


Environmental Education in the 21st Century

Ever since environmental education was promoted at the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (UNCHE) in Stockholm in 1972, its importance has been recognized throughout the world. The UNCHE conference was followed by an increased number of international conferences and events on environmental education, led by the UNEP and UNESCO. In 1992, Agenda 21, an action program for sustainable development, was adopted at the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro. The term “sustainable development” became widely recognized. Discussions on “Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)” arose, expanding on work that had been previously done surrounding environmental education.

Vision and Objective of Environmental Education

Environmental education aims to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge and skills to relate to the environment. By participating in activities that help sustain the health of our environment, individuals nurture a clear sense of value, enabling them to seek alternative lifestyles. While maintaining a deep respect for the uniqueness of culture, environmental education re-evaluates our current societies and supports a transition towards a more sustainable future.

Environmental education is characterized by its holistic




tic approach to the environment and its emphasis on experiential learning. It is essentially interdisciplinary, involving a wide range of disciplines from the natural sciences to the social sciences and humanities. Environmental issues such as global climate change, the diffusion and accumulation of toxic substances, acid rain, genetic modification, and threats to biological diversity as it relates to population, energy and food, along with the uniquely historic, cultural and social environments of our daily lives are all topics of concern in environmental education, research and activities. In addition, the environment of the heart as it relates to our growth and development is also considered important. A diverse range of research and education in a variety of disciplines from education, psychology, medicine, anthropology, sociology to outdoors education is therefore required.

The objective of environmental education is ambitious: to explore new holistic ways in which education, science, culture and civilizations exist.

Environmental Education in Japan today

Environmental education in Japan has evolved from its first phase: raising awareness about the necessity of environmental education, to its second phase: expanding on and developing hands-on activities. Throughout this time, many people and organizations have worked together, embracing environmental education as being central to their activities. In the midst of such developments, the Society was founded in May 1990. Since

then, a wide variety of seminars, symposiums, workshops, work camps and fieldwork on environmental education have been conducted throughout Japan.



The Basic Environmental Law and the Law for Enhancing Motivation on Environmental Conservation and Promoting of Environmental Education were enacted, endorsing the promotion of environmental education by law. With this, universities throughout Japan have worked to create centers for environmental education, and university courses have been established to train environmental education leaders. The Ministry of Education, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has developed Teacher's Guide for Environmental Education, and organizes teacher training courses and events. Article two of the Japanese Education Act on the ‘objectives of education’ was revised in 2006 to include “to foster an attitude to respect life, care for nature, and contribute to the protection of the environment.” Schools and other organizations have since been working to implement this goal. The Ministry of Environment has formulated a basic environmental plan and is expanding its discussion to include practical steps towards realizing a sustainable recycle-based society through cooperative partnerships. Regional governments throughout Japan are also working on localized versions of Agenda 21, expanding inter-regional and international collaboration and information exchange on environmental education through the internet.