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*\* Serial\* Home Economics Education in Japan 1*

This serial focuses on the characteristics and current issues surrounding home economics education in Japan, while also providing a historical perspective.

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## Home Economics as Citizenship Education in Japan : The Creative Challenge of Curriculum and Practice

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Citizenship education, consumer citizen, collaborative learning, curriculum theory, curriculum development, home economics education

### Preface

The Serial “Home Economics Education in Japan ” is organized by the Japan Association of Home Economics Education (JAHEE), and aims to introduce Japanese Home economics education to our international colleagues in IFHE and any others in our field. JAHEE has already published two books in English: *Home Economics Education in Japan* (2004) and *Home Economics Education in Japan 2012*. This time, the serial “Home Economics Education in Japan” will focus more on the details of several major topics, such as describing current educational issues, historical achievements of co-education and new challenges of home economics studies.

The first issue of this serial aims to describe and discuss the current creative challenge of Japanese home economics curriculum and practice, mainly focusing on Consumer citizenship education.

### Introduction

Since the 1990s, citizenship education has increasingly come to assume a central role in the mainstream of the educational revolution in Europe, the U.S., and other countries, including Japan, because of nations’ and societies’ requirements to solve or to negotiate complex issues like democracy, the environment and peace at the national and global levels. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, citizenship especially came to focus on consumers and sustainable development and thus acquired a new name: consumer citizenship.

A consumer citizen is defined as an “individual who makes choices based on ethical, social, economic and ecological considerations and actively contributes to sustainable development by caring and acting responsibly on family, national and global levels” (Consumer Citizenship Network). In light of this development, how does home economics relate to citizenship education on both theoretical and practical levels, and what are the possibilities for home economics, as a school subject, to nurture citizenship among students? There has not been a great deal of research and discussion so far on citizenship curriculum theory, curriculum design, and actual analysis of lesson practice based on

theoretical frameworks in home economics. Accordingly, this paper discusses how home economics can meet the challenge of providing citizenship learning through various types of curriculum and practice.

In this paper, at first, some of the main theoretical frameworks of home economics as citizenship education are discussed: the IFHE position statement and practical reasoning theory from the U.S.. Secondly, the required competencies which can develop good citizenship are analyzed using the indicator proposed by European Commission, DeSeCo's key competencies and the coalescence of Japanese home economics education goals with the key competencies. Thirdly, the requirement of citizenship education in Japan and home economics' potential as citizenship education are investigated. Finally, some of the creative lesson practices of home economics in Japan which nurture citizenship literacy among students are analyzed.

### **The Theoretical Framework of Home Economics as Citizenship Education**

As a theoretical framework, the following statements from the field of home economics indicate how the discipline of home economics relates to the concept of citizenship. The first one is the IFHE's Position Statement (IFHE, 2008), the common internationally-agreed notion of our field, which describes that Home Economics contains a societal area of practice "to influence and develop policy to advocate for individuals, families and communities to achieve empowerment and wellbeing, to utilize transformative practices, and to facilitate sustainable futures". One of the influential theories behind this statement may be the discourse of Marjorie M. Brown (1984), who declared that home economics need to develop the attitude and competence to seek out the implications of existing social conditions and to ask whether other alternatives would be better for those we seek to serve. Brown's discourse was further developed and applied to curriculum theory in several states in the U.S.. Janet Laster, who developed practical reasoning teaching strategy on the basis of Brown's theory in Ohio State, indicated the following: "Through questioning and practical reasoning, critical literacy promotes reflection, especially self-reflection, transformation and action." "In Home Economics and Family and Consumer Sciences Education, critical literacy processes are nurtured through practical problem-based curriculum experiences. (Laster, 2008:262)

All of these statement and curriculum theories show that home economics is a subject which makes student examine their lives, from the private sphere to the public, identify their problems, and try to solve them, which means that home economics is a subject that can nurture problem-solving literacy within students to improve their wellbeing by means of practical reasoning processes. These features indicate that home economics, embodying the discipline of citizenship, is one of the core school subjects which can develop citizenship literacy among students.

### **Competencies required for Citizenship and Education Goals of Home Economics**

Which competencies are required to develop citizenship? European Communities (2008) defined Civic Competency according to the following five indicators: 1) Knowledge of key elements of political and legal systems (human rights, social rights, duties, etc.). 2) Skills to distinguish a statement of fact from an opinion, to resolve conflicts in a peaceful way, etc. 3) Attitude of feeling responsible for one's decisions and actions, in particular, in relation to other citizens, etc. 4) Values that respect human rights (freedom, diversity and equality), a belief in the need to preserve the environment, respect for differences, etc. 5) Intended behavior of being active in the community, to be active in civil society, to be active in the political community. In Japan, approximately the very same framework of

competencies, composed of knowledge, skills and consciousness/attitude, required for citizenship into play, is described in the documents made by the research committee organized by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (Arai, 2007: 41-42).

