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Chapter 9

Contribution of Online Tools to Thinking and Deliberating about Morality in Japanese Schools: A Preliminary Experiment with Student-Teachers

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ABSTRACT

In 2018, the emphasis of conventional teaching methods for compulsory education classes on morality in Japanese schools shifted from reading emotions to thinking and deliberating. The latter better needs meaningful communication with others. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, emergency declarations were issued on several occasions, which rendered conducting classroom discussions difficult. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has also made it possible for one to acquire a virtual communication experience by employing online tools. Accordingly, this study was conducted to examine whether or not moral discussions that employ online tools improve the communication skills and morality of student-teachers. The impact and applicability of online tools in future educational situations in morality classes are discussed in relation to the findings.

KEYWORDS: online discussion, face-to-face discussion, student-teachers, morality classes, systems thinking

Recently, the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (2015) recently pointed out the importance of cognitive and non-cognitive abilities, which include social abilities (e.g., grit, cooperation, and communication skills), in influencing the quality of our daily life. Moral education in each country[1] can be considered one of the methods for developing non-cognitive abilities. How is moral education, which is considered to be important all over the world, positioned and functioning in Japan? Moreover, what has been the influence of the COVID-19 on Japanese moral education?

First, this study provides an overview of the history of moral education in Japan and highlight current issues of moral education in Japan, including the impact of the COVID-19. Second, it reports a preliminary experiment on the educational effects of online moral discussions during the COVID-19 crisis on student-teachers. Third, this study discusses the implications of the results for the future application of online teaching styles and communication methods with a focus on Japanese moral education.

THE HISTORY OF MORAL EDUCATION IN JAPAN

Immediately following World War II (WWII), morality classes in public schools were cancelled by the government. In 1958, a course called *Research on Moral Education*, the subject matter of which was a particular method to teach morality was established as part of teacher training universities. These institutions have started to re-examine and revise the *Research on Moral Education* course. Since then, student-teachers have learned the method for teaching "morality classes" (*dotoku-no-jikan* in Japanese)[2], through the *Research on Moral Education* course. However, no national textbooks on morality classes had been published, which denoted that the teaching method never became universally established. Therefore, the content of the *Research on Moral Education* course varied widely according to the expertise in charge of the course; moral philosophy, moral psychology, and moral education, among others

[1] In this paper, the term "moral education" is used to refer to all activities related to the teaching of morality in schools.

[2] Schools in Japan have a class system, and all teachers, apart from managers, are in charge of the class. It is a rule that the class teacher is in charge of the morality classes of their class. Therefore, all teachers require the skills to carry out morality classes from the time they become in-service teachers.

(Nagata & Fujisawa, 2010). Therefore, moral education was not being taught in a biased manner similar to that prior to WWII in the *Research on Moral Education* course. Conversely, from the standpoint of student-teachers, opportunities for comprehensively learning how to conduct morality classes were insufficient in this course.[3] Moreover, after becoming in-service teachers, morality classes were held only once per week at 35 times a year, which made it more difficult for in-service teachers to acquire teaching skills for morality classes than for classes covering other lessons (Araki, 2021).[4] Although many in-service teachers could not sufficiently learn the basic skills for teaching morality classes, they had to continue with the acquisition of positive educational practices. As a result, it became difficult for both student-teachers and in-service teachers to learn how to teach morality classes.

CURRENT MORAL EDUCATION IN JAPAN

In 2018, in Japanese moral education, the teaching methodology for morality classes changed its emphasis on reading emotions to an emphasis on thinking and deliberating. In addition, all teachers have to grade their students in morality classes. Since then, the stakeholders involved in moral education at the schools have been urgently required to consider how to conduct morality classes that allow students to think and deliberate in morality classes. Veteran in-service teachers who were adept at conducting morality classes before 2018 (at a time when moral education emphasized reading emotions) lacked experience in implementing the new thinking-and-deliberating approach in morality classes. Teachers who completed the teacher training course during the transition period to the new curriculum did not learn the new teaching methodology at the time. In other words, given the differences in teachers' experience and proficiency in teaching morality classes, we, the stakeholders in moral education, have to enable all in-service teachers to conduct thinking-and-deliberating morality classes and evaluate their students' performance in these classes. Moreover, Fujisawa (2020, in press) noted that despite the great need

[3] By contrast, Kaizuka (2015) noted that because of historical factors, there was a nationwide shortage of moral education courses and majors, making it impossible to train specialists in moral education. This accounts for the current situation, in which few morality classes are held in schools.

