The Project for Food Consciousness

Description and Meaning

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1. Overview and purpose of the project

The Project for Food Consciousness was organized in order to seek a new viewpoint about food and eating. As an important step forward for the Food Consciousness Project, a symposium and laboratory titled “Future and Culture Cultivated by Food: Food Consciousness and the Educational Value Chain” was held from February 11 to 15 in 2012. The symposium and laboratory were conducted by Yasuhiro Eguchi and Akira Shinagawa who promote the Project for Food Consciousness.

The Project for Food Consciousness, a food education project with active cooperation from industry, academia, and government, was titled “Future and Culture Cultivated by Food” and held the following schedule.

February 11, 2012 Symposium, "Future and Culture Cultivated by Food"
   (Keynote lecture, case-study presentation, panel discussion)

February 12 Food and aesthetics classes for elementary school children by the Centro Educazione del Gusto in Italy
   “ABC of the sense”
   “Edu-gastronomy: Local food promotion changed by school meals” (Both held for the first time in Japan)

February 13 “Taste-Education Professional Training Program” by the Centro Educazione del Gusto in Italy
   (Held for the first time in Japan)

February 14 Umami-conscious laboratory
   Experience laboratory of “Garum”, the fish sauce of ancient Rome

February 15 “Taste-Education Professional Training Program” by the Centro Educazione del Gusto in Italy
   (Held for the first time in Japan)

(For more details, refer to; http://www-cc.gakushuin.ac.jp/~gwc-ifc/)

1 The symposium and laboratory was held in Gakushuin Women’s University, Tokyo
2 Yasuhiro Eguchi: Professor in Gakushuin Women’s University, Department of International Cultural Exchange, Association of Food Consciousness
3 Akira Shinagawa: Professor in Gakushuin Women’s University, Department of International Cultural Exchange, Environment Education Center
The project is organized to seek a new viewpoint about food and eating and with academic concerns such as;

“Food and eating is an interest shared by the entire human race and is the basis of life. Therefore, food and dietary education is directly linked to intimate human education. With such an understanding, many nations are actively practicing various educational programs and activities aimed at re-forming public consciousness of food and eating such as The University of Gastronomic Sciences and Centro Educazione del Gusto in Italy, La semaine du gout in France, The Edible Schoolyard in the USA, and the sustainable project in Yale University. One of the characteristics that is common to all of these programs and activities is that they promote the fundamental thinking process of searching, experimenting, verifying, evaluating, and developing, which is the origin of all intellectual activities, through sensibility education and experience learning using topics related to food. Also, one of the most important differences between these programs and food education in Japan is that they position food education among various academic fields and discuss it in relation to agriculture, science, biology, historiography, business, economics, sociology, cultural anthropology, philosophy, literature, aerography, engineering, and environmentology.”

Based on such concerns, the project was planned and conducted with the purpose of obtaining a new viewpoint about food and in order to provide an opportunity for basic intellectual experiences by promoting sensibility education and experience learning to society through the window of food and in relation to various academic fields. The slogan of the project is “Food Consciousness: future of intelligence considered and nurtured by eating” and is ultimately aimed at fostering the zest for living, ability to think, and power to create the future culture by developing the five senses toward food from children to adults.

For the further advancement of the Food Consciousness Project from a long-term perspective, promotional activities for food consciousness are based on the 5 strategic frameworks of Mission, Value, Vision, Strategy, and Execution. Each of the strategic frameworks is aimed at the following goals;

Mission: Providing and promoting educational awareness opportunities to raise food consciousness
Value: Centering gustation education or sensory education, re-construction of humanity-regeneration education through the five senses (Development of new educational methods = Creation of new educational value)
Vision: Changing from knowledge or information precedence food education to
five senses or experience initiating food education
Strategy: Education, awareness raising, proposal, and support for food consciousness education and its methods to teachers
Execution: Conducting practice seminars for kindergarten, elementary, and junior-high school teachers, open seminars for those involved with school lunches, university education, and the general public, joint conferences and symposiums with the Centro Educazione del Gusto in Italy, development of food consciousness theory and establishment of related courses, collaboration with other educational institutions (universities or research centers), corporations, and NGOs, and international symposium for food consciousness