The other framework of competencies required for developing citizenship that is currently influential in Japanese education is the “Key competencies” designated by DeSeCo (Definition and Selection of Competencies), one of the educational projects in OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development). It states that people should nurture the following three key competencies required for individuals over a life-long term to face the complex challenges of today’s world: which is; 1) “Use tools interactively” i: language, symbols and texts, ii: knowledge and information, iii: technology. 2) “Interact in heterogeneous groups” i: relate well to others, ii: cooperate, work in teams, iii: manage and resolve conflicts. 3) “Act autonomously” i: act within the big picture, ii: form and conduct life plans and personal projects, iii: defend and assert rights, interests, limits and needs. All of the above are closely related to each other, and at the center of these three competencies lies “Reflectiveness (reflective thought and action)”. Reflectiveness implies the use of metacognitive skills, creative abilities and taking a critical stance, enabling individuals to reach a level of social maturity that allows them to distance themselves from social pressures, take different perspectives, make independent judgments and take responsibility for their actions (D. S. Rychen & L. H. Salganik, 2003).

Accordingly, how do the educational goals of Japanese Home Economics relate to these Competencies? Figure 1 shows how the Home Economics Goals of the 2008-2009 Course of Study correlate with the three Key Competencies. Goal A, “Use knowledge and technology interactively as is necessary for daily living”, closely relates to the competency of “Use tools interactively”. Goal B, “Relate well to family and close members of society, cooperate and manage family issues and daily living”, dovetails with the competency of “Interact in heterogeneous groups”. In addition, goal C, “Form life plans, think and act for better life and assert wellbeing and basic needs for human life”, relates to the competency of “Act autonomously”. From these view points, we may say that the competencies required for developing citizenship could be appropriately nurtured in home economics.

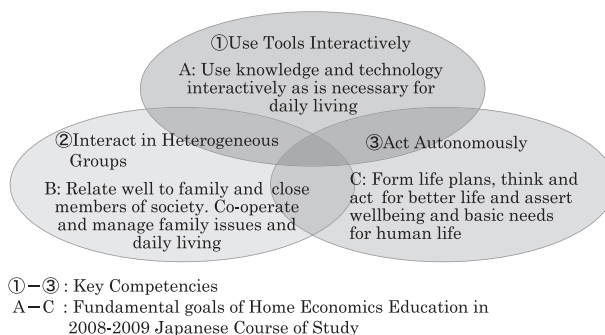


Figure 1: How Do Home Economics' Goals Relate to Key Competencies?

### Requirements of Citizenship Education in Japan

What are the requirements of citizenship education in Japan? In Japan, the societal goals are to make a society in which people are free to demonstrate their abilities and be positive about participating in social activities to create better situations. To achieve this goal, education should aim to nurture people’s ability to demonstrate individuality, to fulfill self realization and to participate and

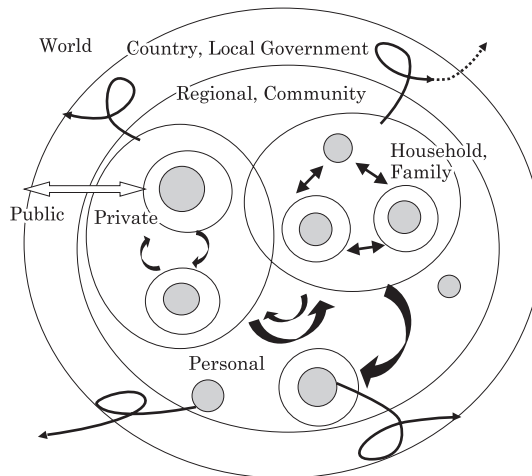


Figure 2: The appeal of citizenship: How Private relates to Public

contribute in creating a better society.

Figure 2 shows an image of active citizenship from the private to public spheres, highlighting the necessary mutual relationships (Arai, 2007:48). Each individual expresses his/her opinion and collaborates with other individuals, such as family members, friends and relatives, and, in turn, each group collaborates with other groups in the community, local area, wider country, and beyond, further global collaboration is also possible. We need to empower ourselves to express our opinions and take action that involves creative and multi-layered collaboration with others in our lives.

### The potential of Home Economics as Citizenship Education

To empower students who will face the complex challenges of today's global world, Japan's 2008-2009 Course of Study placed more emphasis on "Competencies" such as reading and writing, scientific and mathematical literacy, critical thinking, judging and expressing as the main points of focus. In addition, it pinpointed as key "Learning methods", problem solving, inquiry based activity and collaborative work. Furthermore, as "Contents", the environment, food, consumer citizenship, gender equality, welfare and aging issues were earmarked for greater attention than ever before.

