

# The Basis of Moral Education Should Be Knowledge: A Proposal to Today's Japanese Education

Hiroyuki OKAMOTO, M A (Hyogo University)

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## Introduction: Establishing the Special Subject of Moral Education Named “Morality”

What is the basis of moral education? --- The purpose of this study is to make this clear.

According to the Ordinance No 11 of MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, Japan), 27 March 2015, the special subject of moral education “Morality” would start at every primary school in April of 2018, and at every middle school in the same month of 2019. It is now an obligation for teachers to measure pupils’ mental achievements, for example, even on patriotism.

Whether this kind of moral education is proper or not is now under discussion in Japan<sup>1</sup>. However, the presenter is planning to suggest an alternative proposition, the background of which is Japanese modern history.

## 1. A Problem on Japanese Moral Education

### a. What *The Courses of Study* Says

The detail of the special subjects was established in *The Courses of Study for Primary Schools* (CSPS) issued in 2015 (revised in 2017) and *The Courses of Study for Middle Schools* (CSMS) issued in 2008 (revised in 2015). The aim of the moral education is as follows:

The objectives of moral education are based on the basic spirit of education stated in the Basic Act on Education and the School Education Act. Moral education is aimed at cultivating pupils’ morality as foundation for thinking over their own ways of lives « their ways of lives as of human beings », acting under their independent decision, and living a better life independently under coexistence with others. (CSPS, 2017, p 3; CSMS, 2015, p 1. Words inside « » are of CSMS only. Translated by Okamoto)

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<sup>1</sup> For example, MEXT announced that it got six thousand Public Comments which includes 59% agreeing this kind of moral education (Kawai, 2015, March 28, p 1). On the other hand, The History Educationalist Conference of Japan (Rekishu Kyōikusha Kyōgikai) adopted resolutions condemning this kind of moral education (HECJ, 2017, September 26).

You can understand that one of the important points of the moral education is to make pupils think how they should live, when you see the underlined words. The sentences of *The Courses of Study* continue and show us what kind of citizens the authorities of Japan would like pupils to be.

In providing moral education, each school should give consideration to develop pupils with a proactive attitude who would *apply* a spirit of respect for human dignity and reverence for life in specific activities at home, school and other social situations, *have* richness in mind, *respect* traditions and culture, *love* Japan and pupils' hometown which have fostered such traditions and culture, *create* culture with a distinctive character. Each school should also give special consideration to make pupils Japanese citizens who would *honour* the public spirit, *endeavour* to develop the society and state, *respect* other countries, *contribute* to world peace and the development of the international community and the preservation of the environment, and *have* interest in exploring possibilities for the future, as formers of the peaceful and democratic country and society.

(CSPS, 2017, pp 3-4; CSMS, 2015, p 1; Translated by Okamoto)

The presenter is beginning to examine this paragraph. The authorities would like pupils to:

- (1) *apply* a spirit of respect for human dignity and reverence for life in specific activities at home, school and other social situations.
- (2) *have* richness in mind.
- (3) *respect* traditions and culture.
- (4) *love* Japan and their hometown which have fostered such traditions and culture.
- (5) *create* culture with a distinctive character.
- (6) *honour* the public spirit.
- (7) *endeavour* to develop the society and state.
- (8) *respect* other countries.
- (9) *contribute* to world peace and the development of the international community and the preservation of the environment.
- (10) *have* interest in exploring possibilities for the future.

At least these ten points are what pupils are hoped to be. However, if they met the requirements, pupils should know what they are required. That is to say, pupils:

- (1) should know what to do is *to apply* a spirit of respect for human dignity and reverence for life in specific activities at home, school and other social situations.

