

SEEING SPORTS AS EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES: A POSTWAR HISTORY OF EXTRACURRICULAR SPORTS ACTIVITIES IN JAPAN*

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I. *Introduction*

1. **Aim of This Article**

Japanese youth sports are internationally unique. While youth sports are centered on community clubs outside school in many countries, Japanese youth sports are centered on extracurricular sports activities affiliated with schools. Japanese schools not only offer curricula according to the course of study, but also set extracurricular sports activities. Japanese teachers not only teach students inside the classroom, but also manage extracurricular sports activities outside the classroom. Depending on the assistance of schools and teachers, there are major extracurricular sports activities in which many students participate. This is a distinct aspect of youth sports in Japan, compared with ones in foreign countries, and how the extracurricular sports activities became established and expanded requires examination.

At the theoretical level, the existence of major extracurricular sports activities also implies a strong connection between sports and education in Japan. Although the sports seem to have no necessary relation with school education, Japanese schools have seen sports as educational activities. How and why? To examine these questions, this article applies a historical approach and describes the history of extracurricular sports activities in Japan after World War II on the assumption that the strong connection between sports and education in Japan was constructed through its social, cultural and historical contexts.

This article examines how and why Japanese schools have seen sports as educational activities based on the history of extracurricular sports activities in junior high schools and high schools in Japan from 1945 to 2000s.

2. **Background**

The international uniqueness of Japanese youth sports is shown in Table 1 in a comparison

* This article is based on the author's article "Gakkō undō bukatsudō no sengo shi" [A postwar history of extracurricular sports activities in Japan](Nakazawa, 2011a, 2011b), which was written in Japanese. The article was financially supported by a Grants-in-Aid of Scientific Research by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science.

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TABLE 1. YOUTH SPORTS BY COUNTRY

School-centered	Both community and school		Community-centered
Japan (large scale)	Canada USA Brazil	Poland USSR (current Russia) Israel	Norway Sweden Finland
China South Korea Taiwan	Scotland England Belgium	Egypt Botswana Nigeria	Denmark German Switzerland
Philippines (small scale)	Holland France Spain Portugal	Kenya Malaysia Australia New Zealand	Zaire (current Congo) Yemen Thai

Note: The author made this table according to previous comparative sports studies (*Monbushō* [Ministry of Education] ed., 1968; Bennett et al., 1983; Weiss and Gould eds., 1986; Flath, 1987; Haag et al. eds., 1987; Wagner ed., 1989; De Knop et al. eds., 1996).

of youth sports in various countries. In this table, according to previous comparative sports studies, youth sports in thirty four countries were classified into three categories:

- 1) Community-centered type: Countries where youths play sports in community clubs rather than extracurricular activities affiliated with schools
- 2) Both community and school type: Countries where youths play sports in both community clubs and extracurricular activities affiliated with schools
- 3) School-centered type: Countries where youths play sports in extracurricular activities affiliated with schools rather than community clubs

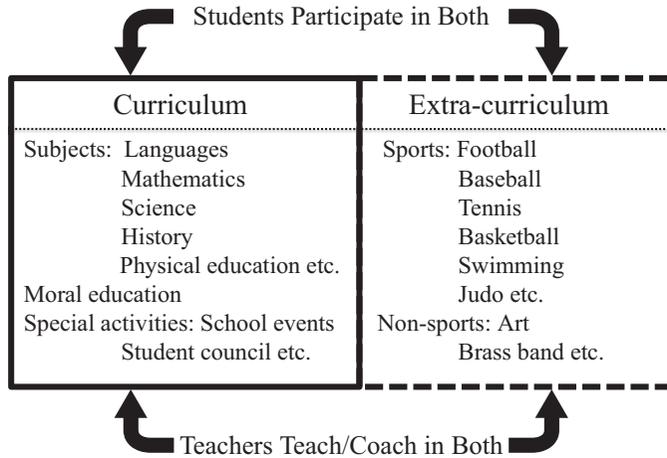
Youth sports in nine countries, including Germany and Scandinavian countries, were of the community-centered type. Next, youth sports in twenty countries, the majority of countries, including North and South America, Australia and Europe (except for Germany and Scandinavian countries) were of the both community and school type. And, youth sports in five Asian countries including Japan were of the school-centered type. However, the scale of school sports in China, South Korea, Taiwan and the Philippines was much smaller than that in Japan. In short, major extracurricular sports activities are a distinct aspect of Japanese youth sports¹.

