Chapter 8
Japanese Educational Policy and the Curriculum of Holistic Development

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8.1 Introduction

Japanese primary and secondary education, alongside their counterparts in other East Asian societies, is often cited as high-achieving (OECD 2010). It has continued to show strong results in international tests such as IEA's Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD's) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in strategic areas, and Japan-originated educational models have been emulated abroad, the most famous being the Japanese model of "lesson study" (*jyugyo kenkyu*). Lesson study is seen as a bottom-up method of teacher learning in which teachers open up their lessons to others, and teacher discussion is held on how to understand and improve the learning of students. Lesson study now has its worldwide organization and is practiced in various forms in many countries.[1]

In short, much has been said about the high cognitive achievement of Japanese students in education. There has been up to now, however, relatively little discussion on how noncognitive education is built into Japanese education. Indeed, some foreign scholars have pointed to the holistic nature of Japanese education (Lewis 1995). Such analyses, however, have mostly been on the cultural aspects of holistic education, not the structural (e.g., curriculum) and policy aspects of it—the focus of this chapter.

Now, the Japanese national curriculum standards have a period of time for non-subject (largely noncognitive) education, which includes activities such as school

[1] World Association of Lesson Studies homepage, http://www.walsnet.org/, retrieved, August, 2017.

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G. Fan, T. S. Popkewitz (eds.), *Handbook of Education Policy Studies*,
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events, classroom discussion, and student councils. Since noncognitive education is part of the national curriculum standards, this means that any consideration of educational reform inevitably brings in discussions of how to instruct noncognitive learning in Japan. Thus, it is necessary to understand the noncognitive part of the curriculum, in order to understand even the cognitive aspect of Japanese education, which has attracted international attention.

In addition, developing the social and emotional aspects of the child in education is now an international concern (OECD 2015; Goleman 2005). With a long history of combining noncognitive and cognitive learning in the curriculum, Japanese education displays a case in which one can observe a form of how this is done, including the benefits and challenges, and how it enters into the discussion of educational reform policy.

8.2 Reform for Balanced Growth

Figure 8.1 illustrates the system of education in Japanese education today (Fig. 8.1). Elementary school and junior high school are compulsory; however, since the 1970s, over 90% have continued education after this level. Therefore, it is the norm for most junior high school students to attend high school or an equivalent after graduation.

Being a very education-oriented society, teachers have traditionally enjoyed much respect in Japan, and it has been known abroad for its intense examination preparation for the top universities. Especially in the eras following the high economic development of the Japanese economy in the 1950s to the 70s, mass enthusiasm for exam-taking gave birth to terms such as "education mamas" (*kyoiku mama*), "exam hell," "children who can't keep up with class" (*ochikobore*), and "*juku*" (cram schools) (Rohlen, 1983; Cummings, 1980; Tsuneyoshi, 2001). Mass media sensationalized the excesses of the exam pressure (e.g., teaching to the test, suicide by those who failed the exam), and for decades, educational policy documents from key governmental committees such as those from the Central Council for Education (Chuokyoiku Shingikai) upheld the rhetoric that Japanese students needed less, not more studying.

Indeed, throughout much of the postwar era, the problem for Japanese policymakers was not low achievement, since Japanese students performed well on international tests and were seen to study hard, but that Japanese students were studying too much for the exams. The goal, therefore, was to loosen the pressure for the notorious Japanese entrance examinations into college (and high school) so that children could grow.

This effort cumulated in what was later remembered as the promotion of "relaxed education" (*yutori kyoiku*) in Japan. Contents of the curriculum were selectively dropped, with the intention of leaving more time. At the same time, the principle of holistic development, the balancing of the mind, heart, and the body (*chi*, *toku*, *tai*) continued to be reaffirmed.

