日本の家庭科教育が抱える矛盾とその解決のための一事例研究

Investigating the background of the contradictions in Japanese home economics education and a qualitative case study for a solution

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Background

Japanese home economics education seems to have sustained two contradictions in (a) a contradiction between the Life Planning (LP) curriculum, lecturing teaching style with linear life planning examples in the textbooks, and the goal of Japanese home economics education, developing human beings; and (b) a contradiction between the application of the empirical-analytical research approach and the goal of Japanese home economics education.

The Japan Association of Home Economics Education (1998, pp. 114-115) has stated that the main goal has shifted from making things to developing human beings. However, this contradicts the heavily positivistic history of Japanese home economics educational inquiry and the practice of teaching home economics. The first contradiction existed between the practice of teaching home economics and the goal of Japanese home economics education. This contradiction is outstanding, especially in the life planning education, where students study the significance of life planning and explore their future lifestyles as well as their current lifestyles.

The home economics textbooks presently utilized in classrooms show students just one type of life course in Life Planning, an area of study in Home Economics at the senior high school level. If you lecture one example of life course in class, it seems to convert students into "the monotone of the same" (Schurich, 1996, p. 54). As personalities, students are different. Home economics educators ought to recognize and advocate individual differences in order to meet the goal of home economics education, that is, developing human beings.

Another contradiction seems to have lied between the goal of Japanese home economics education and the tradition that most Japanese home economics educational research had been undertaken by empirical-analytic methods. Kondo (1998) pointed to this situation. In the thirty six-year history of Japanese home economics educational research between 1960 and 1996, it was found that 39.9% of the completed research used statistical methods and 26.0% used empirical-positive methods. That is, for thirty six years, Japanese home economics educational researchers have greatly relied on empirical-analytic methods. After learning...
of this situation, Kondo (1998) mentioned the need for research which understands individual student change in different contexts. She indicated a need for a new approach, such as qualitative case study, because there were few research projects that used the qualitative case study approach as a main method.

**Purposes**

This study has two purposes. One is to investigate how the contradictions in Japanese home economics education have been constructed with three research approaches: feminist approach, post-structural approach and post-colonial approach. In order to resolve the contradictions, the second purpose is to provide one example from my teaching and researching practice as a qualitative case study.

**Research Method**

For the first purpose, applying the feminist approach, I highlight women’s "struggle both against male oppression and toward seeing the world through women’s eyes" (Lather, 1992, p. 93) that exists in the contradictions. Applying the post-structural approach, I deconstruct Japanese culture and history and look for “difference, plurality, multiplicity and the coexistence of opposites” (Lather, 1992, p. 90). I also examine Japanese history by applying the post-colonial approach in order to "question the hold of the West on the role of global authority and educator" (Willinsky, 1998, p. 253). I intermingle these approaches in the discussion.

To achieve the second purpose, a qualitative case study is discussed which describes students’ change during a project implemented in life planning education of a Japanese second year (grade 11) senior high school home economics class in November, 1998. The study is based on the students’ email logs, teachers’ notes and email logs, and copies of the student handouts. The data were translated into English.

**Construction of the Contradictions**

There are three factors that are assumed to have resulted in the contradictions. Figure 1 describes the complex relationship of the three factors.

![Figure 1. Factors contributing to the contradictions.](image)

**Japanese Community-Oriented School Culture**

The first factor is the community-oriented school culture, which has developed through the educational systems Japan has had since the Second World War. When a student causes a problem at school, teachers often say that it is not only that student’s fault, but it is the community’s fault, which is the homeroom class that student belongs to; and all the students in the class are expected to cooperate to fix the problem. This community sense is nurtured through various activities at school. For example, most high schools have school uniforms,
which gives students a feeling of connection and pride with the school. All elementary schools and some junior high schools have a lunch-serving system. Furthermore, some schools have their own nutritionists and cooks, and others have lunch-delivery service from a public lunch service center. Teachers and students cooperate and serve lunch for themselves, and everyone eats the same daily menu.