- (2) should know what is richness in mind.
- (3) should know what to do is *to respect* traditions and culture.
- (4) should know what to do is *to love* Japan and their hometown which have fostered such traditions and culture.
- (5) should know what to do is *to create* culture with a distinctive character.
- (6) should know what to do is *to honour* the public spirit.
- (7) should know what to do is *to endeavour* to develop the society and state.
- (8) should know what to do is *to respect* other countries.
- (9) should know what to do is *to contribute* to world peace and the development of the international community and the preservation of the environment.
- (10) should know what makes them *have* interest in exploring possibilities for the future.

As seen above, it is impossible for pupils to acquire the features written in the Courses of Study, with only mental attitudes. It is knowledge and wisdom that are necessary to real moral education. Are pupils assured to get these?

#### **b. The Basic Principle of *The Courses of Study***

In addition to the above, *The Courses of Study* says that though moral education should be implemented mainly in the special classes of “Morality”, it also should be done throughout all educational activities. “Therefore, each school should give proper instruction not just during the moral education classes, but during the classes for all subjects, «foreign language activities, »the period for integrated studies and special activities, in accordance with their respective characteristics, while giving consideration to the developmental stages of the pupils.” (CSPS, 2017, p 3; CSMS, 2015, p 1. Words inside « » are of CSPS only, because while foreign language education is included in “the classes for all subjects” at middle schools, it is included not classes but activities at primary schools. Translated by Okamoto).

It means that the basic idea of moral education at schools must be same as the principle of The Courses of Study itself. MEXT tells us about the principle as follows:

The current Courses of Study makes much account of developing children’s abilities of thinking, judging and presenting, as well as acquiring knowledge and technical skills, in light of pupils’ present situation, under the principle of developing “zest for life”. The keyword of tomorrow’s education is neither “relaxed education policy” nor “cramming”. “Zest for life” is what we would like children, who are to bear the next generation, to acquire. (MEXT, n d(a); Translated by Okamoto)

As mentioned above, the basic principle of the moral education at schools and developing “zest for life”, mentioned below, are inseparable.

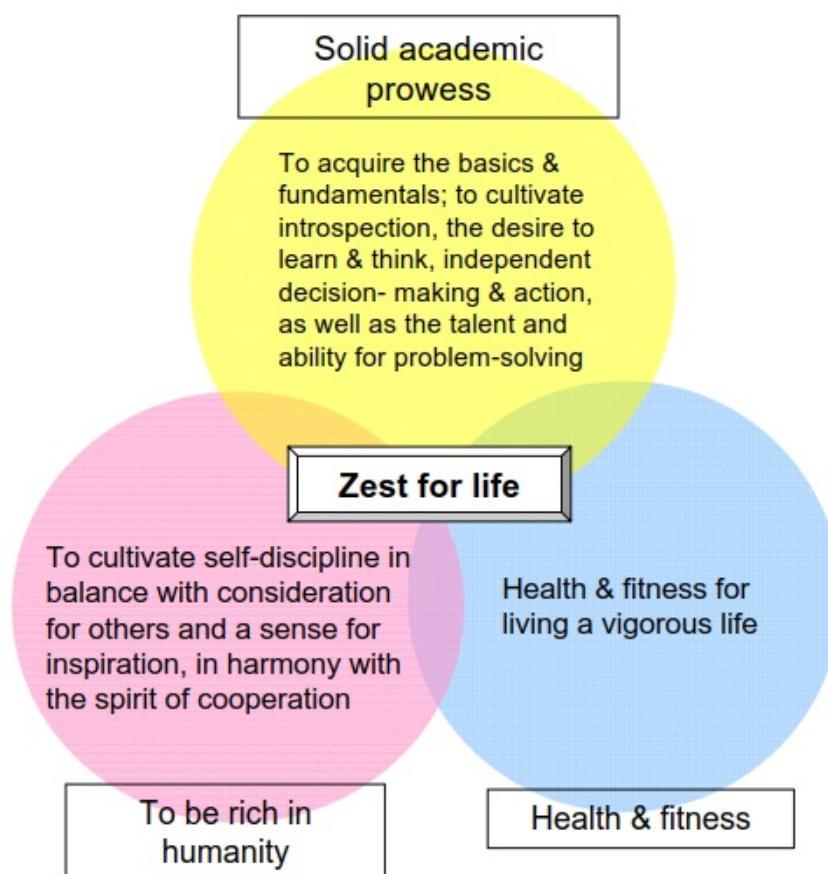
The Courses of Study is aiming at developing children’s “zest for life” more and more strongly.

