

From the frontline of environmental education <Part 6>

In this series, we introduced various environmental education activities, having visited organizations and NPOs working on environmental education. We learned the mechanisms and innovations to enhance understanding of the people who receive environmental education. We summarized in the table below characteristics of organizations and groups introduced in this series and their various schemes.

Translating knowledge to action

“The impact of environmental education is to make children hopeless for their future.” Some cynical people may make this kind of remark. It is true that the more you know, the more you understand how difficult it is to solve environmental problems. But this is why it is so important to put one’s knowledge into action, without stopping merely at learning about the issues.

In order to prompt this necessary action, a system is needed whereby target people do not only participate in a single event, but participate in environmental programs repeatedly. The Junior Ranger System run by the Yatsuhigata Nature Observation Center is a good example of a project that nurtures and enables repeated participation. In order to take actions to tackle environmental problems, an effective way is to begin by doing something in your immediate area. Community based activities such as those organized by Groundwork Mishima provide important suggestions of how to think globally and act locally.

Sustainability of activities

Results of environmental education cannot be obtained overnight. This makes it important to have continuous activities. In order to run the organization sustainably, the Whole Earth Nature School relies on revenue from ecotour guiding and some other sources. The KEEP Association also runs a variety of paid programs and

residential experience programs. Moreover, Groundwork Mishima maintains sustainability of its work by creating a system whereby residents in the area are proactively involved in their activities.

Roles of interpreters and program design

Environmental education programs have sometimes been described as “engaged pedagogy.” Simply stated the teacher aims to learn as much from his/her students as he or she intends to teach. What is important is the connection between people and people and people and nature, and interpreters play the role of establishing this essential connectivity. Therefore the interpreter’s quality impacts closely on the quality of programs. In addition to interpreters, program design is also important. Depending on a program’s intent and aim, adjusting and improving program structure and flow leads to a better product and result.

Environmental education challenges and future development

Environmental issues are a serious problem; they can affect the very survival of the human race. Environmental education is recognized as one of the most important and fundamental measures to respond to these threats and challenges but environmental issues are highly complicated and frequently involve so many different elements that affect and amplify one another, and it is often difficult to see developments towards definitive solutions. We cannot rely on environmental education alone for solving environmental problems, nor can we expect that citizens’ actions alone can solve the problems. However, man-made social and regional problems have to be solved by humans. For this, it is important to develop human resources and nurture them through environmental education programs.

Organizations and Entities	Main Features	Ingenious Actions
Yatsuhigata Nature Observation Center	A visitor center aiming to protect the important tidal flat which survived urbanisation. It is a learning center providing opportunities to observe birds and learn about them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Securing repeaters through the Junior Ranger System with different steps for progression • Citizens participate as volunteers in center’s activities
Whole Earth Nature School	Ecotours making use of the location at the base of Mt Fuji, providing programs for people to practice living based on co-existence between people, nature and communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainability of programs assured with guiding and other revenues as the basis for organization operation. • High quality ecotours offered by interpreters (guides) lead to revenue security.
Groundwork Mishima	Conduct riverine nature conservation and rehabilitation in Mishima which is known as the Water Capital, through coordinating partnerships between citizens, NPOs, private sector companies and government administrations. Community based activities practicing “Think globally, Act Locally”.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aims at improving environment and society through active participation of citizens and companies. • Visible daily actions that link with environmental education at school can change knowing into taking action.
KEEP Association	Runs the Yatsugatake Nature Center, providing nature experience programs and nurturing environmental educators. A pioneer for environmental education in Japan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implements tailor-made programs for companies and schools. • The important role of interpreters is to deliver messages to participants’ hearts rather than communicating knowledge.