At every level from kindergarten to high school, students belong to a homeroom class for one school year. Students are divided into home classes depending upon their age, and they study with the same members of their homeroom class for that year. Each homeroom class has one homeroom. For some subjects, such as Japanese, math, and history, the students stay in their homeroom and the subject teachers come to their homeroom to teach. For other subjects, such as science, music, physical education, and home economics, the students move together to those subject rooms. Our school system therefore develops a sense of community.

Japan enhances the feeling of connectedness through education in order to keep harmony in society. Japanese educational law states that "by respect and cooperation, culture should be created and developed." Thus, cooperation is important for the development of culture. Japanese education nurtures the sense of cooperative community at school so as the society, community, and family do. A school itself is a community with a community-oriented culture.

In this school community, knowledge is shared and nurtured among the members. Within the same homeroom, students educate each other. Even if the students learn fast, they do not keep their knowledge only to themselves; they share their knowledge with their community friends.

On the contrary, in Western culture "knowledge is power" (Spivak, 1990, p. 387). This Western concept of knowledge may sometimes make it difficult to create a sense of community. Accumulation of knowledge in Western culture seems to be recognized as power or as success. Students who take in more knowledge sometimes have a chance to skip grades without staying in the same-level class for a year. Students are categorized according to how much they know. As well, they can go to different class levels for different subjects. They may not have enough time to establish a sense of community, particularly at the high school level. The school may become "an agency of frustration and failure" (Rengifo Vasques, 1998, p. 188) for some students who are put into a lower level. Who decides which students have more knowledge? This is a linear way of thinking. It may be another way to perpetuate the Western colonizing power. This compulsive, colonial, fundamentalist spirit may be something that erodes the harmonious re-creation of life (Rengifo Vasques, 1998). In Japan, students who can accumulate more knowledge repeat the activities and increase their knowledge. These students can also acquire other knowledge, experience, and skills, such as caring, nurturing, and patience, which are not measurable by written examinations but are important for community members in Japanese society.

In Japan students are divided into classes according to their age. Students stay with the same age of students and study at the same level. For example, Grade 10 students
do not go on to Grade 11 or Grade 12 level courses. In most subjects, students are not divided into different groups leveled by mathematically measured knowledge. On the contrary, Japan has cram schools and entrance examinations to go onto the senior high school level after the junior high school level. They measure knowledge. A lot of students go to private cram schools after regular the school hours to prepare for entrance exams for recognized, academic senior high schools. The cram schools categorize students and schools with the deviation resulted from the examinations they created and also the entrance examinations of each school. They categorize students from the highest to lowest achievement. This creates competition instead of community. However, once you get in a senior high school, the school is driven to nurture a sense of community with almost the same school system and class organization.

Staying within the same homeroom class may make quick-learning students bored and frustrated. After-school club activities are opportunities where each student’s talent is developed. All Japanese schools have club activities and each student belongs to one club, and most teachers are in charge of club activities. This is a recognized part of the Japanese school system similar to other subject areas. Each school can decide what kinds of clubs it offers, depending on its students’ interests. For example, schools in Japan have different clubs such as the science club, literature club, drama club, music club, cooking club, basketball club, tennis club, volleyball club, and track and field sports club, among others. Students can also negotiate with teachers to start a new club if they cannot find one that interests them. Each student attends one club depending on his/her interests, regardless of age. Therefore, different-aged students enjoy the activities together in one club. Students help each other and improve their skills and knowledge, and enrich their experience in a group setting where they gather because of common interests. Most of the activities are discussed amongst the students in the club and organized by them. Usually, big clubs rely on the senior students for decision making, whereas small clubs discuss and make consensus decisions. As a result, the club activities are also community-minded activities. Each student belongs to another kind of community that exists within the school.

