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** Serial * Home Economics Education in Japan 8*

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 Education to Nurture the Leaders of a Sustainable Society

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sustainable lifestyle, sustainable consumption, home economics education, ESD

Sustainable Society and Home Economics Education

The word ‘sustainable society’ was introduced in the new course of study by The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in Japan in order to develop future leaders of a sustainable society with an emphasis on harmony and social justice with the natural environment. The new course of study was enforced in the 2011 fiscal year for elementary school, in 2012 for junior high school, and in 2013 for high school.

The word ‘sustainable’ comes from ‘sustainable development,’ an international key word, which is a concept that was taken up as a central idea of the report, “Our Common Future,” which was published by the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987. Sustainable development is defined in the report as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” And the concept includes the idea that development and the environment are not intended to be mutually exclusive, that they may coexist, and that development in consideration of environmental protection is important.

In home economics in schools, the goal is to establish a lifestyle that considers how to consume resources while the environment is enhanced through teaching from the point of view that motivates consumers to live proactively in society.

The Realization of a Sustainable Society: Personal Effort in Collaboration with Others

In home economics class, students have been doing problem-solving learning in which they consider their day-to-day life, and become aware of the problems in it, collect the information

necessary for the resolution, select the solution and practice, and try to continue to live creatively. Problem-solving learning has been done in various areas in home economics in all levels of schools in Japan. And especially at the high school level, problem-solving learning, referred to as “Home Projects, and School Home Economics Club Activities” has been part of the curriculum since 1948. The process of teaching and learning by this method is shown in Figure 1.

“Home Project” refers to activities in which students review their own family life, plan to resolve the various issues that were found there, practice the project, make a record and evaluate the results, and present the findings in the class with discussion. Some themes in the past were ‘Think of a way to stay cool in summer,’ ‘Make a snack for your little brother,’ ‘Think of the type and use of detergents in your home.’ In the “School Home Economics Club Activities,”

the teacher instructs students to set themes relating to their community life, to examine ways to solve the issues, to make plans and practice the plans, and to acquire skills to scientifically examine their life and solve problems through these activities. Some themes in the past were ‘Join the recycling movement of your region’ and ‘Let’s examine the possibility of barrier-free buildings in school and community.’

On the other hand, in the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014), education is required to include participatory teaching and learning methods that motivate and empower learners to change their behavior and take action for sustainable development. Education for Sustainable Development consequently promotes competencies like critical thinking, imagining future scenarios and making decisions in a collaborative way.

Problem-solving learning in home economics class and Education for Sustainable Development are very similar both in the purpose and the process of learning.

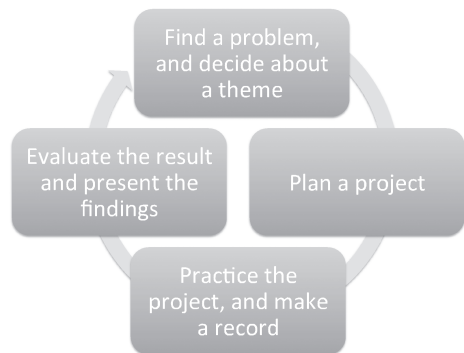


Figure 1. Process of Home Projects, and school Home Economics Club Activities

Contents of Home Economics Education for Sustainable Lifestyle

Let me explain the meaning of sustainable lifestyle in Home Economics.

First, I would like to explain the Course of Study in Home Economics in Japan. The Course of Study announced by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, defines the learning objectives and contents of each subject for all schools in Japan. The Course of Study is revised approximately every ten years in accordance with social changes and educational needs. Based on the Course of Study, textbooks are written by university scholars and school teachers, and class plans are created at individual schools. The latest Course of Study was implemented in elementary schools in 2011, in junior high schools in 2012, and in senior high schools in 2013.

Home Economics is compulsory for all school levels. Table 1 shows the contents of this Home Economics study which was recently implemented.

Table1. Contents of Home Economics

| Elementary School | Junior High School | Senior High School (Integrated Home Economics) |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| A. Family and Family Life | A. Family, Home and Child Growth | 1. Human Life, Family and Home |
| B. Daily Meals and Basics in Cooking | B. Food, Cooking and Independent Life | 2. Relationship with Children and Elderly People, and Welfare |
| C. Comfortable Clothing and Housing | C. Clothing, Housing and Independent Life | 3. Financial Planning and Consumption in Life |
| D. Daily Consumption and Environment | D. Daily Consumption and Environment | 4. Life Science and the Environment |
| | | 5. Life Planning |
| | | 6. Home Projects and School Home Economics Club Activities |

There are four categories which are similar for the elementary and junior high schools: ‘Family,’ ‘Food and Cooking,’ ‘Clothing and Housing,’ and ‘Consumption and the Environment.’ In Integrated Home Economics which is one of the three subjects in senior high school, there are six categories: ‘Human Life, Family and Home,’ ‘Relationship with Children and Elderly People, and Welfare,’ ‘Financial Planning and Consumption in Life,’ ‘Life Science and the Environment,’ ‘Life Planning,’ and ‘Home Projects and School Home Economics Club Activities.’ The topics defined by sustainable lifestyle are included mainly in category D in elementary and junior high school, and categories 3 and 4 in Integrated Home Economics in senior high school, and this area covers a lot of content. In elementary school and junior high school, the area covering sustainable development is called: ‘Daily consumption and the Environment,’ and approaches the topic from the point of view of cultivating an attitude to live as sustainable consumers. In senior high school, the approach becomes more practical, preparing students to live what they learn as adults.