2 Collaboration with the Centro Educazione del Gusto in Italy

1) Contact with the Centro Educazione del Gusto in Italy
To research, develop, promote, and spread food-consciousness education, the project collaborates with the Centro Educazione del Gusto in Italy, which shares similar interests. The Centro Educazione del Gusto is a NPO based in the city of Prato, Tuscany, and aims at promoting food culture, and aesthetics or gustation education. The director of the Centro, Alessandro Venturi, is a member of Slow Food, a NPO in Italy which was founded in 1989 to counter the rise of fast food and fast life, and from its establishment it developed food education projects in the Slow Food. Later, the director established an independent organization, the Centro Educazione del Gusto, by an agreement with Slow Food in 2007. The Centro was certified by the Ministry of Public Education in Italy in 2005 as the first national gustation education training institution for teachers.

Luisa Peris, who is responsible for the gustation-education professionals’ training department, managed the slow food professionals training courses in Slow Food from 1999 to 2007. She has trained more than 12,000 gustation-education professionals since the establishment of the Centro Educazione del Gusto.

The Centro Educazione del Gusto works with states or local governments to introduce locally produced and consumed school lunch to public nurseries, elementary, or junior high schools and is preparing, introducing, and supporting the gustation-education projects. Its philosophy and practice share a lot of similarities with the project for food consciousness, thus, we have reached an agreement to closely work together to continue to promote food-consciousness activities in the future.
This project aims to promote the following food-consciousness activities;
1. Training of 'gustation-education teachers' in the school
2. Development of 'experience-based food and sensory classes for students
3. Development of 'food and sensory classes for teachers and parents
4. Promotion of vegetable-garden projects in schools
5. Introduction of seasonal crops and local dishes to school lunches
6. Developing and introducing the meaning of school lunches in the coursework
7. Construction of producer networks that deliver crops and can be visited by students
8. Preparation and distribution of educational materials about food and food culture
9. Conducting symposiums and conferences about food, agriculture, and the environment

2) Perspective of gustation education in the Centro Educazione del Gusto
The Centro organized and made a presentation titled “Consciousness of Food Changes in the Future” and emphasized the necessity for food consciousness. The keynote lecture titled “Importance of Sensory and Taste Education” by Luisa Peris directly emphasized the necessity of food consciousness, which this project intends to promote. The keynote lecture stated “although it is true that enough nutrients prevent diseases and reduce the infant mortality rate as WHO points out, people desire food for their pleasure. Even if sufficient nutritional knowledge is given, a person will not eat what s/he does not desire. Food preference depend on the eating experiences of a person’s childhood. Once children start going to the nursery or elementary schools, school lunch plays an important role in fostering sensory capability such as taste, smelling sense, and tactile sensibility. Through cooking ingredients, food preparation methods, and the menu, children feel and learn about seasonal changes, local culture, or environmental issues. Eating also offers an important occasion to develop communication skills among friends of a similar age. These are the reasons why the school lunch needs sufficient time and the support of teachers or adults. What then is expected of teachers or adults? Eating habits of teachers are one of the models for children and are printed into their memories. Thus, schools need to develop educational programs that match their growth stages. They need to prepare experimental classes and promote cooperation among family, local community, and local producers. For such a reason, the Centro Educazione del Gusto emphasizes the taste-education trainings for school teachers.”

Venturi explained the background reasons for promoting taste education further and highlighted that “world-class issues such as mad cow disease, dioxin, land
contamination, prominent famine in Africa, obesity, and diabetes as well as weakening of agriculture and fishery and homogenization of tastes brought about by the globalization are all critical problems and need to be tackled with the cooperation of the school, parents, producers, research institutes, and various public administrations”. Then he continued to stress quality of the food and freedom of choice and drew attention to following points:
1. Food needs to be safe.
2. Food needs to be pleasant for the five physical senses.
3. Food needs to be locally produced and consumed.
4. Food needs to be considered from cultural aspects.
5. “Right to taste” needs to be respected and valued.

Following the keynote lecture, the Centro also reported a pioneering case study, “Tasty School Project”, in Viareggio in Toscany which was carried out with the assistance of the Centro. Then, based on the report, a panel discussion was held with experts and participants on the implications of food consciousness titled “From teaching about food to thinking about food - the meaning of food consciousness”.

