

With ethics classes receiving upgrade in 2018, worries of nationalism rise

- ① Starting in the 2018 academic year, so-called “dotoku” (moral education) will be part of the regular curriculum in elementary and junior high schools, instead of its current status as an “activity outside the set subjects.”
- ② It is a controversial change, because of the politically charged question of what ethics should be taught and how students should be evaluated.
- ③ Many experts have questioned whether teachers are sufficiently skilled to assess their students’ sense of morals. They have also voiced concern about the choice of teaching materials — with some warning of the risk of nationalist indoctrination under a conservative government. The education ministry denies this.
- ④ The decision came after the Central Council for Education, an advisory panel to the education minister, recommended in October that the ministry bolster the subject’s status.

Has Japan taught ethics before?

- ⑤ A course called “shushin” (ethics) was taught from 1890 to 1945. Shushin focused on 25 virtues, including friendship, fidelity and engaging in activities for the public good.
- ⑥ Reforms around 1900 saw the introduction of concepts such as diligence and frugality, billed as essential ingredients for the nation’s development, and in the Showa Period (1926-1989) greater emphasis was placed on the role that individuals should play in society and in national life.
- ⑦ After the war, shushin was abolished by the Allied Occupation forces because it was seen as one factor behind the population’s militaristic psyche.

In 1958, ethics classes were revived and given the name dotoku.

- ⑧ Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s administration has been trying to strengthen ethics teaching in light of the rise in reported schoolyard bullying — with an emphasis on stamping it out.
- ⑨ “We became aware of the importance of dealing with bullying, especially after a junior high school student in 2011 committed suicide after being bullied at his school in Otsu (in Shiga Prefecture),” said Ryo Mino, a senior specialist in the education ministry’s elementary and secondary education bureau. “This incident prompted us to review and expand the scope of ethics teaching so that teachers and students will think more seriously in class about bullying and the importance of life.”
- ⑩ Abe had originally wanted to make ethics an official school subject during his first administration from 2006 to 2007, but that plan fell through because then-education minister Bunmei Ibuki was reluctant, arguing that compiling a government-approved textbook and evaluating students would consume too much time and effort. The current education chief, Hakubun Shimomura, feels confident he can push the plan forward.

What do independent experts say about trying to teach morality?

- ⑪ Hidenori Fujita, chairman of the Tokyo-based Japanese Educational Research Association, is against the concept on the grounds that it could instill in students a cookie-cutter brand of “good, moralistic behavior.”
- ⑫ “There is a risk that some students will try to put on a good face so they will be seen in a good light by their teachers, in line with the textbook that the education ministry chooses,” Fujita said. “But inside, they might be accumulating stress. This could be dangerous, because the stress may not be clearly seen from the outside.”
- ⑬ On the other hand, he said, “other students may strongly resist being force-fed the idea of ‘good pupil’ models, and may feel they are not accepted if they express a view that does not coincide with the teacher’s view. This will have a negative effect on the process of self-development.”
- ⑭ It is important for moral education to be balanced, by introducing materials that will evoke discussion and by allowing the students to express contradictory and conflicting ideas and opinions, Fujita said.

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②charged 熱のこもった ⑤fidelity 忠誠、貞節 diligence 不断の努力、勤勉 ⑥frugality 質素 billed as ~と言われる ⑦psych(e)精神 stamp out 撲滅する ⑩fall through 実現されない ⑮steer 誘導する morality 道德規範 倫理観 ⑯instill 思想などを吹き込む、教え込む cookie-cutter 型にはまった ⑰force-feed 強制的に受け入れさせる coincide with 同時に起こる contradictory 矛盾する conflicting 争う、相反する

★Ice breaker for active discussion★

1. Please briefly explain the history of Moral education in Japan.
2. What is the Prime Minister’s stand or opinion about ethics studies?
3. Do you think teaching Moral education will decrease the number of bullying in schools?
4. If you were to decide the textbooks for moral education, what materials do you think are effective?
5. What kind of objections and worries are there towards including ethics studies in the curriculum?
6. If you could add or remove subjects in the current curriculum, what would it be and why?
Which subjects do you think should be prioritized?
7. Make sentences using the following words: fidelity, diligence, frugality, bullying, stamp out, cookie-cutter, instill, force-feed, coincide and contradictory.

現在、小学校の教科は国語、社会、算数、理科、音楽、図画工作、家庭、体育（1,2年生は社会と理科がなく生活）、中学校では国語、社会、数学、理科、音楽、美術、保健体育、技術・家庭、外国語である。教師が一方的に知識を伝授する授業形式が未だに一般的な日本の学校で、子どもたちが主体的に参加する道德の授業をどのように可能にするか。今後策定される学習指導要領がどのようなものになるのか見守りたい。