

Keio University Syllabus and Timetable

EDUCATION IN JAPAN: ISSUES OF CULTURE, SOCIAL STRUCTURE, & WORLDVIEW

Subtitle	Education in Japan: Learning Culture, Social Structure, & Worldview
Lecturer(s)	RIESSLAND, ANDREAS K.
Credit(s)	2
Academic Year/Semester	2025 Spring
Day/Period	Mon.3
Campus	Mita
Classroom	462
Class Format	Face-to-face classes (conducted mainly in-person)
Registration Number	54087
Faculty/Graduate School	INTERNATIONAL CENTER
Year Level	2, 3, 4
Grade Type	S, A, B, C, D
K-Number	CIN-CO-00133-212-09

[▼ Detail](#)

Course Contents/Objectives/Teaching Method/Intended Learning Outcome

Education offers a useful lens for looking at Japan's society (or societies), for education is all about becoming a functioning member of society. It focuses on issues such as what one needs to know to act properly, whom to respect, when to speak, and who to become. Education is also a critical site of the ongoing debate about globalization, bringing the spread of English along with an increased presence of ethnic and social minorities. What is more, looking at education helps us understand Japanese family structure, food, fashion, and the culture of the everyday, all of which reflect (and construct) culture, social structure, and worldview.

In general, Japanese education has a bad reputation. Some scholars point out that bullying is widespread. Certainly there is a dark side, but there is also a lot to acknowledge and learn from. This course aims to look at Japanese education critically, yet with a multidisciplinary perspective and an objective balance, in order to gain a deeper understanding of contemporary Japan. Each week, there will be assignments of approximately 15-30 pages that everyone is required to read before class, and attention will be given during class to exploring the issues raised in these assignments, deepening analytic understanding, and articulating both a personal and academic response.

The course will be conducted entirely in English. It is open to students from Keio and from abroad. For international students, the goal is to expand knowledge of Japan in a way that will help negotiate living and working in this country. For Japanese students, the goal is to deepen awareness of one's own culture, and practice explaining local customs and worldviews to people from abroad.

Active Learning Methods [Description](#)

Presentations
Discussions, Debates
Group work

Preparatory Study

For each lesson, you will have read the required text(s) thoroughly, and you will have developed a well informed understanding of the author's main argument.

Course Plan

Lesson 1

Introductions and overview:
Guidelines, possibilities, key concepts

Lesson 2

Topic: Diversity, distinctiveness, & social division
Reading: Okano (2009) School Culture

Lesson 3

Disciplining the child, connecting the community
Reading: Lewis (1995) Roots of Discipline

Lesson 4

Topic: Establishing Conformity
Reading: Bjork & Fukuzawa (2013) School Guidance in Japanese Middle Schools

Lesson 5

Topic: Parental involvement - *obentō*
Reading: Allison (1991) Japanese mothers and obentōs

Lesson 6

Topic: Parental Involvement - *kyōiku mama*
Reading: Holloway et al. (2010) From Kyōiku Mama to Monster Parent

Lesson 7

Topic: Sports, coaching, & discipline
Reading: Miller (2013) For Basketball Court and Company Cubicle

Lesson 8

Topic: Bullying, marginalization, & pressure to conform
Reading: McDonald & Kawai (2017) Punishing Coaching

Lesson 9

Topic: Studying in English - English as the Classroom Language
Reading: Brown (2017) Why and Why Now?

Lesson 10

Topic: Others – Immigrants, foreigners, & returnees
Reading: Kanno (2003) Imagined Communities

Lesson 11

Independent Reading

(from Supplementary References, Google search, & teacher recommendation)

Lesson 12

Data Collection, Analysis, & Writing

Lesson 13

Final Presentations

Lesson 14

Course review and follow-up discussions, if required.

Other

There may be other reading/viewing assignments in addition to the ones noted here. In that case, they will be announced in class and posted on keio.jp or the Google Classroom webpage.

A list of references, both required and supplementary, will be uploaded to keio.jp prior to the first session.

Method of Evaluation

In-class discussion will be the central component of the course, and everyone is expected to walk in the door prepared to talk about the assigned readings. Class participation counts for 30% of the grade. Writing assignments count for 30%, the final project (presentation & paper) 40%. All written work should be 100% one's own words (with full reference and citation), submitted on time, of appropriate length, and on topic. Plagiarism is cheating, and you will make a D if you copy more than 2 words from any source without correct citation, quotation and reference. Late work will be penalized or simply not accepted. About 2 hours of homework (or so) is expected each week. All written assignments (essays, power-points, self-introductions, etc) should be submitted via the Canvas classroom page, which will be made available at the beginning of the semester.

Textbooks

All reading materials will be distributed by the instructor, placed on reserve in the library, made available on the keio.jp website, or uploaded to the Google classroom homepage.

Reference Books

- DeCoker, G. & Bjork, Christopher. (2013). *Japanese education in an era of globalization. Culture, politics, and equity*. NY: Teachers College Press.
- Sato, S. & Doerr, N.M. (Eds). (2014). *Rethinking language and culture in Japanese education*. Multilingual Matters.
- Willis, D.B. (2006). Learning culture, learning citizenship: Japanese education and the challenge of multiculturalism. In Lee & Befu (Eds.), *Japan's diversity dilemmas* (pp. 47-74).

Lecturer's Comments to Students

Because the class is based on group discussion and on students' individual presentations, which requires preparation and active engagement on the part of every student, enrolment will be limited to 25 students. If more than 25 seek to join, a lottery will be carried out by the IC Office.

Question/Comments

There are no set office hours, but students should feel free to contact me anytime by email, speak to me before or after class, or make an appointment. I am happy to talk if there is time available.