These points of focus are fundamental to every subject; however, home economics has possibilities to further develop them. Because, compared to other school subjects, home economics is able to include everyday life problems, which need to be solved, directly into the lesson content, and through the study of home economics, students attain the self-awareness and self-activation that is necessary for understanding the social dimension of modern life problems (Arai, 2005:80).

From these considerations, we may say that, home economics of Japan has great potential in terms of fostering citizenship, with its wide range of learning contents easily extendable and applicable to citizenship education that utilize the explorative learning methods encouraged by the official Course of Study. Furthermore, in the framework of home economics goals, creative citizenship is at the core, to be nurtured through the Key competencies.

### Analysis of Japanese H.E. Lesson Practice focusing on Citizenship

Chart 1 shows three examples of creative lesson plans which have been developed and practiced by Japanese home economics teachers for nurturing citizenship in students.

The first is a lesson regarding the study area of “Housing” for 5<sup>th</sup> grade students in an elementary school, which asks students to develop ideas to improve the school space by themselves and express them to the principal (Arai & Asano, 2009). It utilized the study methods of practical reasoning and problem solving, and the contents were: to identify inconvenient spaces in the whole school, plan ideas to make them better, and then write a proposal and submit it to the principal. Some of the ideas were actually implemented by school.

The second is a lesson on the study areas of “Consumerism”, “Resource management” and “Clothing” for 8<sup>th</sup> grade students. The aim of this learning is to nurture students as good “prosumers” (a portmanteau term combining “producer” and “consumer”), and the contents are: students make pouches and wallets using the traditional textiles of the region and sell them in the local market by themselves (Suzuki, 2007). They tried to make good-quality pouches and wallets by honing their sewing skills, and discuss how to sell the items using practical reasoning and collaboration with each other.

The third is a lesson on the study area of “ the Elderly and Welfare” for 10<sup>th</sup> grade students. The topic is to propose a better life plan for the elderly in the community. In this lesson, students respond to the concerns of two elderly people, who have difficulty in living by themselves in the region: one desires to stay at her own home by getting public welfare support, while the other hopes to move in the collective housing where he can get good care without losing his privacy. Students gather information, do fieldwork and make assessments of several possible ways to help, find the best way to meet the individual needs of each person (Arai, Yoshikawa & Oshima, 1999). Students’ levels of satisfaction in these studies were very high, and most students reflected on themselves that they had been able to collaborate well with others, think deeply and widen their perspectives through the lessons.

Chart 1 e.g. of Home Economics Creative Lesson Practice Nurturing Citizenship among Students

School Level	Topic	Study Area	Methods & Contents
5 <sup>th</sup> Grade (Elementary School)	Design and propose better school space	Housing	<Practical reasoning/ Problem solving> Find inconvenient spaces in school, plan ideas to make them better.
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade (Junior High School)	Become a good Prosumer	Consumer / Resource management / Clothing	<Practical reasoning/ Collaborative work> Make Pouches& wallets using traditional textiles of the region and sell them in the local market by themselves.
10 <sup>th</sup> Grade (Senior High School)	Propose a better life plan for the elderly in the community	Elderly & Welfare	<Practical reasoning/ Inquiry based activity> Respond to the questions of two elderly people who have difficulty in living in the region. Gather information, do fieldwork and make assessments of several ways to help.

The lesson plans described above utilize the following common features of creative lesson practice for nurturing citizenship.

- Making a learning structure which contains perspectives ranging from oneself/ family to wider community/ society.
- Organizing collaborative learning in which students can share new knowledge and findings.
- Making a learning path for improving students’ decision-making and critical literacy through problem solving and practical reasoning processes.

## Future Tasks

In Japan, Home Economics is a compulsory co-educational subject from the 5th grade to the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>st</sup> grade. However, it is one of the subjects with the fewest hours per week in the curriculum, so we have serious difficulties in developing such creative, inquiry based learning as we are suffering from this shortage of learning hours (JAHEE, 2012). From this aspect, we need to demand more lesson hours and to emphasize the large potential of our subject to the government. To do this, we need to develop and share the common understanding among members of our profession that nurturing citizenship from the view-point of creating better well-being is at the very core of the Home Economics discipline. In addition, we need to appeal more actively to other professions that the competencies home economics aims for are closely related to the civic competencies outlined by the EU, OECD and other prominent international organizations. Finally, we need to develop creative home economics lessons containing inquiry based learning and open our doors to international colleagues to help make creative and collaborative networks on a global scale.

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