Next we discuss how extracurricular sports activities are positioned in the Japanese school system. Figure 1 shows the Japanese secondary school system². In Japan, junior high schools and high schools have a curriculum and an extra-curriculum. The curriculum includes subjects (e.g. languages, mathematics, science, history and physical education), moral education and special activities (e.g. school events and student council). And, the extra-curriculum includes

¹ Most sports activities for youths are affiliated with schools in Japan, pointing to a clear connection between sports and education (Cave, 2004; Miller, 2011). Miller (2011), an American cultural anthropologist, argued that Japan remained one of the few nations in the world to place sports under the auspices of a governmental ministry also entrusted to oversee education.

² The Japanese school system after World War II became 6-3-3-4: 6 years of elementary school, 3 years of junior high school, 3 years of high school and 4 years of university. The term of compulsory education was extended to 9 years from elementary school to junior high school, which covered all children aged 6-15. Although high school was not compulsory education, the percentage of students who went to high schools after graduating junior high schools continued to increase. It was 42.5% in 1950 and over 90% in 1974. Thereafter, it stabilized around 97% from the 2000s.

FIGURE 1. JAPANESE SECONDARY SCHOOL SYSTEM



sports (e.g. football, baseball, tennis, basketball, swimming and judo) and non-sports (e.g. art and brass bands). All students compulsorily participate in the curriculum, and after school, many students elect to participate in extracurricular sports activities, not as a subject of physical education. All teachers teach subjects, and many teachers voluntarily coach students in each sport after school even if the teacher is not a physical education teacher.

Schools are the center of youth sports in Japan. Based on a nationwide survey conducted in 2001, the actual situation of extracurricular sports activities in junior high schools and high schools in contemporary Japan is summarized as 1) almost all schools offer extracurricular sports activities, 2) around 70% of junior high school students and 50% of high school students participate in them, 3) around 60% of all teachers coach students voluntarily without any efficient allowances, and there are few professional coaches, 4) about half of the teachers coach more than 5 days per week, 5) many teachers think that the goal is character-building, not winning (*Undōbukatsudō no jittai ni kansuru chyōsa kenkyū kyōryokusha kaigi* [Supporter conference for an investigation regarding the actual situation of extracurricular sports activities], 2002).

As mentioned above, Japanese schools regard extracurricular sports activities as school educational activities. This article examines why there is such a strong connection between sports and education in Japan.

3. Previous Studies³

First we review previous studies that sociologically or historically analyzed extracurricular sports activities in Japan. These studies attempted:

i) to emphasize the uniqueness: Many Japanese studies examined Japanese schooling as a key factor of postwar reconstruction and economic development in Japan. Vogel (1979), the

³ Although this article reviews literature written in English regarding extracurricular sports activities in Japan, there is much other literature written in Japanese. These Japanese literatures were reviewed in Nakazawa (2011a).

author of a well-known book “*Japan as Number One*”, refers to school clubs including extracurricular sports activities as an example of Japanese uniqueness. Cummings (1980) and Rohlen (1983), American researchers who examined Japanese schooling, also mention them as reflecting the unique characteristics of Japanese schooling.

ii) to clarify the functions : Light (2000, 2008), an Australian sociologist, points out the ritual aspects and the functions of students’ learning masculinity in playing high school rugby in a club in Tokyo. Cave (2004), a British cultural anthropologist, points out the function of socializing students and strengthening school order through participating in fieldwork of junior high and high school clubs in Kansai. Blackwood (2010), an American sociologist, points out the function of reproducing the gender order focusing on girl managers in high school baseball clubs.

iii) to describe the prewar history⁴ : Roden (1980), an American historian, describes students’ lifestyles in baseball clubs at *Tōkyō daiichi kōtō gakkō* [Tokyo first higher school] in the Meiji-period. And Blackwood (2008), the above-mentioned American sociologist, describes the history of student baseball in the Meiji-period, focusing on Japanese ideology (e.g. *Bushidō* and *Yakyūdō* [the way of the warrior and the way of baseball]).

