

## **Japan Educational Research Association Webinar Series: “Pandemic and Education: What Should Be Done to Support Learning?”**

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*As the research work of academic associations faces restrictions and reductions due to the novel coronavirus pandemic, the Japan Educational Research Association launched a jointly held participatory webinar series, “Pandemic and Education: What Should Be Done to Support Learning?” (4 sessions), through the JERA secretariat, Research Promotion Committee, and Public Relations Committee.*

### **I. Content and summary of the “Pandemic and Education” webinar series**

In April 2020, during the coronavirus pandemic, high schoolers’ social media posts gave rise to significant discussion about “September entrance” for universities. While taking account of the problems posed by the adoption of this system, JERA also established a special discussion committee and created specific proposals in order to respond to the unease and fear of students and parents regarding seriously delayed learning.

This webinar series was planned to confirm this point and use it as an opportunity to consider the forms to be taken by education and schools in the future. Given that the everyday norms of Japanese education and schools have, in a sense, been shaken to their roots by the coronavirus crisis, the question at stake is what existing features thereof must be preserved at all costs; the webinar series was planned in order to offer material to address this issue.

The webinars and their participants are summarized as below. With the cooperation of JERA members and others, as well as specialist researchers, four sessions were held from late June through July.

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**Session 1:** “Considering schools amid the novel coronavirus crisis: Based on the Proposal Part II” (June 29)

[Participants] Akio Inui (Professor Emeritus, Tokyo Metropolitan University), Kayo Matsushita (Kyoto University), Kaori Suetomi (Nihon University); moderator Hajime Kimura (Hitotsubashi University)

The discussion touched on (1) the history of the “September entrance” issue, (2) the proposal of the JERA Special Committee for Examination of the September Entrance Issue, and (3) based on (1) and (2), the requirements of schools and educational administration after their reopening, based on the Special Committee’s proposal “More Important than September Entrance Now” (May 22, 2020, downloadable from the JERA website), in particular Part II, “Toward Really Needed Initiatives.”

**Session 2:** “Online classes and school computerization: IRL and online values and issues” (July 10)

The discussion touched on the short- and long-term perspectives on the rapid spread of online classes and school education computerization, touched off by the school closings during the coronavirus crisis, and the forward-looking positioning of education in this context.

[Participants] Terumasa Ishii (Kyoto University), Yoshihiro Kokuni (The University of Tokyo), Tatsuya Horita (Tohoku University); moderators Satomi Saito (Toyo University), Fumiko Takahashi (The University of Tokyo)

**Session 3:** Education and inequality: Based on the novel coronavirus crisis” (July 20)

The discussion covered the impact of the coronavirus school closings on the “education and inequality” problem, the potentials and limitations of administrative and on-site approaches thereto, and future research directions.

[Participants] Mutsumi Shimizu (Japan Women’s University), Kokichi Shimizu (Osaka University), Makoto Yuasa (Chief Director, Support Center for Kodomo Shokudo Musubie/Project Professor, The University of Tokyo); moderators Hajime Kimura, Mayuko Horimoto (Toyo University)

**Session 4:** “Education During and After Covid-19 Around the World” (July 31)

After three webinars focusing on the challenges in Japan, this was an international webinar composed of messages from the world’s leading education researchers.

[Chair] Akiyoshi Yonezawa (Tohoku University)

[Co-chair] Naoko Saito (Kyoto University), Yuto Kitamura (The University of Tokyo)

[Presenters] Ingrid Gogolin (Universität Hamburg), Will Brehm (University College London), Jenny J. Lee (University of Arizona), Wu-Hsun Yang (National Chi Nan University), Byung-ho Kong (Osan University), Wei Bao (Peking University)

[Discussant] Hideki Maruyama (Sophia University)

## II. Content of Sessions

### Session 1

The webinar moved forward with reports from Inui on “The Special Committee Proposal

and issues after reopening schools,” Suetomi on “What Japanese educational studies must do, regardless of the pandemic,” and Matsushita on “Pandemic and education: from the perspectives of curriculum research and educational methodology.”