3) Laboratory
In this project, a class about food and aesthetics, “ABC of the senses”, developed by the Centro Educazione del Gusto, was held for 24 elementary school students in 3rd to 6th grade as a laboratory of participatory education which includes theory and experiences. Also, an educational program for teachers who promote food education in schools was held as a trial version excluding the theory-introduction sections. Both such attempts were new and publicly introduced for the first time in Japan.

Furthermore, Gakushuin Women’s University introduced the “Umami Conscious Laboratory”, as a case-study laboratory of sensory and gustation education in Japan that they have been promoting in the past years. The “Umami Conscious Laboratory” will be one of the main subjects in the food-conscious instructor course that this project intends to develop in the future.

3 Meaning of food consciousness
1) Understanding and defining the issue
But why “food consciousness” now? Discussions about food have been actively taking place from various viewpoints such as food and resource, food and environment, food and poverty, food and nutrition, and food and beauty. In addition,
food is dealt with as an essential topic in many TV programs. Since the Basic Act on Food Education was established in Japan in 2005, knowledge and information about food derived from nutritional science, hygience, and brain science are now easily available in educational settings or at home from the viewpoints of dietary life improvement and early prevention of lifestyle-related diseases.

Although the term dietary education has been repeatedly used to discuss food and education, this term is often referred to from a nutritional point of view and tends to be limited to knowledge or information provision which aims to teach what people do not know yet. Of course, there should be various approaches to food education and knowledge-provision type of education can be effective to some extent. Yet, it is still a form of traditional cramming school education which tends to create a passive attitude in students.

As it is widely known, however, the term “education” originated from Latin, “educare” which means to “take out”. Therefore, when food is re-examined from an educational point of view, it has to be transformed from food education which provides knowledge or information to a form of education which raises consciousness of food itself, taking full-advantage of the five senses of human beings. In other words, the essence of the food education that is truly necessary now is to provide opportunities to arouse the consciousness in every way toward food, such as where the crop is grown, how it came to the table, where we eat it, why it is such a color, shape, or smell, and how we feel when we look at, touch, and smell it.

For such a purpose, therefore, it is necessary to promote a way of teaching how to feel and taste food and to be more aware of it. We need to bring attention to the five senses, to heighten sensibility, and to ensure the feelings that flow from within. We need to recognize once again that we are only aware of some superficial information about any vegetables placed in supermarkets. In the scene behind the growing of the vegetables, there are villages, forests, ocean, lakes, nature, land, water, and air. Many people are involved in producing them and devoted a great deal of time and care to provide the vegetables. Moreover, there are people who cooked them deliciously before placing them on the table to eat. Although it seems ordinary now that we eat three times a day, this has become normal only recently in the history of human beings and is still very unusual and fortunate when considered globally.

Thus, it is important to provide an opportunity to imagine the moment when the food was cultivated, the land or sea where it was nurtured, and the process it
followed to bring it to the table where we eat, as well as to communicate that the food is brought to the table through efforts of the family, society, natural lives, and nature. To sense is to feel with the five senses or in the heart, to understand that the entire nature on the earth is connected. Hence, it is essential to provide such an opportunity to be aware of the fact that food is scarce, life itself, the connection, and a blessing.

With such a perspective and understanding, this project does not value a passive form of education where knowledge or information is prioritized but aims to foster an active and self-conscious attitude toward food by raising awareness about, what to eat, and how to eat. This is the definition of food consciousness which can be expressed in short, as being more properly aware of food. It also means to understand that food consciousness is the starting point to fully utilize the five senses, to foster the zest for living, ability to think, feeling of thankfulness, and the power to create future culture by cultivating the five senses.

2) Food consciousness and 4 core spirits
As is already described, tasting is to feel with the five senses or in the heart and it is essential to be aware that food is scarce, the life itself, the connection, and a blessing. The following four core spirits of food consciousness symbolize this philosophy:

The spirit of Arigato
Japanese term “Arigato” originally means that it is difficult to be there, “arigatai”. The opposite of this term would be “atarimae”, which means that it is natural or common. Although the term is now commonly used to say “Thank you”, the spirit of Arigato is to recognize and appreciate the food itself for being there, that it is not normal but precious and merciful that we have food to be able to survive each day.