However, these previous studies do not clarify the establishment or the expansion of extracurricular sports activities after World War II, which would enable us to understand why extracurricular sports activities became unique in Japan, what kinds of socio-cultural contexts made them possible and how they developed to the present.

Some previous studies on sports and education point out that sports do not always have an educational effect. In the USA, many studies have examined how participation in school sports influences educational, vocational and socioeconomic achievements. Of them, some studies conclude that participation in school sports does not always have positive effects on the students (Hanks and Eckland, 1976; Feltz and Weiss, 1984; Best, 1985; Melnick et al., 1988, 1992; Rees et al., 1990; Spreitzer, 1994; Hanson and Kraus, 1998; Crosnoe, 2001). Other studies claim that school sports have negative effects, for example a decline in academic achievement (Landers et al., 1978) and an acceleration of sexual behavior (Miller et al., 1999). As there is no consensus on the effects of participation in sports, “the educational effect of sports” can be considered unproven or even a myth (Miracle and Rees, 1994; Rees and Miracle, 2000). This article does not assume that sports must be connected to education but considers the educational effect of sports from a socio-cultural context, and adopts a historical approach to examine how and why Japanese schools have seen sports as educational activities throughout postwar history of extracurricular sports activities.

⁴ Extracurricular sports activities in Japan started to be formed in higher education in the latter part of the 19th century, in the Meiji-period. Thereafter, they spread to secondary education from the early 20th century (Guttmann and Thompson, 2001). In short, extracurricular sports activities had already existed before World War II. However, extracurricular sports activities before World War II did not generally depend on the assistance of teachers, schools and policies but depended a great deal on students’ voluntary participation. On the other hand, extracurricular sports activities in junior high and high school after World War II depended a great deal on the assistance of teachers, schools and policies because they were seen as school educational activities. This article examines the major difference between before and after World War II by focusing on its postwar history.

II. Methodology

1. Analysis Framework

This article describes the postwar history of extracurricular sports activities, focusing on the transitions and the relations among the actual situation, policy and discourse. To grasp the actual situation, it is essential to determine how many students participated in extracurricular sports activities. It is also important to grasp the changes in policy on extracurricular sports activities. This involves considering the discourse of physical educators on extracurricular sports activities in order to understand how their meanings and values are reflected in each era. Finally, the relationships among the various actual situations, policies and discourses are examined. This article addresses the following sub questions:

How has the actual situation changed over the years?

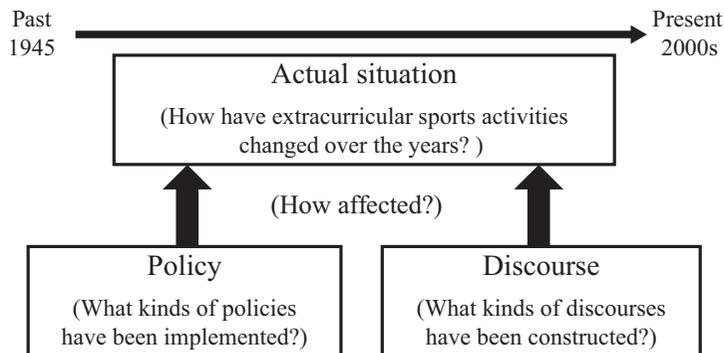
What kinds of policies have been implemented?

What sorts of discourses have been constructed?