In elementary school, students learn practical skills, such as how to choose and how to buy goods, and environmental friendly ways of using things in the area in connection with the other three areas, ‘Family and Family Life,’ ‘Daily Meals and Basics in Cooking,’ and ‘Comfortable Clothing and Housing.’ For example, one content area is “trying to clean up in consideration of the environment” at the time of cooking. Students learn to reduce refuse, to be careful with the amount of water used, and to try to reduce the quantity of dirty water. In another example focusing on summer under ‘Housing,’ students learn good use of a variety of cooling equipment, and the effect of the green curtains, blinds, watering, and a rooftop garden. For winter, students learn the importance of taking the sunshine into the room and maintaining the warmth, the use of utilizing the various types of heating appliances, and housing with environmentally conscious design. And in order to reduce the refuse without wasting earth resources and contaminating the environment, students learn how to reuse clothing, recycle containers and packaging, and find and use the kind of labels needed for reusing and recycling. For washing with environmental concerns in mind, students learn that a lot of water is needed in rinsing if we use more detergent than the necessary amount, and extra detergent pollute rivers and lakes.

In junior high school, students are taught to think about the impact that one's personal and family consumption has on the environment, and to be able to devise and practice a consumer life that takes the environment into consideration. For example, students learn about ecological ways of cooking considering energy and resources used for products in the process of production, energy used in transportation from the place of production, efficient ways in using appliances and in cleaning up dishes, and ecological way of disposing of food scraps. And students learn how to use and interpret the quality indication and environmental information of labels. Students also think about food

packaging by comparing recyclable containers with disposable containers, and think about choosing products considering their environmental impact in addition to price and convenience. And students check the consumption of electricity, gas, and water and the amount of refuse at home, and think about the relationship between living and the environment, and try to practice an ecological way of living.

In senior high school, students learn to understand the relationship between human life and the environment, and proactively practice a sustainable lifestyle based on scientific data and an economic viewpoint about life and tradition and the creation of the life culture. For example, in the subject, ‘Comprehensive Home Economics,’ in the food area, the Life Cycle Assessment of food is taught, and includes topics such as virtual water, food in season, food miles, and local production for local consumption. Life Cycle Assessment is a technique to assess the environmental impact associated with all the stages of a product’s life from cradle to grave.

In textiles, students learn to plan to manage their own clothing through reuse or recycling. In the area, ‘Consumption Behavior and Decision Making,’ students learn to understand the process and importance of decision making in consumption, and to proactively make decisions as consumers. Students learn that needs and wants are different with each person’s values and lifestyles, and consumers should think about them in order to make satisfying purchases, while also thinking about how their consumer behavior affects society. Students are taught to think about globalization of the economy and understand the importance of sustainable consumption and think ‘what a true affluence is’ for all kinds of people in the world by studying about Fairtrade. Fairtrade is an alternative approach to

conventional trade and is based on a partnership between producers and consumers. When farmers can sell on Fairtrade terms, it provides them with a better deal and improved terms of trade. This allows them the opportunity to improve their lives and plan for their future. Fairtrade offers consumers a powerful way to reduce poverty through their every day shopping. Student activities include looking for goods with Fairtrade marks and examining how the goods they own were produced. Students come to understand that ‘Consumer behavior changes society,’ and ‘buying a product means a vote for a company.’ Students also learn CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility), the idea that all organizations should realize and discharge their social responsibility for sustainable development of society, a concept demonstrated by ISO 26000 (which is International Standard: Guidance on social responsibility). Many companies upload CSR reports on their homepage, so students can read them

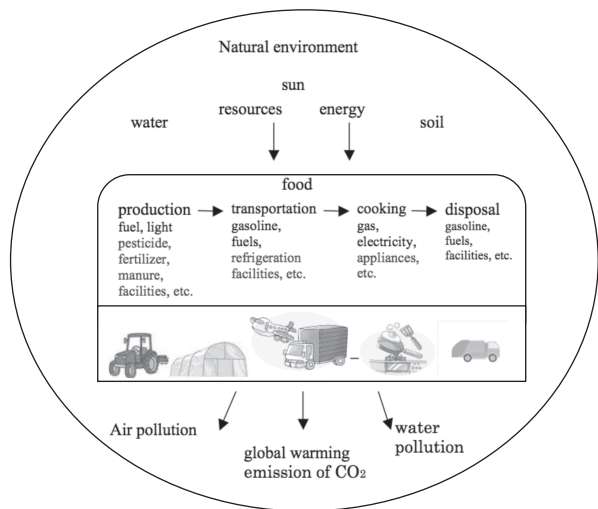


Figure2. The relationship between food and environment

Note: There are two kinds of energy.

Direct energy: oil, light, gasoline, gas and other fuel used directly.

Indirect energy: oil, light, gasoline, gas and other fuel used from making facilities and equipments

and discover what kind of activities the companies are doing. In the class, students realize that they had not known about CSR reports, and that the report was very useful to understand companies.

And the message, 'Think globally, act locally.' is also explained to students. The message urges people to consider the health of the entire planet and to take action in their own communities and cities. Other student activities include examining energy self-sufficiency rates in other countries in the world, and finding out the carbon dioxide emissions in their home by use of eco account book found on the Ministry of the Environment home page, and comparing environmental policies found in each political party's agenda.

Conclusion

In home economics education, our goal is that students not only come to change their personal lifestyles, but also come to practice activities in their communities, and furthermore develop the knowledge and conviction to suggest and support bigger reform of the social system for the purpose of creating a sustainable, global society.

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