The spirit of Itadakimasu
Eating means taking the lives of animals and plants, blessings provided by nature. Sacrificing them for consumption is indispensable to the generation of new lives. Japanese people express such an understanding and feeling of appreciation by saying “Itadakimasu” before meals.

The spirit of Gochisosama
Eating means enjoying delicious meals, which is made possible by the efforts of various people and sacrifice of other natural living things. We need to be
conscious of such links, thus, we say “Gochisosama” in Japan to express gratitude when we have finished eating.

The spirit of Mottainai
Food is a delicious and valuable gift that we enjoy, appreciating the blessings of nature and the sacrifices of the precious lives of plants and animals. We need to be thankful for the food, and value the spirit of Mottainai (trying to avoid waste).

These four main spirits are the basis that supports the philosophy of food-consciousness. Ideally, however, these spirits should not be taught but be naturally held by sincere feelings.

Yet, there are some feelings of resistance or counterarguments regarding the term “tasting” food. In other words, we often question whether it is appropriate to argue we should enjoy and taste food when we know that there are numerous people in the world who are suffering simply because they have nothing to eat. Even so, when people experience the four food-consciousness spirits described above and are convinced of them, they will be able to understand the correlation between the earth and environment and to appreciate having food to eat or to learn moderation and self-control in eating through everyday eating habits. Then, they will truly be able to start acting physically or mentally, directly or indirectly, for those who suffer from starvation.

For instance, once people realize and appreciate not only the fact that leftovers are a waste of food resources, but also the various connections between hard and soft resources before a school lunch or meal is served at a table, they will be able to behave in a reasonable way and take proactive and self-conscious actions before being told not to waste food in a knowledge-provision type of education. Such food education will lead to the proper “food-consciousness” that this project intends to bring people’s attention to. Thus, those valuable words “Arigato”, “Itadakimasu”, “Gochisosama”, and “Mottainai”, or feelings of appreciation and thankfulness, must be felt purely and sincerely with the soul rather than being taught in the course of education.

3) Food consciousness and taste education
In order to taste food properly, however, gustation or taste senses need to be developed first as well as recognizing various elements of the four spirits of food consciousness. Thus, food consciousness includes and values aesthetics or gustation education as an important educational program. In a society where material
civilization is highly advanced and convenience or comfort of living is deeply sought, the natural instinct of human beings tends to be disrupted, whether we like it or not.

Olfactory perception, which directly influences the tasting of the food, is one of the senses of human beings that have been weakening. Regardless of the expiration date, examining if food is still good enough to eat or not using one’s own sense of smell, taste, or vision has become unusual in recent times. If it is expired according to the expiration date, the food is likely to be disposed of without checking with the senses.

In addition, as is well known by researchers of sensory and gustation education, the ability to clearly differentiate the five tastes, sweetness, bitterness, acidity, saltiness, and Umami, delicious taste, is also declining. There are not many children or even adults who can properly differentiate Umami, which is one of the basic tastes of Japanese dishes. There are not even sufficient educational opportunities to learn about the five tastes or to differentiate them. This is well expressed in the gourmet TV programs in which all the personalities only have one word to say, “delicious”, and rarely use any others, or simply express the taste with facial expressions and gestures. Such scenes are good examples of the absolute lack of expression or ignorance of tastes.

But such a reality cannot be blindly condemned because many people have hardly had any opportunity to sense and strengthen the five senses in the course of their education and do not understand the true nature of tasting, which can be reinforced by food-consciousness training courses. Furthermore, strengthening the five senses will bring about the recovery or revival of the intrinsic human capabilities for many of those who live in contemporary modernized society. Thus, such education can be called human capability recovery education, using the five senses and centering on taste education, or sensory and gustation education. This is why gustation education is one of the important bases of the food consciousness project, which involves active food education to make people more aware of food.