And, *How have these policies and discourses affected the actual situations?*

By working through these questions, this study describes the developments of Japanese extracurricular sports activities from 1945 to 2000s. The analysis framework in this article is shown in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2. ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK



2. Documents

We gathered documents regarding the actual situation from six surveys conducted by the national administrative agency, *Monbushō* [Ministry of Education], as shown in Table 2. The documents regarding policy were gathered from *Gakushū sidō yōryō* [Course of study], governmental memos, and *Hoken taiiku shingikai* [Health and Physical Education Council]. The documents regarding discourse were gathered from Japanese professional journals in physical education (*Shin taiiku* [New physical education], *Gakkō taiiku* [School physical education], *Taiikuka kyōiku* [Physical education pedagogy], *Kenkō to tairyoku* [Health and physical strength]), as shown in Table 3.

TABLE 2. SURVEYS CONDUCTED BY *MONBUSHŌ* [Ministry of Education]

Year	Survey title	Source document
1955	<i>Taigai kyōgi / kōnai kyōgi ni kansuru chōsa</i> [Investigation regarding extra / intra-mural sports]	<i>Monbushō shotō chūtō kyōiku kyoku chūtō kyōiku ka</i> [Secondary Education Division in Elementary and Secondary Education Bureau, Ministry of Education] (1956a, 1956b)
1964	<i>Kōritu gakkō taiiku chōsa</i> [Investigation regarding physical education in public schools]	<i>Monbushō taiiku kyoku</i> [Physical Education Bureau, Ministry of Education](1965) <i>Monbushō</i> [Ministry of Education](1966)
1977	<i>Shō / chū / kōtō gakkō niokeru tokubetsu katsudō tō ni kansuru jittai chōsa</i> [Investigation regarding special activities in elementary, junior high and high schools]	<i>Monbushō daijin kanbō chōsa tōkei ka</i> [Research and Statistics Division in Minister's Secretariat, Ministry of Education](1979)
1987	<i>Undō bukatsudō jōkyō chōsa</i> [Investigation regarding extracurricular sports activities]	<i>Monbushō taiiku kyoku taiiku ka</i> [Physical Education Division in Physical Education Bureau, Ministry of Education](1988)
1996	<i>Chūgakusei / kōkōsei no supōtsu katudō ni kansuru chōsa</i> [Investigation regarding sports activities of junior high and high school students]	<i>Chūgakusei / kōkōsei no supōtsu katudō ni kansuru chōsa kenkyū kyōryokusha kaigi</i> [Supporter conference for an investigation regarding sports activities of junior high and high school students](1997)
2001	<i>Undō bukatsudō no jittai ni kansuru chōsa</i> [Investigation regarding actual situation of extracurricular sports activities]	<i>Undō bukatsudō no jittai ni kansuru chōsa kenkyū kyōryokusha kaigi</i> [Supporter conference for an investigation regarding actual situation of extracurricular sports activities](2002)

TABLE 3. JAPANESE PROFESSIONAL JOURNALS IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Year of publication	Title	Editor
1946-1980	<i>Shin taiiku</i> [New physical education]	<i>Shin taiiku kankōkai</i> [Society for publishing new physical education]
1948-2002	<i>Gakkō taiiku</i> [School physical education]	<i>Tōkyō kōtō shihan gakkō taiiku kyōkanshitsu</i> [Laboratory for physical education professors at Tokyo Higher Normal School]
1953-present	<i>Taiikuka kyōiku</i> [Physical education pedagogy]	<i>Nihon taiiku sidōsha renmei</i> [League of Japanese physical educators]
1969-2000	<i>Kenkō to taiiryoku</i> [Health and physical strength]	<i>Monbushō taiiku kyoku</i> [Physical Education Bureau, Ministry of Education]