[4] In classes on other subjects besides morality, in-service teacher training in the first year of service has been shown to lead to improvement in the acquisition of teaching skills in subsequent years (Breaux & Wong, 2003). Therefore, the lack of adequate support for skills training in moral education for both student-teachers and in-service teachers is a big loss.

to improve moral education and to guide teachers in implementing the new methodology, the current in-service teachers are in a difficult position in regard to performing thinking and deliberating morality classes. Therefore, when she explained why it is difficult for in-service teachers to apply new methodologies, Fujisawa referred to Stoh's (2015) systems thinking approach and explained why it was difficult to learn teaching methods in Japanese morality classes. To overcome this aspect, Fujisawa (2020) argued that it is necessary for the stakeholders in moral education, to work together to examine the content of both training for in-service teachers and teacher training courses for student-teachers.

In one region of Japan, an experiment to test the effectiveness of using the moral dilemma discussion (hereafter "MDD") method, which is based on Fujisawa (2020), was proposed.[5] However, when she planned to conduct this experiment in the spring of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, and the Japanese government declared a state of emergency and closed the schools. Since then, the schools have reopened; however, every time there has been a new uptick in the number of the COVID-19 cases, the state of emergency has been reinstated and the schools closed again. Thus, difficulties remained in implementing the face-to-face discussion-based methodology. What could the stakeholders in moral education do about this situation?

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH ON MORAL DILEMMA DISCUSSION

In Japan, MDD has long been proposed as one of the methods for conducting morality classes that encourage students to think and deliberate. Researchers and teachers have collaborated for more than 40 years to comprehensively accumulate knowledge on MDD (Araki, 2014). An interesting feature of MDD is that students are free to discuss cases of moral dilemmas involving multiple conflicting values for which no resolution has been established. In general, using stories that present moral dilemmas as discussion materials enhances not only morality (Araki, 2014; Blatt & Kohlberg, 1975) but also social ability related to morality, such as cooperation and perspective-taking (Araki, 2014; Fujisawa, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c).[6]

[5] This research has been ongoing since 2019 with the support of the Hakuhodo Foundation (grants 2019-025 and 2019-01). Please see https://www.hakuhodofoundation.or.jp/

[6] On the other hand, Fujisawa (2018b) noted that some social abilities enhanced by MDD decrease after approximately one month unless the discussion is continued to be practiced.

A limitation of the above mentioned studies is that they examined only face-to-face discussions. Therefore, there has been little examination of online discussions on moral dilemma that have been made possible by the development of science and technology. The emergence of COVID-19, however, has pushed the Japanese government to promote the Global and Innovation Gateway for All (GIGA) school concept to support online education in schools. This policy includes the distribution of tablet devices to all students in Japan, which are particularly helpful for online morality classes that emphasize thinking and deliberation. Therefore, this policy enables teachers to conduct thinking-and-deliberating morality classes using online tools, with MDD as an option. To conduct such classes, Fujisawa (2020) states that it is necessary for student-teachers in the *Research on Moral Education* course to acquire experience in using MDD in online classes.