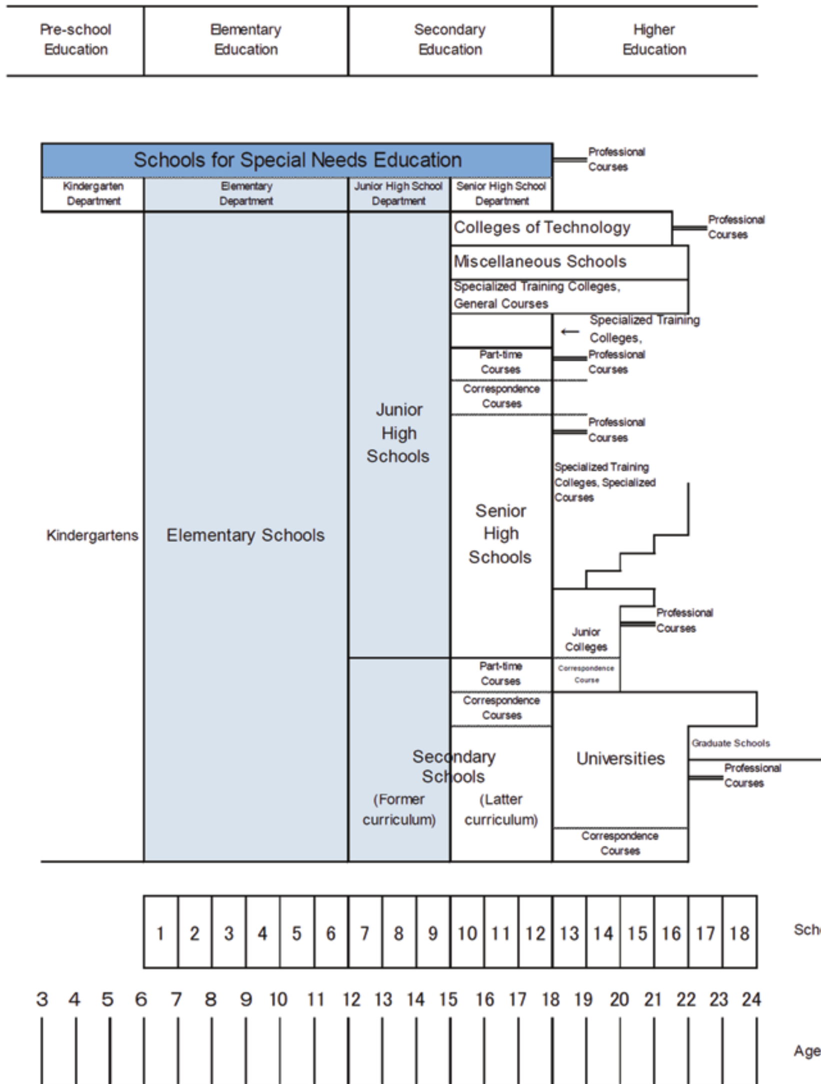

Fig. 8.1 The Japanese Educational System. (Source: Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) (2015). Guidebook for Starting School: Procedures for Entering Japanese Schools. http://www.mext.go.jp/component/english/__icsFiles/afieldfile/2016/06/24/1303764_008.pdf. Retrieved August, 2017)

The 1977 revisions to the national curriculum standards selectively dropped hours from subjects. In the 1989 revisions (implemented in 1992 for elementary school) to the curriculum, the “new scholastic view of education” was promoted. The ability to act independently in the face of a rapidly changing society, the ability to think and judge, the joy of learning, were all emphasized here. A hands-on

subject, life science (*seikatsuka*), was established for the first and second grades, replacing social studies and science.

Such tendencies reached a peak in the 1998 (implemented in 2002 for elementary school) revisions. This reform called for the ability to live well (*ikiru chikara*, translated as the "zest for life"). Children were seen to need to develop the ability to flourish in the fast-changing era of internationalization and scientific progress, facing issues shared with the world as well as issues that particularly affected Japan, such as aging. In the words of the Central Council for Education (1996), regardless of how the society changes, the children of the future need "the ability and capacity to identify problems for oneself, learn for oneself, think for oneself, make independent judgments and actions and to solve problems well" as well as "a rich character" (*yutakana ningensei*), which would allow him/her to collaborate with self-control, while being considerate of others. Physical health was also noted as important. In other words, the balanced development of the mind, heart, and the physique were affirmed. Such capabilities and abilities were "the ability to live" well in the changing society that the children would live, and "it was important to develop these in a well-balanced manner." It was noted that the so-called "zest for life" was a "holistic ability" (Chuo Kyoiku Shingikai 1996). This ability is not just "rational" (intellectual quality). It also includes the "flexible emotions (*kansei*)" the "heart that can be moved by beauty and nature," a sense of justice, respect for life and human rights, consideration, etc. as well as "health and physical strength" (Chu Kyoiku Shingikai 1996). Excessive competition for the entrance examinations was once again villainized.

