

From the frontline of environmental education <Part 1>

Introduction

In recent years, abnormal climatic phenomena such as record rainfall, frequent heat waves and super typhoons seem to have become normal. What is happening with our environment?

Origin of Environmental Education:

It was around 1970 when people started using the term “environmental education”. In 1962, Rachel Carson published “Silent Spring”, a book that rang the alarm bell about the dangers of agrochemicals. Since then awareness about environmental issues such as water pollution has risen dramatically, and in the United States, the Environmental Education Act was promulgated in 1970. In 1975, the international workshop on environmental education was organized by UNESCO. Building on the outcomes of the workshop, the Tbilisi Declaration on Environmental Education was agreed in 1977.

Table: Categories of environmental education objectives as per the Tbilisi Declaration

Awareness	To help social groups and individuals acquire an awareness and sensitivity to the total environment and its allied problems
Knowledge	To help social groups and individuals gain a variety of experiences in, and acquire a basic understanding of, the environment and its associated problems
Attitude	To help social groups and individuals acquire a set of values and feelings of concern for the environment and inspire motivation for actively participating in environmental improvement and protection
Skills	To help social groups and individuals acquire the skills for identifying and solving environmental problems
Participation	To provide social groups and individuals with an opportunity to be actively involved at all levels in working towards resolution of environmental problems

Necessity of Environmental Education:

There are largely two categories of environmental education; pollution related environmental education as a measure to deal with pollution issues, and nature conservation related environmental education which is propelled by the sense of crisis caused by nature destruction. In Japan, environmental education started with a pollution focus. However, there are now environmental educational activities aiming to augment insufficient knowledge and recognition of the importance of the environment through outdoor education and nature education.

On the other hand, higher consumption of individuals and increased production activities around the world have resulted in various environmental problems and nature destruction. In addition, there are a multitude of other global environmental issues such as global warming, ozone layer destruction, extinction of wildlife, and desertification that make environmental education particularly important.

Nowadays, environmental issues, which originated from concerns about pollution and nature conservation issues, have been increasingly recognized as problems that threaten the survival of the human race. Given this,

environmental education in recent years has developed to be an essential education tool for achieving sustainable development (ESD; Education for Sustainable Development). It is recognized that one of the ways for solving environmental problems is to build human resources with rich sensitivity and sound knowledge and views. Environmental education and learning as a delivery mechanism for nurturing human resources are in increased demand.

New Series:

In this new series, we will visit organizations and NPOs that implement environmental education activities and we wish to learn their approaches, discuss the state of environmental education and challenges and to explore future potential in this field.

Themes of environmental education vary from the large scale such as global environmental issues to activities to get to know plants and animals in neighborhoods. The important thing is to be able to think about problems in distant places as issues that have relevance to ourselves, which would lead to resolving global level problems.

In Japan, for example, in the 1950's and 60's, nature was something more closer to most children. In modern days, the natural environment seems to have become something of a different world. One of the roles of environmental education in modern society is to bring back nature and make it close to them. This is expected to lead to enhanced ability to live and deal with environmental issues.

Also, in conducting environmental education activities, participation and action are important. This is because environmental education aims to nurture knowledge and techniques for problem solving by enhancing understanding through entertaining activities. It is also essential that knowledge is translated into action in order to solve problems. Therefore there are many systems and schemes to promote understanding rather than simply having fun. We would like to explore examples of these schemes and ideas in this series.

Towards the common goal of establishing sustainable society, some would say ecosystem conservation guarantees human survival from the view point of nature conservation. On the other hand, other more human centric opinion holds that sustainable economic development will guarantee human survival.