Some aspects of connectedness are ineffective and often pressure students to maintain the sense of community. Behavior contrary to community can lead to bullying. To ensure connectedness, nonconforming students are often expelled from the group, and it becomes difficult for those students to continue to function within the school. If the problem cannot be resolved with help from teachers and parents, students may commit suicide. Because of the sense of connectedness and the desire to retain harmony in a community, outstanding students may also be excluded. It is important that the existing connectedness to the Japanese school community be upheld. Harmony is desirable because it is peaceful and comfortable, but sometimes there can also be a sense of vulnerability and danger.

The harmonious sense of community has developed in these school communities. Activities enhancing the harmony are woven in school culture. On one hand, students
are helping each other in the community. On the other hand, they are limiting their own life. And, because home economics is a part of the Japanese education system, this school culture concurs with the scientific standardizing perspectives in Life Planning of home economics textbooks. However, this contradicts the goal of home economics education. For example, in creating a harmonious community, students are molded into one ideal lifestyle, introduced in the home economics textbook, rather than encouraged to develop individual lifestyles. Further, this Japanese community-oriented school culture exists also in the academic field of school-based research. The empirical-analytical research approach still remains as the main stream, especially in the research field of Japanese home economics education.

Male-Dominant History

The second factor perpetuating the contradictions is the long-time male-dominant history. It is in this context that I will examine the history of Japan and Japanese home economics education. For example, West (1993) wrote, “Social practices . . . [and research is a social practice] are best understood and explained . . . by situating them within . . . cultural traditions” (p. 267). Furthermore, Willinsky (1998) wrote, “Educators are responsible for developing an account with their students of what has brought us to seeing the world” (p. 251). Thus, I, as an educator, think that looking back to the past is my responsibility. Japan has been governed by men since the last queen died in the 3rd century. There were some female empresses, but they are considered to have been just marionettes manipulated by men. From the beginning of the 12th century to the middle of the 19th century, we had feudal governments, during which time men fought each other to plunder the governing power and replace the shoguns. We did not have a single female governor for eight hundred fifty years between the 8th century and the 17th century. Japan decided to close itself off from the West in 1633 when Western influence became widespread. The main reason was that Christianity did not conform with the way of governing the country of that era. Although the Japanese government wanted to trade with other countries, it was threatened by the Christian idea of dedication to God and equality of humanity before God. This is because the top shogun was supposed to be admired as an omniscient and omnipotent being and served by his people. After 220 years of closure, the United States forced Japan to open the country, saying that Japan was behind the rest of the world. This was an invitation to their game: Western Capitalism. Japanese men switched physical fights of fighting games to economic fighting games. Japanese people began to think that Western ideas were more advanced and that we needed to catch up with the West.

Schooling in Japan began in some communities in the 15th century. However, it was not until the end of the 19th century, with the introduction of capitalism, that a schooling system was established. “House chores and sewing” began as a subject offered only for girls, and home economics was introduced after the Second World War by two American educators and a Japanese woman who had studied at Washington State University in the USA.
Finally, home economics began to be taught to boys and girls at Grades 5 and 6 and only to girls in high schools. Since then, home economics has been continuously taught to both boys and girls in Grades 5 and 6. It was not until 1993 in junior high schools, and 1994 in senior high schools, that home economics was offered to boys at the high school level as well. At the same time, home economics became a required subject. Currently, all boys and girls study home economics at all three school levels: the elementary, junior high and senior high school levels.

Because of the long male-oriented history of Japan and influence from the male-dominant West, Japanese home economics education had struggled until it finally gained equal status with that of other subjects. In a sense, Japanese home economics education has become familiar with having something dominant and always catching up with others instead of exploring different perspectives as the first runner. Within the short history of Japanese home economics education, we have not had enough time to examine ourselves and solve these contradictions.

**Nature of Home Economics**

The third factor contributing to the development of the contradictions is the fact that home economics is a study of the private sector. Because home economics involves the private sector, which is usually considered less important than the public sector, it needed to follow the mainstream scientific linear perspective to be recognized in academia.