With regard to online moral education in Japan, thus far, there has been practical research on connecting classrooms of different schools. However, few studies have examined moral discussions using online tools by individual students. Moreover, previous studies have mainly recruited university students as participants. These studies have revealed that although university students adapt to online discussions, they prefer face-to-face discussion. They regard online discussions as a supplement to face-to-face discussion (Tiene, 2000). Hedayati-Mehdiabadi et al. (2020) showed that college students can gain new insights through ethical education using online discussion. Cain and Smith (2009) compared online moral dilemma discussion (OMDD) with face-to-face moral dilemma discussion (FMDD) among pharmacy students. It was found that OMDD helped students to think and deliberate, and online discussion generally enhances morality as much as other kinds of discussion. However, it was also clarified that OMDD hinders constructive discussion because of its anonymous nature. These results suggest a possibility that online discussions will be accepted by college students in emergencies in social contexts such as the COVID-19 pandemic. If the discussions are among acquaintances, there is a possibility that they will be constructive.[7]

As a follow-up to the study of Cain and Smith (2009), this study examines

[7] Lu et al. (2018) also examined the educational effect of combining online and face-to-face discussion. However, as the authors fail to examine the non-cognitive abilities, which has been discussed in this paper, their study will not be further considered here.

potential differences in the effects of OMDD and FMDD on morality and communication skills in university students studying to become professional teachers in Japan. Following this report on this research, the study discusses the applicability of online tools in future educational contexts.

METHOD

Participants

This study recruited 100 undergraduate female students from the first year to the fourth year.

Design and Procedure

Prior to the study, the Institutional Review Board of Kamakura Women's University reviewed and accepted the protocol. Informed consent was obtained from all participants at the start of their session.

The participants were divided into the FMDD[8] group and the OMDD group. Both groups filled in the same questionnaire before (pre-test) and after (post-test) the discussion task. In the FMDD, discussions were conducted after filling in the pre-test questionnaires. In the OMDD condition, the students participated in the discussion in private rooms, mostly at home, using Zoom and filled in the same questionnaire using Microsoft Forms on their own personal computers or tablets. The participants conducted OMDD with individual Zoom screens turned on. In both conditions, Heinz dilemmas (1) and (2) were the discussion materials.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of two scales presented in the following order.

Standards for Public Space Scale

The standards for public space (SPS) scale consist of 25 total items in 5 subscales. Its aim is to evaluate how much importance the respondent attaches to each of the five standards (or norms) regarding behavior in public spaces (Nagafusa et al.,

[8] The experimental data for FMDD used in this study were those obtained before COVID-19.

2012). Being *Egocentric* means to pursue one's own profit and freedom without concern for the effect of this pursuit on others. Conforming to a *Peer Standard* is to align one's behavior with that of one's peers. Conforming to a *Regional Standard* is to seek approval from the local community. To *Care for Others* is to manifest concern about people one is not related to. To express *Public Values* is to manifest concern for the public interest and fairness for society as a whole. Responses were recorded on a 5-point scale, with response alternatives ranging from "Does not describe me at all" (1) to "Describes me very well" (5). The score for each subscale was calculated by summing the scores for each item on the subscale, as described in the paper (Nagafusa et al., 2012). The higher the score, the more important the standard is considered to be. The reliabilities (Cronbach's α) of the five subscales computed from the data in this study were .77, .84, .78, .71, and .69 for the Egocentric, Peer Standard, Regional Standard, Care for Others, and Public Values subscales, respectively. Previous studies (Fujisawa et al., 2006; Nagafusa et al., 2012) have confirmed the reliability and validity of the scale. The five subscales correlate with the corresponding five stages of the Defining Issues Test in the manner (Fujisawa et al., 2006).

Communication Skills Scale

The Communication Skills (CS) scale was developed by Ueno and Okada (2006). It consists of four subscales: *listening*/*speaking*, *nonverbal skills*, *assertion* and *discussion*. Listening/speaking measures the ability to listen to the other person and to express one's own opinion to the other person. Nonverbal skills refer specifically to nonverbal skills in discussions. Assertion measures the ability to build better relationships with others by openly expressing one's opinion while respecting the other person, rather than by unilaterally imposing one's own opinion on the other person or simply putting up with the other person's opinion. Discussion measures the skills in the discussion context. Each item is responded to on a 0 to 3 scale, with 3 meaning a high level of the corresponding skill. According to the manual of Ueno and Okada (2006), the scores for each subscale were calculated.

