum during the 1990s. The OECD, which has been referred to as the *de facto* 'world ministry of education' (Meyer & Benavot, 2013: 123, cited by Spring, 2015: 64), defined a new knowledge economy in which learning has a monetary value and is pursued by individuals or states entrepreneurially. The OECD thus works to define the most valuable knowledge to developed economies. It is this influence

that has shaped Japan's National Academic Achievement Test (*Zenkoku gakuryoku gakushū jōkyō chōsa*) to more closely resemble the structure of PISA, including the incorporation of exam questions to test the application and understanding of knowledge.

International tests such as PISA not only decontextualize knowledge taught in schools, but also infuse 'key competencies' favoured by the OECD, including 'a combination of an eagerness to learn, good learning habits, initiating active learning, and learning how to learn' (Kariya, 2011: 94). Drawing on Kariya's work, Keita Takayama argues that it is precisely these kinds of competencies that are 'less susceptible to school's pedagogic interventions and more strongly shaped by children's socioeconomic difference at home' (2013a: 73), more efficiently co-opting the school into an arbiter of Bourdieusian (1984) distinction, as a system which rewards those with psychosocial resources in the family, which is closely correlated with wealth and thus class. This was even more stark in the Japanese case because, historically, the survey attached to the National Academic Achievement Test included questions on individual students' academic and health activities out of school but did not collect data on family circumstances. As such, the children who perform poorly are correlated as those who, for example: do not speak with family members about school-life, do not eat breakfast everyday, who do not like reading and who do not have high aspirations, who do not check items before leaving home and who do not follow school rules; rather than as those born into the class-based circumstances that have elsewhere been shown to predict those habits and attitudes (Kariya, 2012). Students who perform poorly may be said to do so because they work less because they care less, responsibilizing (Kaneko, 1999) students and families for their circumstances. Moreover, schools with cohorts who acquire the requisite knowledge outside of schools at home or in *juku*[1] can spend more time developing higher order cognitive skills, whilst schools with cohorts learning the required knowledge in school need to use the available time to ensure exam readiness, which tends to favour 'the basics' (also see Kobari, 2018). Takayama argues that the overall assessment mechanisms in Japanese education are converging with the key visions of the OECD, albeit adjusted for local conditions.

Initially, MEXT created the term 'zest for living' to continue its own humanist project of less pressured and child-centred learning. Arai (2001, cited in Takayama, 2021) has suggested that the term was influenced, at least in terminology, by the UNESCO (1972) report *Learning to be*, and that its contents were influenced by subsequent UNESCO reports. This reinforces the global origin of some concepts brought into domestic policy by MEXT. However, whereas Takayama discusses the OECD *alongside* UNESCO, there are also differences between the OECD conception of education and that of UNESCO (Spring, 2015).

[1] Juku is often translated as 'cram school'. Whilst many juku are cram schools, the purpose of premier juku extends beyond cramming. It is not unusual for such juku to implement engaging pedagogy to pre-teach and expand materials in advance of the public school curriculum, incorporating the public school into a resultant spiral curriculum. Juku can be enjoyable and social(izing) environments for children, depending on various factors.

The UNESCO worldview of education begins from many of the same premises as that of the OECD. The definition of the new knowledge society—in light of changes in technology, automation, information processing, and the reformation of borders—and the need for education to respond to its ascendancy are common to both narratives. However, rather than seeking economic development directly, UNESCO frames education as an indispensable force for peace, freedom and social justice, aiming for 'a deeper and more harmonious form of human development and thereby to reduce poverty, exclusion, ignorance, oppression, and war' through a 'process of forming whole human beings—their knowledge and aptitudes, as well as the critical faculty and ability to act' (UNESCO, 1996). Rather than being trained to perform in a fixed global economy, humans are valued as critical participants in the creation of democratic systems; and arguments based on human dignity are valued more than those based on efficiency. Borjian (2014: 13) provides a comparison by epithets:

> If [UNESCO's] motto is learn how to live peacefully with the different 'other', the [OECD's] mantra is learn how to swim in order not to sink. Whereas the former seeks to teach learners the learning of who to be, the latter sings the beauty of individualism that can only be achieved by efficiency and competition.

It is the humanist worldview which resonates most comfortably with prevalent teaching practices in Japan, such as with creativity, lesson study, and building classroom communities. It is also this view that resonates with those in the departments of MEXT responsible for the finer details of the curriculum and those from the teaching community appointed to its curriculum panels. The synergies found with active learning and the strength of existing practice in Japanese schools are evidenced in Japan's recent leadership of the OECD's articulation of 'good practice' in classroom pedagogy (Takayama, 2021).

