

Issues future directions in foreign language education in Japan

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Japan's educational policy is undergoing a major change. The following three principles are mentioned as essential in the attainment of academic proficiency: 1. knowledge and skills, 2. thinking, decision-making and the ability to express oneself, and 3. the enhancement of the will to learn and develop human character. Up until now, the emphasis in education has been on the acquisition of knowledge and skills, with the result that students at all levels acquired knowledge and skills without acquiring the ability to integrate them for higher cognitive and social purposes. The shift in emphasis to the acquisition of the ability to integrate the knowledge and skills to think, make decisions and to express one's ideas and opinions, has brought about a change in the attainment of Can-do criteria as a major goal in the learning of foreign languages from elementary school to high school. Along with the introduction of four skills tests to replace the present university entrance examinations, the shift is hoped to become a major impetus in raising the foreign language proficiency level as well as the confidence level of the Japanese students in communicating in foreign languages. Although these changes are mentioned primarily in reference to the teaching of English, the same principles and goals will also be expected in the teaching of other foreign languages as well.