RESULTS

Tables 1 and 2 show the basic statistics for the SPS and CS scales. An analysis

of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted for each subscale (Egocentric, Peer Standard, Regional Standard, Care for Others, and Public Values) of the SPS and for the subscale (Listening/Speaking, Non-Verbal Skills, Assertion, and Discussion) of the CS Scales with Condition (FMDD/OMDD) as the independent variable, post-test subscale scores as the dependent variable, and pre-test subscale scores as the covariate. Satisfactory results on the slope and parallelism tests for each subscale and statistical independence among the pre-test and among the post-test subscale scores justified performing ANCOVA.

The only significant effect in any of the ANCOVAs was a main effect of condition on the post-test scores for Public Values, (F (1,96) = 6.5, $p < .05$; biased η^2 = .1), with pre-test scores on Public Values controlled for. The mean post-test score on Public Values was higher in the OMDD condition than in the FMDD condition.

DISCUSSION

This study investigated whether the changes in the scores of student-teachers on measures of the various standards of behavior in public spaces (SPS) and on measures of various communication skills (CS) before (pre-test) and after (post-test) participation in a discussion of moral dilemmas differed as a function of whether the discussion took place face-to-face (FMDD condition) or online (OMDD condition). In this section, this study discusses the results of the experiment and the applicability and potential impact of the online tools used in the experiment in future educational settings.

Differences Between OMDD and FMDD

The pre-test scores on each subscale of the SPS (Table 1) and CS (Table 2) of the pre-test were controlled for and compared with the corresponding post-test scores, because the pre-test scores for the FMDD and OMDD conditions are different. As a result, the score of OMDD is higher than the score of FMDD in terms of Public Values. Public Values concern a behavioral standard, conformance to which requires concern for the public interest and fairness for society as a whole. It may have been easier for participants to think about the interests of others in the OMDD condition, where they were physically separated from one another, than in the FMDD condition. Meanwhile,

when the OMDD was implemented, the whole world was suffering from the COVID-19. Therefore, when this study was conducted, they may have been able to easily understand the public interest and the feelings of others as their own. It remains necessary to examine OMDD even in normal situations. In contrast, there were no significant differences between the two conditions for any of the post-test subscale scores, which suggests that the perceived importance of the various behavioral standards and communication skills generally remained the same regardless of whether the discussion was online or face-to-face. These results support those of Cain and Smith (2009). In this study, the participants in the discussions were acquaintances. Therefore, these results suggest that the effects of participation in an MDD with regard to behavioral standards and communication skills is not be influenced by the anonymity of holding the discussions online. Thus, I conclude from this study that it is feasible to conduct effective discussions online in educational situations where having face-to-face discussions is difficult.

Table 1

Means (M) and Standard Deviations (SD) of Pre- and Post-Tests Scores on Subscales of the Standards for Public Space Scale

	Condition		Subscales				
			Egocentric	Peer Standard	Regional Standard	Care for Others	Public Values
Pre-test	OMDD	*M*	9.8	12.1	20.3	21.2	22.2
		SD	3.1	4.1	2.9	2.1	2.2
	FMDD	*M*	10	11.3	17.9	19.4	21.4
		SD	3.6	4.3	4.0	2.9	2.3
Post-test	OMDD	*M*	9.7	11.3	20.2	21.2	22
		SD	3.5	4.2	3.4	2.5	2.5
	FMDD	*M*	9.5	10.9	18	20.3	19.8
		SD	3.7	4.6	4.4	2.8	4.1

Note. OMDD = Online Moral Dilemma Discussion. FMDD = Face-to-Face Moral Dilemma Discussion

Table 2

Means (M) and Standard Deviations (SD) of Pre- and Post-Tests Scores on Subscales of the Communication Skills Scale