The sustaining explanation still remains that the public sector is more important, at once more rational and mysterious, and, generally, more masculine than the private. . . . The feminist, reversing this hierarchy, must insist that sexuality and the emotions are, in fact, so much more important and threatening that a masculinist sexual politics is obliged, repressively, to sustain all public activity. (Spivak, 1990, p. 377)

Home economics has struggled to be recognized as an academic and professional field since the Japan Association of Home Economics Education was established in 1958. Following the Western traditional style of research was the only path that the association could take at that time in order to be recognized in academia, whether or not it was ethical and appropriate for home economics education.

While examining the three factors that contributed to the development of the contradictions, I kept asking myself what we, as home economics educators, could do to grow in fidelity with the goal of Japanese home economics education: developing human being. This contradictory situation cannot be solved just by saying that it is a part of our culture.

Home economics had been taught only to females for a long time, which indicates the strength of the Japanese male-dominant history; and retaining the empirical scientific orientation, which also has a male-dominated background, resulted in the contradictions being perpetuated.

In order to become recognized by the West, we might have ignored thinking about what is best for Japan. On one hand, I think that we "have had to wear these 'White' clothes [be bicultural] so that we could succeed in research communities, however sociologically, historically, or
culturallly ill-fitting” (Scheurich & Young, 1997, p. 9). On the other hand, sadly, according to Willinsky (1998), “I am not at all sure whether we can un-install the mammoth program of Westernization that the world has absorbed” (p. 263). Even tools such as research, which can be useful to make a change in such a world, are created in the West. However, using the Western tools, we can at least examine the perspectives that we have accepted, recognize in what contexts we are living, and reevaluate what we need to teach. I think that Japanese home economics education is beginning to be concerned with the contradictions because its focus is on addressing our basic need to develop human beings.

In order to challenge the next question, what we could do to meet the stated goal of home economics education, I attempted to explore teaching strategies that address the complexity and multiplicity of life and have students become voluntary and interactive learners. A qualitative research approach was explored to capture changes of the participating students in the following project.

**A Case Study for a Solution**

The following is the outline of a case study of an online debate-like discussion project, that I implemented, in life planning education for a Japanese a second year (grade 11) senior high school home economics class in 1998. The project involved the home economics class students from two high schools. The students were divided into groups of 2 - 4 students, based on their choice of one of five topics and their support of decision A or B. The instructional goal of the activity was to instruct students to consider social issues from multiple points of view. About three hundred students participated in this project. I selected three students among them. The rationale for focusing on these three students was that their discussion was well constructed by communicating with their opponent group, and it also showed they were learning different ways of looking at the discussion topic. The gender of the three students in the following case was happened to be female.

***The topic given to the case students***

| Mr. & Mrs. D are both employed full-time. They have two children. One child is in kindergarten. The other is in elementary school. They live in a big city. Mr. D's parents passed away a couple years ago. Mrs. D's parents are retired and live in a small countryside town, which is far from where Mr. & Mrs. D live. Mrs. D's parents are over 70. Her father has a hearing problem. Her mother fell down a flight of the stairs a few months ago and was hospitalized. She is OK now and back home. However, living by themselves does not seem to be safe. Mrs. D is an only child. Her family wonders if they should invite her parents to live with them. But, their house is not big enough for 6 people and they cannot afford to move into a bigger house. What should they do? They should: |
| A: have the parents in their house |
| B: continue to live separately and visit |

I describe the three students’ changes as the discussion progressed. They were all in the decision B group. They were paired with a decision A group from the other school. In order to give enough of a description to reveal how the three students changed through the discussion, I only focus on the decision B group students instead of how the two groups
constructed their discussion. The students exchanged the opening arguments, questions, answers and closing arguments by email. The decision B group students are identified as student b1, b2, and b3. The following is each student’s first opinion to support decision B.

**The first opinions to support decision B**

**Student b1:**
I do not want my parents to be dependent on me. So, I think that they should live independently.

**Student b2:**
For the present situation, they do not need to live together because they do not need special care. They can think about it later.

**Student b3:**
Actually, I live with my grandmother. There are things I think are good about living with her, but also things I think would have been better not to live together because then I would have not seen the character I do not like in her. If I were Mrs. D’s parent, I would like to live by myself instead of living together. I do not want my grandchildren to think about me like what I think about my grandma.

