

Teaching Silence:

Educational Approaches to Buraku Issues

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In schools, students learn what is important, what is to be valued, and what is to be hidden; silence as a form of suppressing ideas. This paper examines how youth experience silence surrounding buraku issues in two different schools. In it, I argue that lessons in school can either replicate silence as the status quo approach to buraku issues, or they can reshape and challenge these understandings. I begin by examining the national standards for how buraku issues are to be engaged in schools through the national Dōwa (assimilation) education. These lessons provide formal and informal lessons on what it means to be burakumin and how that social identity is viewed by the majority society.

Christopher Bondy is an Associate Professor of Sociology and the Coordinator for Japan Studies at International Christian University, Tokyo. His research examines contemporary buraku issues, with an emphasis on the day-to-day experiences of burakumin. In addition, he conducts research and has published on the gap between policies on and implementation of minority education. His current research project centers on the representations of minorities in Japanese textbooks and the manner in which schools with minority populations respond. Bondy has been a post-doctoral fellow at the Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies at Harvard University and a visiting professor at the University of Tokyo, Graduate School of Education.

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