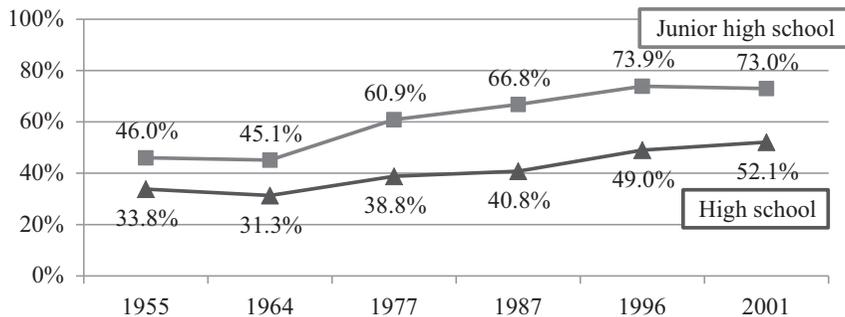
III. Results & Discussion

1. Changes of Actual Situation

Figure 3 shows the changes of students' participation rates of extracurricular sports activities in different eras. The rate of participation of junior high school students in extracurricular sports activities was 46.0% in 1955 and 45.1% in 1964, thereafter, increasing to 73.0% in 2001. In the case of high schools, it was 33.8% in 1955 and 31.3% in 1964, thereafter, increasing to 52.1% in 2001. On the whole, the junior high school and high school students show a similar trend in students' participation rates. That is, they were already high in 1955. Thereafter, they decreased slightly from 1955 to 1964, and increased significantly after 1964.

For this reason, this article divides the postwar process into three stages: "the initial stage" from 1945 to 1950s, "the transition stage" around 1964, and "the expansion stage" from the late 1970s to 1980s. Each of these three stages is discussed in turn below.

FIGURE 3. CHANGES IN PARTICIPATION RATES OF EXTRACURRICULAR SPORTS ACTIVITIES



Source: survey materials shown in Table 2.

2. Policy and Discourse in the Initial Stage: 1945–1950s

In the postwar history of extracurricular sports activities in Japan, what kinds of policies have been implemented, what sorts of discourses have been constructed, and how have these policies and discourses affected the actual situations?

In August 1945, Japan accepted the Potsdam Declaration to remove "all obstacles to the survival and strengthening of democratic tendencies among the Japanese people. Freedom of speech, religion, and of thought, as well as respect for fundamental rights shall be established" (Anderson, 1975, p.61). World War II was over; Japan was a defeated nation and had lost her sovereignty. The General Headquarters of the United Nations started the Occupation and promoted postwar education reforms. Twenty-seven distinguished educators, known as the United States Education Mission to Japan, were invited from the USA. These educators

investigated Japanese education and produced a report that suggested a democratic vision of postwar educational reform (United States Education Mission to Japan, 1946). According to the report, a set of postwar educational reforms was implemented and shifted Japanese school physical education away from a militaristic mindset. Japanese school physical education sought to embrace democratic values. Educational importance was placed on sports as a symbol of democracy. One governmental memo stated:

“The adequate operation of extracurricular sports activities is a driving force of democratic physical education promotion.” (*Monbushō* [Ministry of Education], 1946)

Moreover, a government bureaucrat in charge of physical education policy said:

“From here on, education should focus on students’ spontaneous activities...so, we emphasize sports and extracurricular sports activities.” (*Monbushō taiiku kachō* [Head of Physical Education Division, Ministry of Education], 1947)

The discourse also affected the initial stage. After World War II physical educators reflected on the militarism that dominated physical education in the war. In the early postwar period, they placed importance on sports as they sought to promote a new, free and democratic physical education. For example, the Japanese professional journal *Shin taiiku* [New physical education] in June and July 1947 gathered representatives in the field of physical education and held a discussion meeting on new physical education in postwar Japan. At the meeting, the physical educator Takada said:

“Sports themselves are democratically organized. So, if students correctly play sports, then their democratic characters can be built.” (Takada’s statement: Otani et al., 1947, p.19)

And Professor Otani, a typical physical education academic in the early postwar time, said:

“In particular we emphasize extracurricular sports activities. They have an aspect of self-government. So, we should let students govern themselves as they play sports.” (Otani’s statement: Otani et al., 1947, p.19)

That is, extracurricular sports activities were given a democratic value and seen as a democratic symbol of freedom and self-government. Therefore, students’ participation rates in extracurricular sports activities were already high in the early postwar period.