“Zest for life” means the ability with well-balanced “academic prowess”, “rich humanity ” and “health and fitness”.

In order to make children live in the future society with various changes, it is important to develop their abilities with enough balances of these three elements.

(MEXT, 2011, January; Translated by Okamoto)

And you can see Figure 1 in the website of MEXT.



**Figure 1** (MEXT, n d(b), p 4; Originally English)

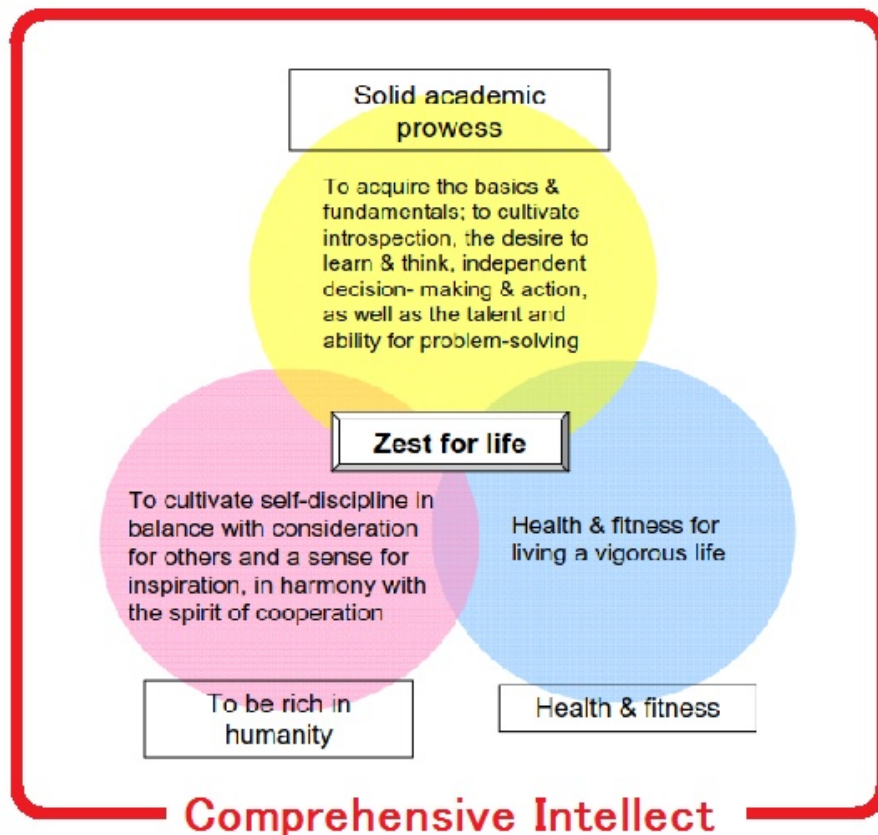
However, the presenter must indicate that these sentences and figure includes a problem.

According to MEXT, the education connected with knowledge and wisdom can develop pupils' "academic prowess" only, so moral and physical education would be almost nothing to do with knowledge and wisdom. In actuality, it is very hard to think that moral and physical education apart from intellect could result in success.

Firstly, let us think about moral education. How can a pupil "cultivate self-discipline in balance with consideration for others and a sense for inspiration, in harmony with the spirit of cooperation", as the Figure 1 shows? He/She has to acquire the abilities to decide what to do or say to others after guessing what they think or feel. In order to do these things, he/she must collect the information about the environment in which others have grown up, and the pattern of their thinking deeply related with it. Next, he/she must suppose their feeling, and at last determine what to do or say. Persons who are good at making friends with others always do these things with full of intellect, but probably in many cases, of wisdom from experiences. Thus moral education will never succeed without intellect.