Such revisions in the key concepts of educational reform were backed by shifts in the view of ability. Rote memorization, teacher-centered teaching, whole class instruction, and learning for the exam were all villainized. What was necessary for the twenty-first century was the ability to think independently, to collaborate, and to create. Hands-on learning, problem-solving, child-initiated learning, learning in the real-world, reflection, etc. were all emphasized with much passion (Tsuneyoshi 2004: 369).

Such changes in the view of ability were accompanied by changes in the curriculum. For example, the period for integrated studies (*sogoteki na gakushu no jikan*), which encouraged integration and independent learning, was erected in the 1998 reforms (Monbukagausho 1998). According to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), schools were to design this period to "enable pupils to think in their own way about life through cross-synthetic studies and inquiry studies, while fostering the qualities and abilities needed to find their own tasks, to learn and think on their own, to make proactive decisions, and to solve problems better" (Monbukagakusho 2011b). The period was to include, for example, international understanding, information, environment, health and welfare, and other areas, which were interdisciplinary and which the existing curriculum could not handle sufficiently.

It is at the height of the relaxed education, in the late 1990s, that a sensationalized debate arose about the lowering of achievement in Japanese education. Cram schools, scholars, and Ministry of Education representatives all got involved in this

debate (Ichikawa 2002). Critics went on to argue that the conventional media image of Japanese students as studying too much was a myth. The middle- to lower-achieving students, it was argued, studied less than their counterparts in other major countries (Kariya 2002).

The curriculum that followed was a response to the decades of reform that came before it. The curriculum that is in place from 2017 to the present started from April 2011 for elementary school (2012 for junior high and 2013 for high school, though math and science started earlier). The goal of this reform was that education was "neither 'relaxed' (*yutori*) nor 'cramming' (*tsumekomi*)".[2] The reform reaffirmed the "zest for life" (*ikiru chikara*) as a balanced ability, which combined the education of the mind, heart, and physical strength. Solid intellectual ability, "the richness of the heart" (*yutakana kokoro*), and physical health were what were necessary for "the society of tomorrow which changes dramatically."[3]

8.3 A Holistic Curriculum

The first clause of the Fundamental Education Law calls for educating "the character," "the constructors of a peaceful and democratic nation and society." The section that follows on "the goal of education" calls for the development of knowledge as well as emotional qualities and values/attitudes, ands one's physical health.[4] The need to balance the mind, the heart (emotions/values), and the physique are reflected in the proposals.

Now, Japan has a semi-centralized system in which the national curriculum standards lay out the general direction of the curriculum. As was discussed, the curriculum standards are revised every decade or so, in response to the changes in the needs of the times.

Though much attention has been paid to the subjects or periods added, or to changes made in the teaching of certain subjects such as English, relatively less noted in the literature in English has been the basic structure of the Japanese national curriculum standards that aims to realize the holistic framework mentioned above. It can be easily seen that despite the differences in emphasis, the ideal of balancing the mind, heart, and the physical health remains constant.

Table 8.1 is the yearly unit of subjects in elementary school. Life science is a hands-on subject erected to reflect the increasing emphasis on experiential learning, inner motivation, real life, and hands-on learning. The period for integrated studies crosses over subjects, and is again a reflection of the changes in the curriculum toward independent thinking, etc. There are two other periods which are not usual

[2] From the homepage of the Ministry of Education, http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/new-cs/idea/, retrieved August, 2017.

[3] Same as above.

[4] From the Fundamental Education Law, http://law.e-gov.go.jp.

Table 8.1 The yearly unit hours of subjects in elementary school (school education law)

Grades		1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th
Hours for each subject	Reading	306	315	245	245	175	175
	Social studies			70	90	100	105
	Math	136	175	175	175	175	175
	Science			90	105	105	105
	Life science	102	105				
	Music	68	70	60	60	50	50
	Art	68	70	60	60	50	50
	Home Economics					60	55
	Phy.Ed	102	105	105	105	90	90
Moral education period		34	35	35	35	35	35
Foreign languages activities						35	35
Period for integrated studies				70	70	70	70
Tokubetsu katsudo (Tokkatsu)		34	35	35	35	35	35
Total		850	910	945	980	980	980

Source: http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/new-cs/youryou/syo/(translation)

subjects, moral education and *tokubetsu katsudo* (*tokkatsu* for short, special activities) (Table 8.1). *Tokkatsu* best represents the holistic nature of Japan's national curriculum standards and has thus been the focus of this chapter.

