

## From the frontline of environmental education <Part 4>

### Groundwork Mishima

#### What is Groundwork?

Groundwork comprises practical environmental actions. The idea started in the United Kingdom in the 1980s. Residents, in partnership with government administrations and private sector companies, conducted environmental improvements and conservation activities. Unlike traditional government led methods, residents actively participate in the activities, and private sector companies take part in the work with a view to contributing to local society. The three parties collaborate on activities to maintain the local environment to improve the quality of their own environment and society.

#### Groundwork Mishima

Non-profit organization (NPO) Groundwork Mishima (GW Mishima) introduced the UK's Groundwork method for the first time in Japan. In Mishima, spring water from Mt. Fuji had decreased and the environment had deteriorated. GW Mishima was initiated in September, 1992, by eight citizens groups, with support from the Mishima Municipal Government and private companies, aiming to restore and improve waterside environments in Mishima, known as the Water Capital. Currently, 20 citizens groups are involved in the GW Mishima and it obtained official NPO status in October 1999.

Until now, the GW Mishima has been conducting practical work in 50 locations in the city. The work includes restoration of rivers clogged by garbage, reintroduction of extinct flowering water plants called Mishima Baikamo (*Ranunculus nipponicus*), restoration of old wells, spots that honour "water gods" and spring ponds, and the creation of firefly habitats.

#### From Environmental Restoration to Local Revitalization, and to Human Resource Development

The GW Mishima has been coordinating partnerships between the residents, NPOs, companies and government administrations, and these initiatives have been yielding many results improving the environment with citizens' participation. These successes based on practical activities have led to an increased number of visitors and tourists to the GW Mishima. The environmental restoration work is yielding an expanded impact regarding local economic revitalization. GW Mishima is also nourishing human resource

development through internships and other educational and inter-active approaches.

#### GW Mishima's Environmental Education Activities

The GW Mishima also conducts environmental education programs targeting local children and adults. It organizes nature observation sessions, eco-study tours, establishment and maintenance of "biotopes" in schools, and mobile environmental classes for primary and secondary schools. In particular, focused efforts are made for environmental education for children to nurture the human resources of future generations. In the study tours and mobile environmental classes, the GW Mishima takes the participants to their work site on the ground and uses the sites as open air class rooms, which brings guests close to the field and enhances their understanding. In addition, guidebooks on freshwater wildlife of the Gembe-gawa River and bilingual environmental *karuta* card games have been produced as teaching aids.

#### Think Globally, Act Locally

The GW Mishima's activities originate from the restoration of the Gembe-gawa River – the largest river in Mishima which is fed by springs. These were previously polluted by solid and liquid wastes and household effluent. As the theme was rooted in local areas, it was a familiar thing, easy to understand for local residents and it was relatively easy to inspire interest and, as a result, show progress and results.

When a problem is enormous such as global environmental issues, sometimes ordinary people may not know what they can do and how they can do something to tackle the issues. The GW Mishima's activities present a good example of successfully showing practical ways of how people can "think globally and act locally", through working to solve the local environmental issues, while clearly understanding the linkage between local and global issues.

From now on, we need to understand how these practical and individual initiatives can be positioned in the global effort to solve holistic environmental issues. Furthermore, by linking the visible and every day activities which the GW Mishima is working on with environmental education in schools, they can have significant educational impacts by being able to convert knowledge into action.



Walking along the restored  
Gembe-gawa River



Restored habitat of Mishima Baikamo  
(*Ranunculus nipponicus*)



Bilingual environmental *karuta* card  
game