Secondly, let us think about physical education. You can see the phrase "Health and fitness for living a vigorous life" in the Figure 1. Of course there are lots of unexplained points in medicine or related fields, which are developing day by day. So, what is called desirable lifestyle is changing every day. If you did not catch the latest information on health and fitness, you could be in a risky situation. You can find that physical education will also never succeed without intellect.

As seen above, the expression by the MEXT that "zest for life" means the ability with well-balanced "academic prowess", "rich humanity" and "health and fitness", is not enough, or very risky in some cases. Therefore the presenter now insists on the need for amending the concept of "zest for life", adding "comprehensive intellect" at the basement of it. The content of "comprehensive intellect", which partly overlaps "solid academic prowess", includes lots of wisdom from experiences. See the Figure 2.



**Figure 2**

## **2. Learning from History: Always Place Intellect at the Base of Moral Education**

The presenter got the hint of the study above from a novel-styled essay on life for boys and girls of the social middle class, *Kimitachi wa Dô Ikiruka?* (How Will You Lead Your Lives?). It was written by YOSHINO Genzaburô (1899-1981) in 1937, the age of militarism before the World War II. In this book the author indicates lots of social problems of the world, such as poverty, hunger and wars; comments on the studies of economics, history and astronomy; and insists that bullying or any other infringements on human rights must not be permitted from the viewpoint of academism. At that time liberal arts were extremely made little of, and the atmosphere of irrational spiritualism was prevailing all over Japan.

The hero of the book is a middle school pupil named Coper-kun (the Younger Copernicus), who were changing his attitude to observe everything, from self-centred view to the view of elementary social sciences. One day he happened to notice that powdered milk, which he had had in his babyhood, was produced in Australia and carried to the consumers in Japan through lots of people's labour. He found that this phenomenon was seen not only on powdered milk but

also on everything, so he named it “the relationship of people as if they were molecules; or the law of network”, and happily reported it to his uncle who was his guardian, for Coper-kun’s father was already dead.

Coper-kun’s uncle felt happy, too, and wrote down his thoughts in his notebook so that Coper-kun might read it someday. It started at a primary study of economics, and that our species still has a big problem of poverty, and that poor people can hardly save their own health, live civilised lives, avoid being mentally obsequious.

Do you remember that we – you, your mother and I – saw numerous chimneys spouting smoke, from an overhead railway in the low area of Tōkyō City, on the way to the resort last summer? It was a hot day. Lots of roofs filled in the area without any gap, and the group of chimneys extended to the horizon under the summer sky which beat down with dazzling brightness. Hot wind blew into our train through the upper air of the factories. [...] Dozens or hundreds of labourers were working under each chimney, being smeared with sweat and dust. After escaping Tōkyō, we found that the whole world around us were green rice fields, felt relieved with fresh and cool wind. But it was tenant-farmers that made the wide rice fields without any holidays.

There are full of these kinds of working people all over Japan, and most of the population of the world are these people. How many kinds of lack they must endure every day! It is very difficult for them to cure even their own diseases, not to speak of to study arts or sciences, to enjoy good paintings or music. Coper-kun! You have already read the brilliant history of our species, which is full of struggles for many dozens of thousands of years, from the era when the lives of human beings were same as those of beasts, to the present civilisation. But the fruits of the struggles have not been given to every member of the species.

“That is a false.”

You must say so, and you are right. Everyone must be capable of leading his/her life in a human way. [...] Who has any objection, if he/she is honest? But the world has not solved this problem, though we regret strongly. Our species has made progress, but it has not reached at the stage of solving this big problem. And all of many problems related to this big one are now waiting for solution in front of us. (Yoshino, 1982, pp 133-135)

In addition to this, Coper-kun’s uncle not only wrote down knowledge, but also made him think what the desirable way of leading his life was.