Table 8.2 (as of 2017) is taken from the national curriculum standards of the "general goal" in the *tokkatsu* goal section. *Tokkatsu* is broken up into several activities, which are at present: classroom activities, student councils, club activities, and school events for elementary school. The specific contents of *tokkatsu* have shifted depending on the time period.

The fact that such activities (e.g., school events) are placed under a specific period, which has educational goals, means that noncognitive elements of education are treated together with the cognitive. The emphasis on social relationships in the goals of *tokkatsu* means that small groups are used extensively in the activities. An example of classroom activities will be given below.

Though some elements of *tokkatsu*, like sports day, can be seen in schools in other countries, the Japanese case provides an example of how the concept of the holistic child operates when built into the curriculum, as part of the official role of education.

8.4 An Example of Content: Classroom Activities (as of August 2017)

As noted above, "Classroom activities" is one component of *tokkatsu* together with school events, club activities, and student councils. Each component has its own goal, which complies with the general goals of *tokkatsu* in Table 8.2. For example, the specific goal for classroom activities is:

> To develop, through classroom activities, desirable human relationships, and a self-motivated and practice-oriented attitude to solve various problems, as well as to maintain a healthy attitude toward life in participating as part of the group in the bettering of (everyone's) life in the classroom and school. (Monbukagakusho 2011a)

Though the goals of activities under classroom activities are similar, there are some variations as can be seen in the goal of "school events" below:

> To develop desirable human relationships through school events, to strengthen the feeling of being part of a group or to form links, to develop a sense of public responsibility, and to cooperate to encourage the self-motivated and practice-oriented attitude to cooperate to improve school life. (Monbukagakusho 2011a)

Going back to school events, specific events include rituals, cultural events like art exhibition, sports events, excursions and stayovers, and volunteering.

Under each component are more specific contents. For example, under "classroom activities" are its contents as listed below. The contents are broken down by developmental level (grades), followed by common contents across the grades. The common contents listed for classroom activities are as follows (Table 8.3):

8.5 The Structuring of Noncognitive Education

The structure of the Japanese national curriculum standards cuts across subjects and nonsubjects. What is the consequence of placing noncognitive education inside the regular curriculum?

One obvious result is that it becomes institutionalized. All schools nationwide and every single teacher engage in it since it is part of the national curriculum standards. "Standard practices" emerge. The contents tend not to be as clear-cut as math; however, there are signs of noncognitive education in every classroom. For example, in primary school classrooms around the nation, observers would find postings related to what are called "*toban,*" which are those (small groups) in charge of tasks such as cleaning (Fig. 8.2). Classroom discussions and school events are the norm everywhere in Japan. Such structuring of noncognitive teaching will be discussed in the next section. Unlike math, however, which is influenced by academic societies, and the textbooks are set, *tokkatsu* is much more a creation of teachers, though based on the various governmental guidelines. Teachers research groups,

Table 8.2 *Tokkatsu* course of study (elementary school)

Goal
Effective group activities aim at the well-balanced development of mind and body and the encouragement of individuality. Participation in the group helps build an active, positive attitude toward improving life and personal relations. At the same time, it should deepen each child's attitude toward life and the ability to do his/her very best

Source: Translation from Tsuneyoshi ed. 2012, The World of Tokkatsu, translated by Mary Louise Tamaru, http://www.p.u-tokyo.ac.jp/~tsunelab/tokkatsu/

curriculum specialists, etc. play a large role in structuring the fuzzy area of the noncognitive.

The placing of noncognitive education inside the curriculum also means that there are various research groups by and run by educators as in the case with the subjects. Such research groups hold annual meetings, displaying their lessons, publishing journals, etc.

Other than the institutionalization of the structures supporting *tokkatsu* (or the other extracurricular periods in the curriculum), the existence of such noncognitive education in the curriculum means that every decade or so when the discussions to revise the national curriculum standards take place, there will be reform subcommittees not just for the subjects, but for noncognitive instruction such as *tokkatsu*.

8.6 Development of Characteristic Activities

The situating of particular activities within the national curriculum standards in Japan means that it is the object of lesson study. Teachers around Japan have researched the best methods, not always agreeing, but displaying various practices to each other. There are guidelines from governmental bodies, but they are general enough that teachers can leave their imprint.

I will give here some standard tendencies as examples.