3. Policy and Discourse in the Transition Stage: Around 1964

Secondly, the policy affected the transition stage around 1964. Tokyo Olympics, which was the first one to be held in Asia, was held in 1964. In association with Tokyo Olympics, the policy of extracurricular sports activities was changed around 1964. Before 1964, it was characterized by elitism. For example, *Hoken taiiku shingikai* [Health and Physical Education Council] (1959, 1960) emphasized “improving sports skills” and “to increase health and body strength” in order to win at the Olympic games. However, the policymakers reconsidered these elitist policies led to a decrease in students’ participation rates in extracurricular sports activities.

By contrast, after 1964, the focus of policy shifted to popularization. For example, *Hoken taiiku shingikai* [Health and Physical Education Council] (1972) emphasized “sports for

everyone” and “rethinking of elitism”. Moreover, in the course of study in 1969 and 1970, “compulsory club activities in the curriculum” were set in addition to conventional extracurricular sports activities, so as to provide sports opportunities to all students. Setting compulsory club activities in the curriculum stimulated the promotion of extracurricular sports activities.

The change in discourse around 1964 also affected the transition stage. Before 1964, the discourse revolved around the question of “how to train elite athletes”. For example, some physical education academics wanted physical education “to be recommended to students and adolescents with high potential abilities” (Noguchi, 1960), “to be planned to produce athletes totally from school physical education” (Honma, 1960) and “to contribute to training students in order to win the Olympic games” (Mori, 1961). Such elitist direction was desirable from the viewpoint of meritocratic education because it was thought that students should improve their abilities to the extent possible in a meritocratic society (Honma, 1960).

But, these discourses were immediately criticized from an equalitarian perspective. After 1964, the discourse shifted to “how to engage everyone in sports”. In other words, Japanese physical educators criticized prioritizing the training of athletes without caring for general students and argued that extracurricular activities must be school educational activities for all students (*Zenkoku kōkō seikatsu sidō kenkyū kyōgikai* [Research conference of nationwide high school students guidance] ed., 1966; Kumeno, 1969). For example, one high school teacher said, “elitism deprives many students of sports opportunities” (Hanawa, 1969). Therefore, “the need for inclusive school sports activities” was demanded (Yamakawa, 1967), setting a high value on equality.

That is, the policy and discourse after 1964 promoted the popularization of extracurricular sports activities to supply every student with equal opportunities to sports. As a result, students’ participation rates in extracurricular sports activities began to increase.

4. Discourse in the Expansion Stage: Late 1970s–1980s

Thirdly, the discourse, rather than the policy, affected the process of expansion from the late 1970s to 1980s. The percentage of students who went to high school after compulsory junior high school exceeded 90% in the late 1970s. Schooling until 18 years old was standard for almost all adolescents in this era. In other words, schooling enlarged and went deep into adolescents’ lives. Against the backdrop of enlargement and deepening of schooling, schools and teachers had to handle a broad range of students and to face many problems with students’ misbehavior (e.g. alcohol, tobacco and violence). Therefore, schools and teachers began using extracurricular sports activities to eliminate these problems. For example, a junior high school teacher said the following under the title “extracurricular activities are stopping delinquency”:

“Letting students break a sweat, having students released from their frustrations and depriving students of time for misconduct are very useful for preventing delinquency. Extracurricular activities are important in these respects.” (Hayashi, 1980, p.43)

“It is good to coach students until late everyday (in extracurricular sports activities) so as to deprive students of the time and physical strength to slip into evil ways.” (Hayashi, 1980, p.43)

Thereafter, Japanese professional journal *Gakkō taiiku* [School physical education] in August 1981 put together special issues of “prevention of delinquency and physical education, sports”. In the special issues, Professor Suzuki (1981), an educational psychologist, argued that sports had both a preventive aspect to remove stress and a caring aspect to rehabilitate juvenile delinquents. Moreover, the special issues included some practical reports. For example, one report “aiming for a school without any delinquency” by a junior high school teacher argued that letting students participate in extracurricular activities had the effect of preventing delinquency (Tosaka, 1981). And, another report by a supervisor of the Board of Education “something that changes a delinquent student” argued that a delinquent student who participated in extracurricular sports activities was rehabilitated (Ibata, 1981). However, we do not know whether extracurricular sports activities truly rehabilitated a delinquent student. So, we should not assume “an educational effect of sports” in this article. Nevertheless, there were many discourses on using extracurricular sports activities in order to prevent delinquency. That is, discipline was emphasized in discourse regarding extracurricular sports activities, and many schools and teachers regarded them as necessary for disciplining students. As a result, extracurricular sports activities were significantly expanded, and students’ participation rates continued to increase.