Inui confirmed the process of the novel coronavirus pandemic and related school closings along with the “September entrance” issue, discussing the status quo during the closings along with reports on children’s unease and stress, parents’ difficulties, social isolation, studying and other problems. Further, he pointed out urgent issues such as handling the learning delay and learning gaps, caring for the children affected, and “how to recoup the loss within limited time,” along with the issue of the “stress and inequity generated by trying to claw it back,” emphasizing the need to ensure sufficient school personnel. Suetomi discussed concerns about the damage to policy and discussion durability in the face of the argument-winning “because of the pandemic.” Based on the “poverty of the perspective on poverty” in Japanese society, she raised the issues of realizing smaller classes, the need for discussion returning to the right to exist of children and young people, and the reconsideration of “educational studies as social studies research” including the issue of academic neutrality; she also positioned the distance between educational studies and policy-making, academia and politics, and relations with administration as attempts to work out the “new normal.” Matsushita described how the coronavirus crisis has highlighted schools’ functions, based on the trend of attention to the value of work itself and the reconsideration of educational objectives. Further, she pointed out that, given changes in the “learning ecosystem,” the environments provided during school closings have varied by school type, as well as touching on the simultaneous global experience of things that can still be done/can be done better/can’t be done online and the polarization into people who have benefited from this (school non-attendees, those with mobility issues, etc.) and who have faced difficulty (those with no Internet, no study support, etc.). Based thereupon, she noted the influence between MEXT’s “Learning Guarantee Overall Package” and JERA’s Proposal, and simultaneously the gap in quantitative handling as policy proposals between the two.

Based on the above, the webinar discussed topics such as ideal school images and school class size. The discussion on class size involved perspectives such as its relation to school experiences and learning styles at school in addition to the basic orientation toward smaller class sizes, the scale enabling collaboration with regard to abundant learning, and the importance of teachers’ attention to various children. Participants agreed that personnel increases must apply across the board to school counselors, school social workers, learning aides, and so on as well as teachers.

## **Session 2**

How has the role of schools changed due to the coronavirus crisis? The moderator posed common questions such as the current problems with IRL and online, the values and issues generated thereby, and how to make the most of each format; in response the participants raised various topics.

In response to the questions raised, Horita pointed out the serious issue that the school education sector was unable even to manage online classes, also noting the importance of learning experiences online and the acquisition thereby of IT literacy and that ICT comprised students’ learning environments and teachers’ workplace environments. He added that when determining what learning activities were better suited to online, the judgment would differ

with regard to “possible online” and “must be face-to-face” activities when considering methods on the premise of adequate ICT infrastructure. Ishii said that online learning was a safety net of sorts in guaranteeing a connection to learning for all children, and might be a good opportunity for cooperative project learning based around good-quality tasks and inquiries. As directionalities and issues for these initiatives, he raised 1) changing schools to face the issues, rather than trying to return to normal; 2) establishing remote and hybrid attendance for children who could not be reached in the past; 3) establishing suitable conditions for online schooling; and 4) that while the use of ICT and collaboration with extramural private-sector organizations are essential, children’s right to learning cannot be guaranteed if teachers’ work is hollowed out. Kokuni pointed out the problems of online education from the stance of its basis in children’s lives. As the guarantee of the right to education becomes trivialized to the narrow definition of guaranteeing academic ability, the meaning of schools must be reconstructed based on their welfare functions. To this end, with “school life as a space to meet IRL” as a basis, it is important to begin with discussion of how to adopt and enrich online functions and what kinds of schools and classes are needed for both face-to-face and online lessons, as well as examining how to make use of them. Further, he pointed out the dysfunction of the decision-making system which has strengthened the authority of Boards of Education and principals at the prefectural, municipal, and school levels, calling for urgent reforms of this system.

Subsequently, in response to questions from the audience about referring to the educational experiences of special education schools and remote islands with regard to what is learned at school, the discussion addressed perspectives of technology, lesson theory, and the history of educational practice. Current trends and issues were raised, such as the problem that while schools emphasize carefully selected curricula, they fail to function and end up following the crowd, the need to reconsider the meaning of IRL (don’t just have an arithmetic star make a video), the meaning of ensuring the right distance for an aligned class in an online environment which also includes the problem of making exploration a skill, and so on.