As is already pointed out, tasting food means to feel with the heart and five senses, to understand the initial moment of life and to appreciate various people involved until it comes to be served as a school lunch or at the dining table. It also suggests returning to the origin of true education that actively fosters imagination and creativity, which has been largely lacking in the passive form of education that tends to seek correct answers to questions. In addition, this will ultimately contribute to the development of new educational methodology using
food materials. This is the reason for the concept of food consciousness defined as “the future of intelligence considered and nurtured by eating, what to eat, and how to eat”. In present-day society where globalization is rapidly expanding, one of the crucial capabilities of the workforce is the imagination to foresee and envision the unknown future and the creativity to consolidate and construct the growing reality, which can be greatly promoted by the course of education of the Food Consciousness Project.

4) Food consciousness and educational value

Eating, or similar action, includes various meanings and value, which can be nutritional, health, or five senses related, as well as cultural, moral, educational, social, economical, or environmental. For instance, problematic eating habits such as anorexia, bulimia, fatness, fat-to-be, high-calorie, high sugar content, high fat, or high animal protein are directly related to diseases like obesity, coprostasis, diabetes, high-blood pressure, brittle-bone disease, cardiac infarction, and cancer. Such a claim regarding health and balanced eating is a form of contribution to the physical value. Culturally, on the other hand, it is widely recognized that food is a living cultural heritage and many experts in the field point out the importance of inheriting the past or local food culture such as crops, cooking methods, seasoning, eating manner, and food festivals as well as in-home food culture like special flavors of the family. Considered environmentally, environmental preservation and sustainability have to be carefully examined because food production can play a major role in the destruction of the environment as it consumes vast amounts of water and energy and often causes land pollution, soil exhaustion, and air pollution.

Thus, eating similar actions may have various meanings and values, food consciousness project values following educational significances as it attaches importance to the intrinsic meaning of education, to “take out”.

I Curiosity

Every activity of learning is and must be based on curiosity. Questions such as “What is it?” and “Why is it?” are the origin of learning. Food is an educational material that unifies curiosity and joy.

II Observational skills

To awaken the five senses, sharpen the sensibility, and confirm the feelings coming from within. It is important to realize once again that we only see the outside of things and some superficial aspects of them, not the whole. In other words, it
is vital to observe phenomena, fully utilizing the five senses, and to perceive the true nature of them with a sharp sensibility and a pure heart.

III Problem finding
The number of answers depends on the number of questions one may have. If a problem or a question cannot be found properly, no solution will be discovered. In our complicated modern society, one always has to have increased awareness of social issues and problem-finding capabilities.

IV Cenesthesia
It is necessary to recover the ability to feel with the five senses, to retrieve the vivid sensibility of the human senses, and intrinsic human capabilities.

V Imagination and creativity
We need to imagine and understand the moment when the life of crops began till the moment they came to be served as a meal, people who cultivated them, the village and land which grew them, to be proud of the area one live in, to be aware of the environment and its sustainability.

VI Sensibility
Although the term sensibility is often used in the field of art, literature, and fashion, real sensibility of humans can be fostered in scientific fields such as agriculture, biology, and science.

VII Expression or presentation skills
These skills are the capabilities to express what one has felt, tasted, and learned with the five senses and his/her own heart and to articulate the essence of it.

VIII Communication skills
It helps to develop the basic communication skills by being interested in home cooking, the taste of it, and the family culture and by learning and taking over the art of living.

IX Tasting ability
Based on the sensibility of the five senses and the heart, it is important to recognize the nature of tasting and the four concepts of food consciousness.

X Nurturing skills
By growing vegetables in school gardens, students can develop delicate attention, deep knowledge, and continuous effort. They can learn that it is impossible to
grow delicious vegetables without attentive care and broad knowledge, that knowledge of numerous academic fields is concentrated in agriculture as well as the importance of effort and also patience. Learning about the significance of nurturing will contribute to complement what is largely lacking in contemporary school education.

5) Educational Value Chain, EVC
As is pointed out in the previous sections, the Food Consciousness Project values the essentiality of education, to “educare” or to “take out”, and to re-confirm the origin of learning through food materials. Also it will eventually have a fundamental influence on society and the economy. Ultimately, raising food consciousness will change not only school education but will have a major influence on family life, purchasing behavior, retailing and the food industry, then distribution or production activities of society. Thus, it will bring about a fundamental transformation of society, economics, education, and culture. Expressed elaborately and optimistically, raising food consciousness will provide a spark for a positive transformation of society through food. This can be called a new Educational Value Chain, or EVC.