	Condition		Subscales			
			Listening/ Speaking	Nonverbal skills	Assertion	Discussion
Pre-test	OMDD	*M*	1.8	1.9	12.9	4.0
		SD	0.5	0.7	2.5	0.9
	FMDD	*M*	1.6	2.0	14.3	3.6
		SD	0.7	0.8	3.1	1.1
Post-test	OMDD	*M*	1.7	1.9	13.3	4.0
		SD	0.5	0.7	2.4	1.0
	FMDD	*M*	1.7	2.1	14.6	3.9
		SD	0.8	0.7	3.7	1.2

Note. OMDD = Online Moral Dilemma Discussion. FMDD = Face-to-Face Moral Dilemma Discussion

IMPACT AND APPLICABILITY OF ONLINE TOOLS IN FUTURE EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS in MORALITY CLASSES

This study, which focused on student-teachers, found no significant differences in the educational effectiveness of online and face-to-face discussions in terms of improving morality as measured by the CS scale. This finding suggests that online discussions make no difference in the development of thinking and discussion skills, even in situations where face-to-face discussions are difficult to conduct. In other words, online thinking and deliberating morality classes can be conducted in much the same way as face-to-face discussions. Specifically, we can take advantage of the Breakout Room feature in Zoom to implement thinking and deliberating morality classes online. This allows a small number of students to discuss online. Also, face-to-face discussions in multiple small groups in a large room generate a lot of distracting noise, while discussions in the Breakout Room are independent and quiet for each group. Therefore, students can focus on their own discussions. Further, online tools make it easier for students from different schools to deliberate not only with other students of their own country but also with students living abroad. Given that Japanese morality classes have been influenced by Japan's past, being able to easily create an environment where students can deliberate with other people from diverse backgrounds is more meaningful for morality classes than for classes on other subjects.

The finding of little difference between the OMDD and FMDD conditions in terms of the SPS and CS scales is inconsistent with results from previous studies (Fujisawa, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c). Whether this inconsistency is a function of the features of online education or because this study was conducted within the environmental constraints of the COVID-19 could not be determined. Therefore, future researchers should compare the educational effects of OMDD and FMDD discussions under normal conditions. Furthermore, in this study online classes were significantly more effective than face-to-face classes only in the social context of Public Values. In brief, there do seem to be educational benefits to proactively incorporating online tools in discussions among students who are older and can think about morality in a broad perspective.

Finally, the COVID-19 has taken an enormous toll on all of us worldwide. However, if without COVID-19, the GIGA school concept would not have been

pushed forward, and tablets would not have been distributed to all students soon. Bearing this in mind, it is concluded that the COVID-19 has made us realize the potential of online tools to significantly change education in schools. Schools in Japan will be able to restart the FMDD in thinking and deliberating morality classes in the near future. However, this study hopes that online moral discussions will continue as one of the options because online moral discussions allow us to overcome the problem of physical distance in a globalized society and connect with people of different values, both non-face-to-face and face-to-face.

Future Tasks

There are still some issues that have not been clarified by this study. First, differences in the educational effects of continuing with OMDD versus FMDD have not been clarified, although efforts to do so are currently underway. Second, because of this lack of clarity, care must be taken in applying the results of this study to students. Online tools, including Zoom, which it was used in this study, have multiple functions. Thus, in addition to Zoom's Breakout Room features, we can also use features such as chat, conversation subtitles, and whiteboards to drive online discussions. It is possible that online learning tools can be more effective if they are used according to students' developmental stages and educational needs. Examples of areas where such tools can be effective are online discussions with teachers acting as facilitators in the lower grades, small-group discussions held in a Breakout Room in some grades, and chats in adolescent-equivalent grades, where the amount of speech decreases to a level depending on the developmental age of the students. There remains the possibility in conducting thinking and deliberating morality classes that online tools can be used effectively depending on individual students' needs. In short, though this study has some educational benefits of using online learning tools, many tasks remain for future consideration and research.

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