IV. *Conclusion*

This article examines how and why Japanese schools have seen sports as educational activities based on postwar history of extracurricular sports activities, focusing on the transitions and the relations among the actual situations, policies and discourses. As shown in Figure 4, the conclusion of this article is summarized as follows:

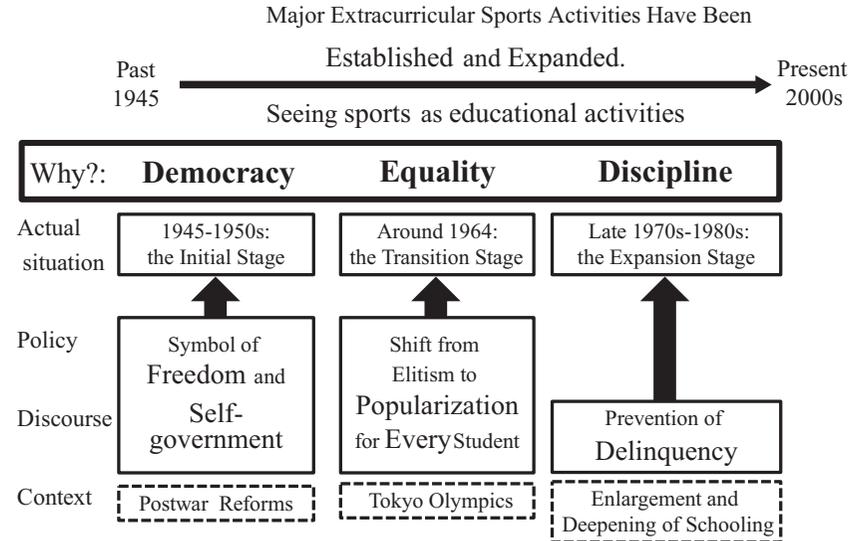
1. The initial stage from 1945 to 1950s was affected by the policy and discourse in the context of postwar reforms. After World War II, a set of educational reforms shifted Japanese school physical education from a militaristic to a democratic mindset. Thereafter, extracurricular sports activities were seen as a democratic symbol of freedom and self-government. Extracurricular sports activities after World War II differed from those previously as schools and teachers strove to promote democratic values through extracurricular sports activities.

2. The transition stage around 1964 was affected by the policy and discourse in the context of the Tokyo Olympics. In line with the Tokyo Olympics, the policy was characterized by elitism. And the discourse focused mostly on students with high-level skills in advance of the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. However, after the Olympics, the policy and discourse reacted against such elitism because many students with low-level skills were deprived of sports opportunities. As a result, extracurricular sports activities were popularized and expanded to provide every student with equal opportunities to participate in sports.

3. The expansion stage from the late 1970s to 1980s was affected by the discourse in the context of enlargement and deepening of schooling. Schools and teachers began using extracurricular sports activities to eliminate problems with students’ misbehavior. In other words, extracurricular sports activities were seen as a tool to prevent students’ delinquency and a means of disciplining delinquent students. Therefore, extracurricular sports activities were significantly expanded for discipline.

4. Through these stages, major extracurricular sports activities have been established and

FIGURE 4. THE POSTWAR HISTORY OF EXTRACURRICULAR SPORTS ACTIVITIES IN JAPAN



expanded in postwar Japan. That is, Japanese schools have seen sports as necessary for democracy, equality and discipline in various periods in its postwar history. In conclusion, Japanese schools have regarded sports as an integral part of Japanese education, seeking to promote democracy, equality and discipline in Japanese socio-cultural contexts.

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