Table 8.3 Common contents of classroom activities in *tokkatsu*, elementary school

(1) Constructing life (*seikatsu*) in the classroom and school
∗ Solving various issues that arise in life in the classroom and school
∗ Organizing the class and dividing and executing the tasks
∗ Improving the life of diverse groups in the school
(2) Adaptation to everyday life and learning & health and safety
∗ The development of the attitude to live one's life with a sense of hope and purpose
∗ The development of basic living habits
∗ The development of desirable human relationships
∗ Understanding the meaning of labor and the role of *toban* activities such as cleaning
∗ Utilizing the school library
∗ The development of attitudes toward life which are both healthy and safe for the mind and body
∗ School lunch, which includes a perspective of lunch education, as well as the development of desirable eating habits

Source: Ministry of Education (2011a)

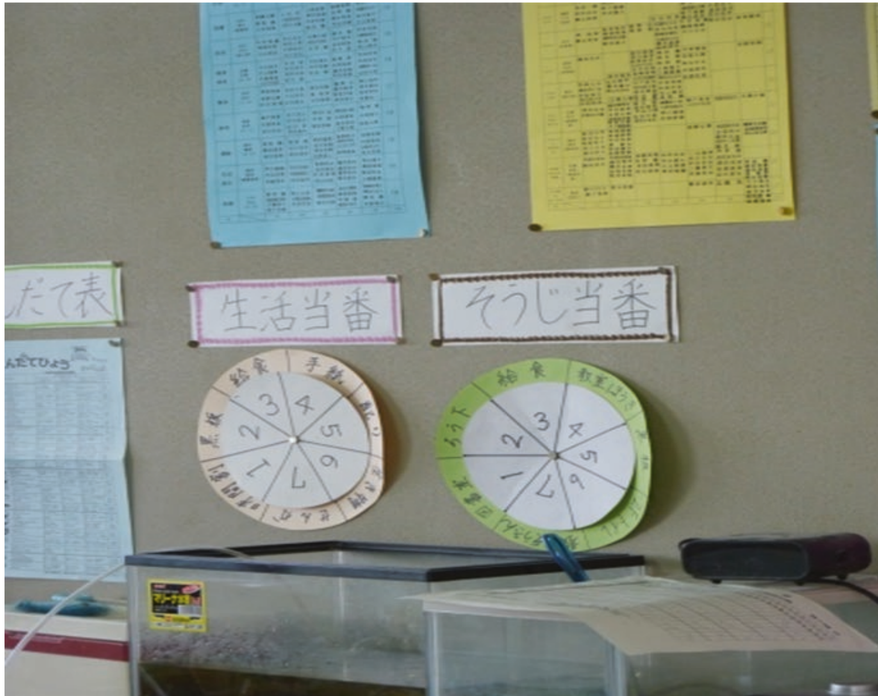

Fig. 8.2 Picture of *Toban* (small groups in charge of tasks) Roulette. (Source: My picture. Left, "*Toban* for Living Matters" and Right, "*Toban* for Cleaning")

8.6.1 Use of Monitors and Small Groups (Han)

Because *tokkatsu* tries to delegate authority to students, and encourage cooperation, certain tasks contributing to the welfare of the class and school are rotated among students. The most famous in the literature in English are the daily monitors (*nichoku*) and the tasks using small groups (*toban*). The class is usually broken up into small groups (*han*), which stay together for a certain period of time and cooperate on various cognitive and noncognitive activities. After a while, the small groups are reorganized, so that children can have the experience of learning how to work together with different people. The groups are usually designed to be heterogeneous (e.g., gender). Though cleaning task groups are famous abroad, there are also small groups in which children can chose the type of activity they want to do, such as taking care of the classroom pet or being in charge of the classroom library (*kakari*).

Figure 8.2 shows one common example of displaying the small group tasks at that time. It is a roulette, with the number of one's small group in the smaller circle, and the cleaning location of that small group in the larger section (e.g., library). If one looks up cleaning *toban* on the Internet, there are numerous information exchanged by teachers, advising how they motivated children to clean for themselves, and one can download free roulette templates. Alongside more traditional

information routes such as publications/guidebooks from public entities or private companies, the Internet provides a source of information for teachers.

8.6.2 Role of Teachers

Since noncognitive activities are in the curriculum, this has led to teacher discussion on what kind of components (e.g., forming and using small groups, use of reflection time, motivation techniques using classroom discussion) and techniques most contribute to the given goal of self-directed, self-motivated, and practice-oriented collaborative behavior.