On the other hand, economized discourses of education shaped policies driven by the central government's positions on decentralization and on the implementation of the National Academic Achievement Test. Despite indications of an aversion to national testing, MEXT implemented the establishment of such a test as a means of re-centralizing standards in education in the face of increasing decentralization (Takayama, 2008, 2013b). It was a case of bureaucratic rationality (Kato, 1994) over ideological policy preference. Though beyond the scope of discussion here, MEXT implemented the National Academic Achievement Test strategically to retain its oversight of other aspects of educational administration which had come under bureaucratic threat. Other compromises were required, but, to the extent possible, the direction of the articulation of curriculum policy by the Ministry has drawn on humanistic strands of global policy led by UNESCO.

In summary, active learning and assessment for growth were largely welcomed by those in the teaching community and by progressive education specialists, who could participate in policymaking, to an extent, through the Ministry of Education as relations between the Ministry and the teaching community thawed through the 1990s. Concurrently, the wider policy landscape was reformed by policies for economic development, coinciding with fiscal austerity and wider wealth gaps in society and increasing child poverty. These reforms work to activate competition

between regions, teachers, and students in Japan, within an international olympiad for the global currency of PISA (or PISA-like) exam results. The extent to which competition has been activated in comparison to other developed countries remains an open question, and one for future research to explore. This wider policy renders the higher aspirations of the new curriculum an 'exhortative' policy, to be considered in the spare time between the pressure to perform by 'imperative' or 'disciplinary' policies. Despite mechanisms specific to Japan which limit the activation of competition, there is a growing concern that time for schools to invest in new pedagogies and formative assessment practices is increasingly a luxury of privileged schools, whose work dovetails with family resources and the work of *juku*, the provision of which varies according to price and the family commitment expected.

12.4 In Lieu of a Conclusion: Looking Forward

This short closing chapter has expanded on some of the remaining questions surrounding the new curriculum and its implications. Despite enthusiasm for the new curriculum and its potential to respond to the new knowledge society, uncertainty and the need for caution arise from the wider policy landscape and context of education. Evidence suggests that the new curriculum was drafted in reference to well-established pedagogic principles and that it genuinely aims for a child-centred education, building on countless previous steps by the Ministry of Education in the same direction. This trajectory of change is adjusted based on the global consensus of a shift towards a 'new knowledge society'. In doing so, MEXT tends towards a humanistic position on the new knowledge society. Nonetheless, the curriculum operates in a broader policy context which has incorporated decentralization, along with its potential to 'activate competition' between prefectures and perhaps at lower levels. The use of PISA-like examinations in teacher evaluations and their leverage in local politics has tended towards an economized vision of a 'knowledge economy'. More broadly, the shift away from government and towards governance (or 'controlled de-control', du Gay, 1996) of education focuses policy on the outcomes of education rather than on the process (Nitta, 2008).

Study of the curriculum remains important as a signal of the intent of the Ministry of Education, and as a set of guidelines for teachers, school administrators and educators in local settings. Their interpretations of the curriculum are translated into practice, albeit within the broader policy context, in which teacher evaluations and other comparisons are threatened by the simplicity of the currency of exam results, which undermines assessment for growth and reduces the time available to teachers to work on less important agendas defined in the course of study. Further research is needed 'on the ground' in schools to better understand how these translations are unfolding. Such research also requires nuanced analysis to capture the politics that occurs in the tensions between global policy circulations and domestic government, and in the cracks between the various bodies of the Japanese government. In particular, the relationship between the central government and the Ministry of Education

has shifted over the past two decades, as has the relationship between the Ministry and local boards of education, and between boards of education and executive local governments.

Finally, the Covid-19 pandemic has postponed the opportunity for the study of active learning, assessment for growth, and other aspects of the new curriculum in normal circumstances on the ground. However, any expectation to return to enacting policies along the same trajectory as before the pandemic is ultimately unrealistic. Taking a long-term perspective, the pandemic has accelerated the integration of digital technologies into Japanese elementary and junior high schools (Iwabuchi et al., 2022). Before the pandemic, debate was slow, though entirely digitized editions of every textbook (Kyōkasho kenkyū, 2021) and some digital supplementary resources such as videos were available. Adaption to digitally enhanced teaching will require changes to pedagogy and most teachers have undertaken an unplanned crash-course on (at least) its potential. As in other countries, these experiences have also provided teachers with insights into digital poverty, realizing, for example, the restrictions of siblings or households sharing digital devices and the difficulty for students studying in the same room as other family members.[2] Needless to say, digital poverty is one face of a more general landscape of increasing child poverty and increasing income inequality, in Japan as in most rich nations. This could serve to increase the salience of poverty in discussions on school education. Discussions of technology and of child poverty will continue alongside those of the curriculum and wider changes in the policy landscape, influenced by multiple strands of global policy circulation.

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