### Session 3

K. Shimizu reported on “Educational inequities after the coronavirus,” M. Shimizu on “Considering the relations between temporary school closings/reopenings and educational inequity,” and Yuasa on “*Kodomo Shokudo* [children’s free cafeterias] after the coronavirus.”

K. Shimizu, while foreseeing that post-coronavirus education will be further computerized and individualized, held that affirmative action such as supplementary tutoring will be required to reduce inequity and that at the same time further intra- and extramural collaboration (education community building) will be essential. Based on the promotion of joint intra- and extra-mural activities—that is, collaboration on class- and school-building with the region and households, revitalizing and creating a culture of mutual support and enhancement—he argued that comprehensive methods are required. M. Shimizu reported from the perspective of “what happened then.” Concerning the influence of the sudden school closings on children, she focused on the differing “sudden” from the events of the Great East Japan Earthquake, grasping “sudden” as “a status where necessity is unclear,” and addressing the calls for September entrance and the progress of ICT use with regard to their linkage with worse inequities to come. Further, she noted “making children unnerved, rushing them, cramming

schoolwork in” as well as split attendance as experiences of “inequity” due to school reopenings. Yuasa’s report looked at the problem of inequitable poverty through national support activities for *Kodomo Shokudo*. He reported on the actual state of subject learning, non-subject learning, lifestyle support, regional status, and school collaboration as “concerns and their handling” seen from the margins of education, pointing out the importance of providing children with a place to be. Based thereon, he raised the issue of the cycle of emergency and normality which can be deduced from the experience of the coronavirus crisis. As an example he adduced food pantries in disaster-afflicted areas and *Kodomo Shokudo*, noting the importance of making part of normality the creation of relations in which the former promotes the establishment of the latter and the latter becomes the basis of the former.

In response to the reports, a discussion took place including comments from the floor. The wide range of points ranged included how to position the experience of the coronavirus, not approaching school closings as meaningless, and the need to continue with the practice being created on the ground and its “visualization.” Suggestions for making schools community places to be included easily adopted ideas like opening domestic science classrooms to the public and including information in class newsletters. As well, with regard to methods of realizing smaller class sizes, it was noted that discussion was required with attention not only to educational sites but also to people in the region with no direct connections to education, such as the childless and the elderly.

#### **Session 4**

This international webinar was composed of messages and discussion by the world’s leading education researchers.

Prof. Yonezawa posed three questions to the presenters from 6 countries: *1. What do you think is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education system in your country, region, and the world? 2. What discussions are being carried out regarding education and education research during and after COVID-19 in your country, region, and the world? 3. Do you have a message or suggestion for the education research community in Japan for envisioning education and education research?* Prof. Gogolin, former president of the World Education Research Association (WERA), addressed the negative effects due to Covid-19 and stressed the role of WERA in collective education and research. Dr. Brehm mentioned the challenges of the learning gap and suggested the likely re-birth of the idea of resilience in education as well as the possible leadership role of Japan’s education research communities with regard to expertise in risk reduction from disasters. Prof. Lee explained the rise of transnational education and suggested that the role of education research in Japan and the East Asian region may be in leading the world to optimize the use of technology in education. Prof. Yang described the successful experience in Taiwan and clarified their highly effective policy measures in education, along with a wide range of good practices using ICT assistance for effective learning and an inclusive community. He also stressed the importance of international dialogue including the Global South. Prof. Kong examined the impact of and successful reactions in South Korea and focused on online education challenging the value of education. He proposed a new education paradigm using EdTech, with inclusive educational opportunities for vulnerable groups. Prof. Bao argued that researchers need to maintain an imperturbable eye on the issues behind the successful rapid diffusion of distance education in China and many other countries. She stressed that education researchers in the world must

collaborate to address the common challenges instead of obsessing over discriminatory prejudices. Prof. Maruyama summarized three points: i) the effects of the pandemic on education, ii) the possibilities of education research and collaboration, and iii) lessons for Japan.

For more details: <http://www.jera.jp/en/news20200818.html>