To tell you the truth, people who were born and grew in a poor situation, graduated

only primary schools, and did only manual labour after that, often have less knowledge than you though they are already adults. It is normal that they do not have even basic contents of the education in middle or upper schools, such as geometry, algebra or physics. In many cases, they have vulgar tastes. From this point of view, I would not be surprised if you thought that you had a better character than they. But, in a different way of looking at this situation, whose shoulders are now supporting the entire world but theirs? They cannot be compared with you for real respectability. Is there anything not products of labour that people in the world need in everyday life? Are there any tools for respectable works, for example, scholarship or art, not the products of their working with sweat on the forehead? No labour of them, no civilisation, no progress of the world.

By the way, think about yourself. What are you producing? You are receiving many kinds of things from the society, but what are you giving back to it? Needless to say, you are only consuming, and have produced nothing yet. [...]

Of course, everyone must eat food, wear clothes, and so on, so there are no producers who consume nothing. And things are produced in order to be consumed usefully, so consuming should not be blamed. However, which are respectable and important, people who are producing much more than they are consuming, or people who are producing nothing and consuming many things every day? The answer is out of the question. You could not consume happily if there were no producers. It is the function of working that makes persons human. [...]

If you felt uncomfortable to see the sentences above, and thought as if I blamed you for being only a consumer, it would not be my purpose. You are still preparing to be an adult as a middle school pupil now, so you have no problem. But you have to keep your social standing as an only consumer. You should humbly respect Urakawa who takes charge of his family business, and works without disliking it, though some bad conditions forces him to do so<sup>2</sup>. If you ridiculed his life, it would be a big mistake because you could not understand your social place. (Ibid, pp 138-141)

MARUYAMA Masao (1914-96), a famous researcher of political ideas, commented on this book. "The contents showed in this book of the end of 1930s are not only the ethics of how to lead our lives, but also the problem 'what is to understand on the basis of social sciences?' The unique character of this book is to investigate human morality connecting with understanding society." (Maruyama, 1982, pp 310-311)

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<sup>2</sup> Urakawa is a classmate and good friend of Coper-kun. He is a son of *tofu* maker and seller, but the severe economic condition of his family business does not permit him to go to school every day. In addition to this, he is usually ridiculed by some of his classmates because of his smell of fried *tofu*.



If we draw this argument to moral education, the main subject of this presentation, we can say that knowledge and wisdom, which belong to the category of intellect, should be the basis of moral education.

## Conclusion

The expression by the MEXT that “zest for life” means the ability with well-balanced “academic prowess”, “rich humanity” and “health and fitness”, is not enough, or very risky in some cases. Therefore the presenter now insists on the need for amending the concept of “zest for life”, adding “comprehensive intellect” at the basement of it.

This idea came from a book for boys and girls written in 1930s, the age of militarism in Japan. It may be very useful for us to learn from legacy of the history.

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OKAMOTO Hiroyuki, M A  
(Hyogo University, Japan)

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## Introduction

OKAMOTO H.  
10/ 5/2018

The special subject of moral education “Morality” started at every primary school in Japan in April this year, and at every middle school it will start in the same month next year.

It is now an obligation for teachers to measure pupils’ mental achievements, for example, even on patriotism.

Whether this kind of moral education is proper or not is now under discussion in Japan.

However, the presenter is planning to suggest an alternative consideration, the background of which is Japanese modern history, and to show that the basis of moral education should be not mental attitudes but intellect, i e, knowledge and wisdom.



*The Courses of Study for Middle Schools*, MEXT.

## 1. A Problem on Japanese Moral Education

### a. What *The Courses of Study* Says

According to *The Courses of Study*, the main point of the moral education is to make pupils think how they should live. The sentences in it continue and show us what kind of citizens the authorities would like to make.