In elementary school classrooms, this has been closely linked to classroom management--building a classroom community, and the teacher stepping back to become a facilitator. The construction of small groups such as above, as well as various common activities that are initiated by these groups, is an example of institutionalization of noncognitive education. Classroom discussion is a central means by which teachers try to build their classroom communities. If the example of cleaning is taken, children might discuss in class the meaning of cleaning, which might help children realize that a cleaner environment is easier to study in, which might motivate children to clean spontaneously. The process is what is regarded as important, rather than the result of the task. Guests such as the janitor might be invited; the teacher might encourage reflection on the meaning of what the children are doing, whether it is keeping their school and community clean, or whether it is the opposite.[5]

8.6.3 Learning by Doing Together

Learning by actually engaging in the activity collaboratively is a major characteristic of these extracurricular activities as outlined in the national curriculum standards. As was noted in the section above, "learning and doing it together" is linked with discussion and reflection, with the teacher trying to act as facilitator, and utilizing various standard ways of organizing children so as to delegate authority. In other words, there is a structuring of daily activities, a system of action toward the *tokkatsu* goal, which structures child-initiated activities and tries to encourage inner-motivated action by "learning by doing" in a collaborative learning setting.

Tokkatsu is not the only extracurricular area which is brought into the curriculum. The period for integrated studies, for example, brings in integration across subjects, discovery, and inquiry.

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[5] "Japanese Whole Child Education: Learning from Cleaning and Lunch." *Tokkatsu* Series1, 2015. The Center for Advanced School Education and Evidenced-Based Research, The University of Tokyo, DVD, not for sale.

Tokkatsu is more "doing together" and has more diversity within, since it is a structuring of different extracurricular activities which are as diverse as music events to classroom discussion, though this chapter will not go into the details of other components of the period here. Since learning by doing is a major characteristic of *tokkatsu*, why one is doing something and how one is doing it are most crucial. Cleaning, for example, can be done from a democratic viewpoint or an authoritarian perspective. It is not the act of cleaning itself that distinguishes the two.

It suffices to note here that what fall inside extracurricular activities, and which activities are seen as most important, would differ by society and historical age. Ideally, components within noncognitive education would be interrelated. If we take the example of Japanese *tokkatsu*, sports events, acts of cleaning, etc. should be linked with classroom discussion in which the children discuss the goals, the meanings of such activities, and practice self-motivated autonomous decision-making, as outlined in the *Course of Study*. This also means that noncognitive areas would ideally be linked with subjects. For example, cleaning might be linked with health and physical education.

In this chapter, I have noted that one of the characteristics of the Japanese curriculum today is that it has brought together activities other than the subjects into the official curriculum. What extracurricular activities have been brought in as *tokkatsu* differ depending on the period. Today, it brings together diverse activities of classroom discussion, sports day, art exhibitions, and club activities under one banner. It may be meaningful to note that moral education is the values education portion of the Japanese curriculum, and *tokkatsu* is "learning by doing," hands-on, and experiential activities; both take charge of different but overlapping areas.[6]

8.7 Ending Remarks

The actual contents of the extracurricular portion of the curriculum changes with the times, even more so than subjects. New subjects have also been erected to reflect what are seen as the needs of the times (e.g., the establishment of the period for integrated studies), but since extracurricular activities include a wide range of activities, bringing them under a common goal in a structured way is a great challenge.

It may be noted, however, that though *tokkatsu* emphasizes group situations, the goal in the national curriculum standards dictating self-initiated student behavior encourages the teacher to step back. The emphasis of learning by doing helps it to distance itself from the ideological swings of the government. By comparison, values education (in Japan, moral education) is more directly related to the educating of values, and its positioning in the curriculum has been a highly controversial one in the postwar era, as has been the contents of history textbooks.

[6] Moral education, whose content and place in the curriculum has been very controversial in the postwar era, is scheduled to become a "special subject moral education" in the 2018 implemented (elementary) national curriculum standards.

That being said, any educational activity which extends to the area of social, cultural, emotional, and behavioral has to be very conscious of its guiding principles. If the principles are democratic, engaging, and child-initiated, the extracurricular activities in the curriculum can complement and strengthen the academic side of the child in a democratic society. History has shown, however, that group activities or holistic education can be utilized for totalitarian, nationalistic, and undemocratic purposes.

Holistic education, the need to widen the sphere of education into the social and emotional, values, etc. seems to be increasingly supported by educational reform proposals in various countries. All the more important is that educators and policy-makers alike remember the guiding principles on which the value of their education depends.

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