What then is necessary for the realization of EVC based on food consciousness? Of course it is crucial to teach individual parents, family, and children. But the most important step for this EVC through food consciousness raising is the education of teachers themselves in the elementary schools, junior high schools, or high schools who understand and implement the food consciousness projects. The heart of food consciousness lies in the very educators in the schools.

Holding similar views and concepts to the food consciousness project, the Centro Educazione del Gusto in Italy has been conducting and promoting gustation education programs for over 12,000 teachers in total for as long as 20 years. This is the reason why the project collaborates closely with the Centro. Therefore, the most important difference of this project from other dietary education programs is that the biggest aim of the food consciousness project is “the education of the educators” themselves.

“The wise man alone knows how to eat”, as Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, a French author, has pointed out in his writing, The Physiology of Taste. He also indicated “Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are” and highlighted that “the fate of a nation depends on the way that they eat.” The future always relies on education. Now we are in the age to recognize not only academic records
but also food and eating backgrounds and awareness. The Food Consciousness Project promoted by Yasuhiro Eguchi and Akira Shinagawa and EVC will be a step forward for the new future of Japan as well as for the world to realize a truly sustainable society and must be recognized as a crucial message from the earth about the permanency of mankind. The symposium and laboratory conducted in 2012 will have been the first step towards it.

4. The Food Consciousness Project and Psychological Significations

The Food Consciousness Project, being promoted in Gakushuin Women’s University, is an activity to recuperate the five taste senses through sensory education, or gustation education, that many children and adults have lost or are now losing in contemporary Japanese society. It is also aimed at deepening the understanding about food, seasonality of food, environments where it grew, producers, distributors and means of distribution, chefs and ways of cooking it, etc. Moreover, the project ultimately intends to bring about a fundamental transformation of society by changing the basic attitudes and values toward food, such as re-examining the reality that food is heavily consumed and disposed of while there are people suffering from famine in different parts of the world. What is more important about the project, however, is that it is focused on education to utilize the five senses of humans through sensory education, thus, it can be called a form of education to recover intrinsic human capabilities.

Considered from a psychological perspective, the Food Consciousness Project shares a crucial value for focusing on education to recover human capabilities because it means the regaining of human sensibility in educational settings, which has been largely lost in modern society. Sharpening human sensibilities such as taste, re-examining feelings, and regaining innate tasting capabilities are directly related to changing how or what to feel and influencing ways of thinking, or psychological values. Such attempts can be a fundamental cure for increasing modern psychological disorders such as depression because they often damage or hinder self-respect, confidence, purpose and motivation of life by weakening the sensory functions, like insomnia or loss of appetite. Sensory dysfunctions, such as being unable to sleep although wanting to sleep or being unable to eat though wishing to eat, are often the initial symptoms of mental diseases and can be the biggest concern for patients with depressive psychosis. Thus, the form of education that intends to restore the innate human sensibilities and capabilities by actively utilizing sensory or gustation education in the formal education has significant implications for the future of Japanese society where people are suffering increasingly from psychological disorders.
Moreover, as has recently become known through advancements in brain science, many psychological disorders are brought about by excessive or imbalanced secretion of neurotransmitter substances of the brain, which is often caused by lack of specific nutrients. Currently, such abnormalities of neurotransmitter secretions are treated with medications in many health-care facilities. When it is intended to heal psychological diseases using medications, however, the medical treatments often take a long time and are accompanied by various side effects in many cases. If they can be replaced with enhancement of the five taste senses or other forms of nutritional therapy, the treatments can be shorter with fewer adverse effects and many patients will be able to experience physical recovery with the reactivation of intrinsic human sensibility and perceptivity. Therefore, fostering sensibility in school education and altering attitudes and values toward food is of great significance for the human body, mentality, and psychological values.

For these reasons, the Food Consciousness Project which aims to bring about basic changes from the sense to the body, or from the feelings to psychological values, is crucial for modern Japanese society. It is also aimed at bringing about changes in formal education and among teachers, thus, possibly leading to a fundamental transformation among future generations of society. Therefore, the Food Consciousness Project can be a fundamental cure or preventive preparation for those who suffer from physical insensibility and/or various physical and psychological diseases in contemporary Japanese society.

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