

SPORTS & ICU

Yuko Nonaka (AN reporter)



Physical Education Department Senior Associate Professor Ryoko Mitsuhashi

Experiencing Diversity Through the Body

Relationship Between Liberal Arts and Physical Education

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Some of your friends must find it hard to believe you took archery or wadaiko (Japanese drum) courses in college. We all know that life at ICU is far from banal. The PE program is no exception. Alumni News (AN) student reporter Yosuke Hikabe interviewed Physical Education Department Senior Associate Professor Ryoko Mitsuhashi.

The PE program at ICU started with two credits in physical training and two credits for lectures, in accordance with the 1956 Standards for the Establishment of Universities. PE was deleted from the standards when it was amended in 1991 to allow each institution to set its own curriculum according to its mission. From then on, PE courses were optional. But ICU still requires students to take 4 credits and offers some unusual courses in practical training. Students and faculty use the English term “PE” for the physical education program, because it is not synonymous with the conventional “taiiku” (physical education) programs in Japan.

We have courses in the curriculum that normally would not be considered a sport.

AN: You have courses that are not very common (see chart) like Wadaiko. Would you call that a sport? When did this trend start and why?

Mitsuhashi: I joined the ICU faculty in 1986. By then ICU already had courses like archery, kendo, ethnic dancing and trampolining (since dropped). The university was probably the first to offer tai chi and wadaiko courses. This diversity epitomizes ICU’s philosophy of having PE as part of its liberal arts education. The program here is not just about physical training or learning the rules of a sport, but a process of learning the diverse aspects of physical movement.

AN: What does that mean?

Mitsuhashi: In team sports such as basketball, volleyball, and soccer, when you pass the ball to your teammate, you must consider his height or speed. You adjust and control your passes according to whoever it is you are playing with. This is a form of non-verbal communication. In PE, we emphasize physical communication with others. Wadaiko also involves non-verbal communication. When you teach a person to play, you have to demonstrate the piece physically, by beating the drum or vocalizing the rhythm. The feeling of oneness that comes in drumming together is also a form of non-verbal communication. In social dance, you have standard steps. But when the couple makes a turn, the man leads his partner by shifting his balance and putting pressure on his partner’s waist with his palm. Students who practice social dance are also taught how dance developed in European culture. Movement for ethnic dancing will differ according to whether it was done in a rice-paddy, or on firm ground. Students learn how cultures affect movement. Your frame of mind will differ according to your movements. Tai chi and yoga emphasize self-reflection. You are communicating with yourself. A quiet moment of reflection will bring movements totally different from those of team sports or wadaiko. We want our students to experience various sports to feel the difference in how the body moves. You come to feel different cultures through your body. This is why we feel PE is part of liberal arts.



Everybody enjoys PE according to their needs

AN: When you consider adding a sport to the curriculum, I suppose the criteria would be whether it fulfills the university’s mission in liberal arts.

Mitsuhashi: Of course. For example, in scuba diving, we use the deeper corner of the swimming pool to go under water using diving apparatus. We started offering this course ten years ago, because the required physical movements differ totally from swimming on the surface of the water. We also find it important to try to meet diverse student needs. Recently, there are many students who are overwhelmed with mental stress or have communication problems. Because of this background, we now offer yoga. Just telling students to get moving because they are young does not work. PE may give some of them the opportunity to reflect on their physical condition.

AN: In terms of student diversity, you have students with special needs. How do they participate in the PE courses, if they cannot move along with the others?

Mitsuhashi: We don’t exempt them from PE courses or award credits for observing the courses. Compulsory courses aren’t just what every student must take. They should be something everyone can enjoy. Physically-challenged students may not have been able to enjoy PE courses at school before college. But at ICU, they don’t have to do things the way others do it. We want students to enjoy physical activity according to their ability.

For example, Professor Shin Takahashi made a special frame for a visually-challenged student who took the archery course. He could pull the bowstring along the frame and the arrow would fly towards the target. For a student with muscular dystrophy, we designed a blowgun game, in which he used the muscles that he could move. Everybody can enjoy PE at ICU.

Enhancing health literacy is our goal

AN: Why are freshmen required to take lecture courses Sports Science and Health Education?

Mitsuhashi: Sports Science offers a scientific understanding of the body and the effects of exercise and training. Freshmen take this course and the PE Basic 1 course in the same term. These are complementary courses. After a jog in the Basic course, we measure the heart rate and use this data in the lecture to calculate calories burnt and explain why the body feels tired. Students feel the actual change in their bodies in the physical training courses and the lecture explains why. With this foundation, they

can work out what is best for them in terms of physical exercise.

AN: What about the Health Education course?

Mitsuhashi: Students learn how the body works and about problems that can affect health such as anorexia, drug abuse and depression. In an age where we are deluged with information about health, you have to judge what is best for you. Overdependence on doctors should be avoided: it will be important for us to make independent decisions about our own health.

AN: Would that be described as enhancing health literacy?

Mitsuhashi: Yes. For example, accurate information about depression will help you communicate better with a family member or close friend coping with the condition. Recently, we also asked a lecturer specializing in gender problems to talk about diversity in sexual preference.

AN: I now understand why PE at ICU differs so much from the traditional Japanese idea of “taiiku.”

Mitsuhashi: Good. The other thing about PE at ICU is that we have a spacious campus that gives us room to move our body in different settings. That is so rare for universities in Tokyo. When the indoor and outdoor facilities are not in use for PE or club activities, students are free to use them. By moving the body, we learn a lot. I hope more students will want to make full use of the environment for exercise or other physical activity.

PE practical training courses

Basic 1

Students take this course in the spring term of their freshman year for exercises such as stretching, jogging, and swimming. The course aims to train students to be able to continue workouts that raise the heart rate to 120/min. for 20 minutes. We coach those who cannot swim. Those who can will swim for about 400*500 m continuously.

Basic 2

Students take this course in the autumn term of their freshman year. The content of the course depends on the instructor, but usually students will be playing team sports. The theme is communication through physical activity.

After taking Basic 1 and 2, students choose four courses from:

◎Team sports:

flying disc, softball, futsal, soccer, volleyball, basketball

◎Dual sports:

tennis, table-tennis, badminton

◎Individual sports:

golf, archery, swimming, aqua sports

◎Self-testing activities:

yoga, weight-training, physical conditioning, movement awareness, fitness

◎Martial sports:

kendo, kendo kata (form), tai chi, aikido

◎Rhythms and dance:

Japanese ethnic dancing, social dancing, rhythms and dance, creative wadaiko

◎Games and crafts:

games and craft, camp and craft