After expressing their first opinions, the three made a group and discussed the issue. They summarized their arguments to support decision B and emailed them to their opponent group in the other school. The following was the three students’ email logs of their opening argument as a group.

**The opening argument of the decision B group**

1) The number of aged people is rapidly increasing. They have to learn to live independently. The burden is becoming too great for their children.

2) For the present, the elderly parents do not need special care.

3) Living together may break good relationships among the family. It is easy to see defects in others when people live together.

4) It is difficult to buy a house in the city where Mr. & Mrs. D family live because it is very expensive. It is also difficult for both Mr. & Mrs. D to move to the countryside because they are full-time workers.

5) The social welfare system is getting better. There are senior homes for living and temporary usage, day care centers, and home helper services. They can take advantage of them.

6) If the parents move to their children’s house, they have to leave their familiar neighborhood and friends. This unfamiliar new environment may cause mental difficulties for them.

7) If many old people start to move to big cities to live with their children, it accelerates the population drop in the countryside.

8) It is common in North America and Europe for aged people to live independently. Japanese seniors can learn from them to live independently.

They exchanged their opening arguments with the decision A group in the other school. Their first individual opinions were put together and summarized into eight items. Student b1’s opinion became 1) in the group’s opening arguments. Student b2’s opinion became 2) and student b3’s opinion became 3) in the opening arguments. Items, from 4) to 8), came up through their group discussion. Item 4) was developed from item 1). The group discussion made the three students think what burden Mr. & Mrs. D as children would have experienced. They considered
the financial burden to buy a house and the physical burden to take care of Mr. D’s parents. In this consideration, they came up with the two ideas for Mr. D to live with his parents. One was bringing Mr. D’s parents to where Mr. D lived in the city. The other was having Mr. & Mrs. D’s family move to where Mr. D’s parents lived in the countryside. Item 5) was developed from item 2). The three students attempted to find alternatives of care giving for Mr. D’s parents. They considered the effect to the family relations between Mr. & Mrs. D’s family and Mr. D’s parents in item 3) and expanded the relationship issue to the community in the neighborhood and friends in item 6). They also added items 7) and 8). They showed their consideration of the effect to society in item 7). They even brought their knowledge about the different ways of living in other countries in item 8).

Their first opinions were based mainly on their own living experiences. Through the group discussion and information research, they connected the issue to other social issues, like the social welfare system, expensive property in Japan, population decrease in the countryside, and examples of other countries. They attempted to look at the issue from Mr. & Mrs. D’s side and Mr. D’s parents’ side. They also considered the relation with the conditions that exist outside the family and community. They constructed their first opinions with more multiple points and expanded items 1), 2) and 3) into items 4), 5) and 6). They further expanded their points of view to society and beyond Japan.

After they exchanged their open arguments with the decision A group, they asked questions about the decision A group’s opening arguments and decision A group asked them questions about their opening argument to support decision B. After answering each other’s questions and exchanging them, the three students in the decision B group made the following closing argument.

**The closing arguments of the decision B group**

For the present situation, the parents are in no need of special care. That is, there is no definite reason to live together. It is not so easy to buy a big house in the cities. It is also difficult for Mr. & Mrs. D to move to the countryside because of their job and their children’s education. We agree that living together makes it easier for children to learn from old peoples’ wisdom. However, nowadays we have telephones, facsimiles and the internet. We can communicate with them using technology. Mr. & Mrs. D’s family can visit the parents on holidays as well. We think that there is a necessity for aged people to be independent because Japanese society has been constantly aging. Mr. & Mrs. D’s family may want to think about this issue again when either of their parents dies and it becomes too difficult for the remaining parent to live by his/herself. But, for now, it is not necessary. It is easily assumed that the social welfare facilities and policies would be more developed as the society’s demand on social welfare becomes greater and greater. The aged people should take advantage of those public facilities and services.