(Numbering in the following sentences was made by the presenter. )

“In providing moral education, each school should give consideration to develop pupils with a proactive attitude who would

- (1) *apply* a spirit of respect for human dignity and reverence for life in specific activities at home, school and other social situations,
- (2) *have* richness in mind,
- (3) *respect* traditions and culture,
- (4) *love* Japan and pupils' hometown which have fostered such traditions and culture,
- (5) *create* culture with a distinctive character.

“Each school should also give special consideration to make pupils Japanese citizens who would

(6) *honour* the public spirit,

(7) *endeavour* to develop the society and state,

(8) *respect* other countries,

(9) *contribute* to world peace and the development of the international community and the preservation of the environment, and

(10) *have* interest in exploring possibilities for the future, as formers of the peaceful and democratic country and society.”

(CSPS, 2017, pp 3-4; CSMS, 2015, p 1; Translated by Okamoto)

At least these ten points are what pupils are hoped to do. However, if they met the requirements, pupils should know what they are required.

For example, pupils are hoped to:

(1) *apply* a spirit of respect for human dignity and reverence for life in specific activities at home, school and other social situations.

As a prior condition of this, pupils:

(1) should know what to do is *to apply* a spirit of respect for human dignity and reverence for life in specific activities at home, school and other social situations.

It is knowledge and wisdom that are necessary to real moral education. The articles from (2) to (10) are just alike.

Are pupils assured to get knowledge and wisdom in classes?

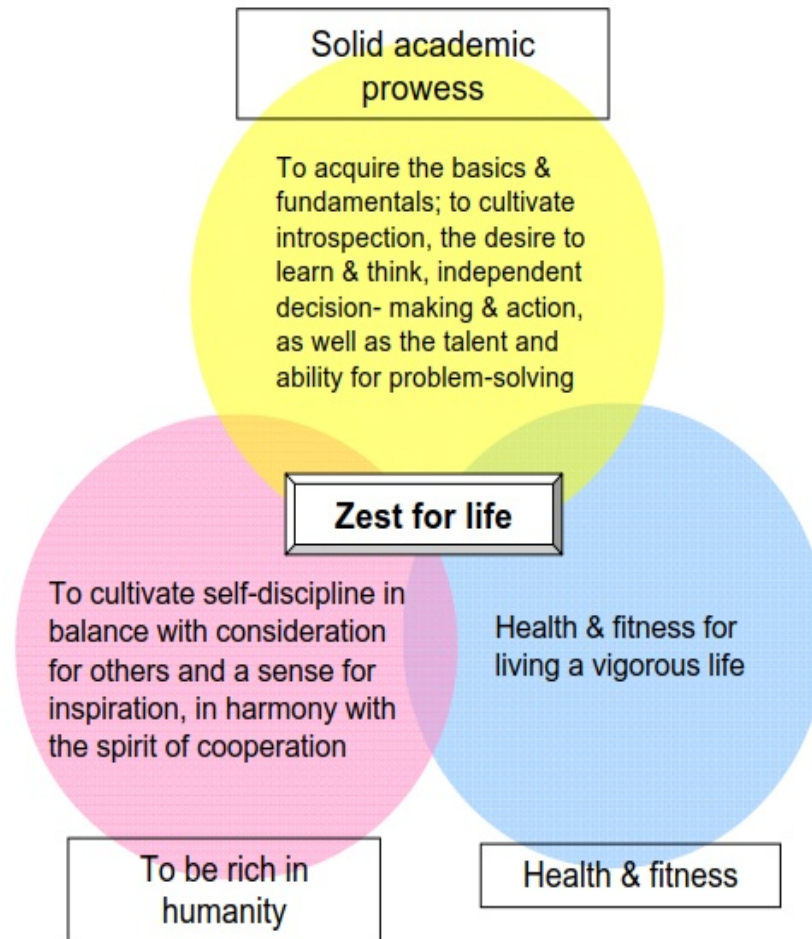


b. Zest for Life: The Basic Principle of *The Courses of Study*

The MEXT says as follows in its websites:

“The current Courses of Study makes much account of developing children’s abilities of thinking, judging and presenting, as well as acquiring knowledge and technical skills, in light of pupils’ present situation, under the principle of developing ‘zest for life’. The keyword of tomorrow’s education is neither ‘relaxed education policy’ nor ‘cramming’. ‘Zest for life’ is what we would like children, who are to bear the next generation, to acquire.”  
(MEXT, n d(a); Translated by Okamoto)

“‘Zest for life’ means the ability with well-balanced ‘academic prowess’, ‘rich humanity’ and ‘health and fitness’.” (MEXT, 2011, January; Translated by Okamoto)



(MEXT, n d(b), p 4; Originally English)

However, the presenter must indicate that these sentences and figure includes a problem. According to the MEXT, moral and physical education would be almost nothing to do with knowledge and wisdom. On the contrary, it is very hard to think that moral and physical education apart from intellect could result in success.

(i) About moral education.

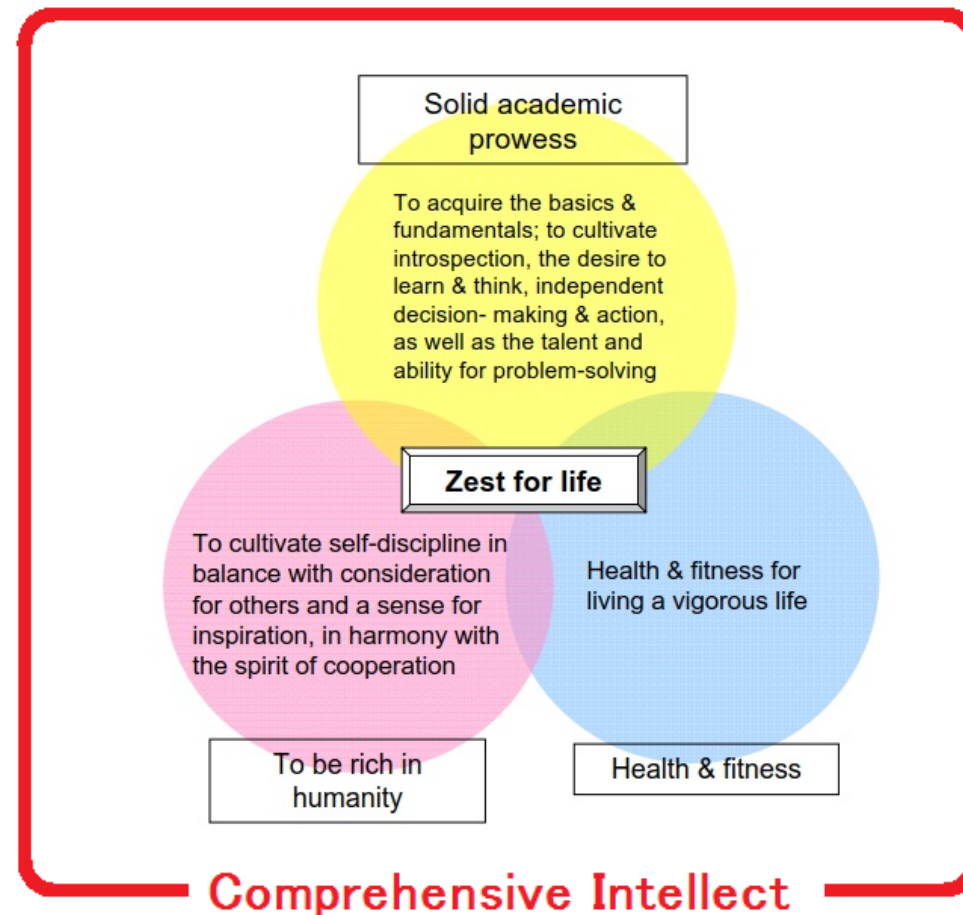
A pupil has to acquire the abilities of guessing what others think or feel and deciding what to do or say to others.

In order to do these things, first, he/she must collect the information about the environment in which others have grown up, and the pattern of their thinking deeply related with it. Second, he/she must suppose their feeling, and at last determine what to do or say. Persons who are good at making friends with others always do these things with full of intellect, but probably in many cases, of wisdom from experiences. Thus moral education will never succeed without intellect.

(ii) About physical education.

Of course there are lots of unexplained points in medicine or related fields, which are developing day by day. So, what is called desirable lifestyle is changing every day. If you did not catch the latest information on health and fitness, you could be in a risky situation. You can find that physical education will also never succeed without intellect.

Therefore the presenter now insists on the need for amending the concept of “zest for life”, adding “comprehensive intellect” at the basement of it as the next figure.



The content of “comprehensive intellect”, which partly overlaps “solid academic prowess”, includes lots of wisdom from experiences.

## 2. Learning from History: Always Place Intellect at the Base of Moral Education

The presenter got the hint of the study above from a novel-styled essay on life for boys and girls of the social middle class, *Kimitachi wa Dô Ikiruka?* (How Will You Lead Your Lives?). It was written by YOSHINO Genzaburô (1899-1981) in 1937, the age of militarism before the World War II.



Yoshino

In this book the author indicates lots of social problems of the world, such as poverty, hunger and wars; comments on the studies of economics, history and astronomy; and insists that bullying or any other infringements on human rights must not be permitted from the viewpoint of academism. At that time liberal arts were extremely made little of, and the atmosphere of irrational spiritualism was prevailing all over Japan.

The hero of the book is a middle school pupil named Coper-kun (the Younger Copernicus), who were changing his attitude to observe everything, from self-centred view to the view of elementary social sciences.

One day Coper-kun's uncle wrote a letter on his notebook so that his nephew, who noticed that everyone around the world connected through labour and the economy of distribution, might read it someday. The notebook writer admired Coper-kun's "discovery" of the economic law, and told that the great majority of the world are workers and tenant-farmers suffering poverty, which is the problem that our species had never solved.

The notebook says as follows:



“To tell you the truth, people who were born and grew in a poor situation, graduated only primary schools, and did only manual labour after that, often have less knowledge than you though they are already adults. . . . In many cases, they have vulgar tastes. From this point of view, I would not be surprised if you thought that you had a better character than they. But, from the other perspective, whose shoulders are now supporting the entire world but theirs? They cannot be compared with you for real respectability. . . . No labour of them, no civilisation, no progress of the world.

“ . . . Needless to say, you are only consuming, and have produced nothing yet. . . . You are still preparing to be an adult as a middle school pupil now, so you have no problem. But you have to keep your social standing as a mere consumer. You should humbly respect Urakawa [a classmate and good friend of Coper-kun. He is a son of poor *tofu* maker and seller, and ridiculed by some of his classmates] who takes charge of his family business, and works without disliking it, though some bad conditions forces him to do so . If you ridiculed his life, it would be a big mistake because you could not understand your own social place.” (Yoshino, 1982, pp 138-141)

MARUYAMA Masao (1914-96), a famous researcher of political ideas, commented on this book. “The contents of this book at the end of 1930s are not only the ethics of how to lead our lives, but also the problem ‘what is it for us to understand on the basis of social sciences?’ The unique character of this book is that it investigated human morality connecting with understanding society. ”  
(Maruyama, 1982, pp 310-311)

If we draw this argument to the problem of today’s Japanese moral education, we can say that knowledge and wisdom, which belong to the category of intellect, should be the basis of moral education.



Maruyama

## Conclusion

The expression by the MEXT that “zest for life” means the ability with well-balanced “academic prowess”, “rich humanity” and “health and fitness”, is not enough, or very risky in some cases. Therefore the presenter now insists on the need for amending the concept of “zest for life”, adding “comprehensive intellect” at the basement of it.

This idea came from a book for boys and girls written in 1930s, the age of militarism in Japan. It may be very useful for us to learn from legacy of the history.

## References

Please see the handout.