In their closing argument, they added the educational issue of Mr. and Mrs. D’s children. They admitted a disadvantage of living separately, but gave alternatives to solve it. However, they suggested the alternatives in order to gain as much
communication between Mr. & Mrs. D's family and Mr. D's parents as possible. They also admitted the necessity to consider living together later on when either of Mr. D's parents dies. Still, they emphasized the fact that Mr. D's parents can live on their own at present. They expected more development of social welfare facilities and services. And, they led a family issue to a social issue by emphasizing the importance of improving the social welfare system.

Their closing arguments indicated their advancement of their arguments as well as consideration of the opinions the opponent decision A gave them. They constructed their arguments more firmly by answering the questions from the decision A group.

And, at the end they reflected upon their discussion inside the decision B group and with the decision A group and wrote the following notes.

**The reflection notes of each student in the decision B group**

**Student b1:**
This issue is very significant in present Japan where society is aging rapidly. It includes parents' pride and financial issues. Through the discussion, I learned totally opposite opinions to mine by exchanging opinions with the decision A group. It made me think about this issue objectively. I also found that it is important to listen to different people to avoid prejudice.

**Student b2:**
I realized that a decision is depending on each family member's feeling and conditions of the community in the city and in the countryside. I became aware of how important it is to consider financial issues and actually what kind of social welfare service they could get as well. This discussion was a precious opportunity. I found a difference in cultures of the two schools, too.

**Students b3:**
I learned that each person has a different sense of value in his/her life. That is why people have different opinions from mine. Talking with people from a different school, I realized the fact that I lived in a community of this school. I was amazed with different points of view. It was very interesting.

In the reflection notes, student b1 and student b2 mentioned other important aspects they recognized through the discussion. Student b1 pointed out Mr. and Mrs. D's parents' pride and their financial conditions. Student b2 wrote about each family member's feeling, financial conditions, relations with the community and availability of the social welfare service. Because the topic story did not indicate these aspects, it seemed to be difficult to include them in their arguments for the online debate – like discussion. However, they found those aspects needed to be considered for Mr. and Mrs. D's family to reach the final decision. Student b3 showed her recognition of differences in people's values and the context in which she lived.

**Conclusion**
The debate-like discussion project challenged the contradiction between the life planning curriculum and the goal of Japanese home economics education; developing human beings. Instead of being lectured and reaching the same life plan, they admitted
that each student’s original opinion was different, and further, they expanded their opinions through discussion and looked at the issue from multiple points of view. And, all the process was interactive. The students discussed within the group and the group discussed with another group from the other school. They did research on the issue by themselves. They inspired each other and became active, voluntary learners through the online-discussion project.

This project also challenged the contradiction between the application of the empirical-analytical research approach and the goal of Japanese home economics education. The description of the case group opinions, opening and closing arguments and reflections captured each student’s different growth through the online debate-like discussion project.

In conclusion, the factors which have influenced the contradictions seemed to be woven into our history and practice. To resolve these contradictions may not be easy because even research tools we have now are from the West. Sheurich & Young (1997) says that “All of the epistemologies currently legitimated in education arise exclusively out of the social history of the dominant White race” (p. 8). Although those approaches were created in the West, we may try them, not only case study but other qualitative research methods, instead of refraining from the contradictions. We can start to question ourselves and change the present context.

On the contrary, we must learn to live in the middle of things, in the tension of conflict and confusion and possibility; and we must become adept at making do with the messiness of that condition and at finding agency within rather that assuming it in advance of the ambiguity of language and cultural practice. In addition, we must be on the lookout for each other as we negotiate meaning and create new descriptions of the world. (St. Pierre, 1997, p. 176-177)

We need to deconstruct and reconstruct our foundations in order to continue our research in the field of home economics education. We as educators are not controlling the machines nor manufacturing standardized products in home economics education. We as home economics educators serve to facilitate the development of human beings. In order to invite the audience to the discussion of where our home economics education research could proceed in its development, this paper discussed the contradictions and shared one example for a solution.

References
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