

**Okayama Declaration of
the UNESCO Associated Schools in Japan
Promoting Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)
beyond
the United Nations Decade of ESD**

What ESD means to us

I am connected to you, to everyone at school, to everyone in the community, an inclusive community, and to everyone in the world.

Therefore, even though you may be hidden from my view, recognizing the value of my role in encouraging each other and supporting each other makes me want to do something.

My world extends from the classroom to the schoolyard, from the schoolyard to the community, from the community to my country, from my country to your country, and then further to the world and to the Planet.

Therefore, recognizing that precious living treasures are present everywhere, makes me want to do something.

Connections with the past, with tomorrow and with the distant future. Now, I am connected with the past and with the future.

Therefore, recognizing that I shoulder an important responsibility amid this long passage of time, makes me want to do something.

Based on a message from teachers describing their perceptions of student transformation at a UNESCO Associated elementary School

Incorporating the ESD vision will lead to the creation of various connections within children's learning - connections between themselves and other people, as well as with the diversity of the world, the living earth, nature, science and technology, culture, the past and the future. Amid such connections, learning will deepen and survive in the hearts of children, and it will support the creation of a sustainable future. This support will be in the form of power to invoke action and collaboration, and the ability to continue inquiring and learning.

Outcomes of the UNESCO Associated Schools in Japan under the UN Decade of ESD

In 1953, UNESCO launched a programme to realize its ideals in schools around the world. Schools in Japan have participated in the programme from the outset. In Japan, the Course of Study (National Curriculum Standard) and the Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education incorporate the ideas of constructing a sustainable society and promoting ESD. UNESCO Associated Schools in Japan were positioned as bases for promoting ESD in accordance with the Proposal regarding the effective utilization of UNESCO Associated Schools for the promotion and dissemination of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) (February 2008) by the Japanese National Commission for UNESCO. Through the ESD vision, and by virtue of teachers who empathize with the objectives of UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network

(ASPnet), and of people and organizations that support the schools, UNESCO Associated Schools in Japan increased dramatically in number, to reach a current total of 807. Thanks to the UNESCO Associated Schools across Japan, the scope of ESD in school education broadened significantly. The UN Decade of ESD has led to many positive outcomes in ESD in UNESCO Associated Schools.

By implementing ESD in UNESCO Associated Schools, topics such as peace, the environment, biodiversity, energy, human rights, international understanding, multicultural coexistence, disaster risk reduction, cultural heritage and regional studies were considered as entry points to learning. Projects and curricula were developed for identifying and resolving key issues in a hands-on, investigative manner. As well as in individual subject areas, ESD has been implemented by drawing connections between curriculum areas, effectively utilizing the Integrated Study Hours and other school activities.

Through implementing ESD that makes the most of the unique characteristics of a region, the children have gained a deeper understanding of how local communities are formed by people supporting each other. They have learned about the merits of communities and the issues they face. In addition, together with local people, they have considered what to hand down to future generations and what to reform, and they have learned about translating these ideas into action. ESD has also been leading to a shared understanding that the issues faced by local communities are linked to those at national, Asian and global levels and that joint efforts to overcome geographical distances and differences in generation and status enables us to create a sustainable future.

The children now view various local and global issues as their own. They have nurtured a “zest for living” while learning collaboratively, and they have developed an awareness that they are the future leaders of society. It is now realized that experiential learning and scientific investigation, through ESD, foster communication skills and critical thinking. They assist individuals in creating a sustainable future either individually or in collaboration with others.

A transformation occurred in the awareness of teachers guided by the ESD vision. Rather than merely communicating knowledge, teachers adopted an attitude of designing and coordinating child-centered study while learning together with their students. There were instances where this attitude changed the children, and changes in the children brought about changes in their school, which in turn brought about changes in the community. It brought out the inner strength of those children in Japan who were regarded as being indifferent to society and as having low self-esteem. It let them to gain self-confidence. Exchanges between schools led to the realization of an even deeper level of learning.

Moreover, collaboration deepened between schools and boards of education, parents/guardians, local stakeholders, NGOs and NPOs, businesses, universities and specialized institutions, the quality of ESD in practice improved. It also led to confirmation of the joy of trans-generational learning.

The Great East Japan Earthquake of 11 March 2011 wrecked tremendous damage. However, in certain areas, ESD that had been embedded in schools and communities contributed significantly to the disaster recovery, with a great deal of compassionate support being extended to the affected areas through domestic and international networks. Education aimed at creative reconstruction and based on a philosophy of ESD is being conducted for the revitalization and re-creation of local areas.

UNESCO Associated Schools in Japan: Our commitment

We will commit to continuing the promotion of ESD as a driving force for transforming education in Japan.

We will:

- Nurture the next generation who will contribute to their own community and to take actions with global viewpoint for creating a sustainable future.
- Realize education with deeper awareness of interconnectedness in cooperation with members of the community and other stakeholders, no matter what approach to learning or the subject, in order to create a broader commitment to peace and sustainability in local communities, in Japan, in Asia, and in the world. Approaches to learning and subjects include peace, the environment, climate change, biodiversity, international understanding, multicultural coexistence, energy, human rights, gender, disaster risk reduction, cultural heritage, regional studies and sustainable consumption and production.
- Illustrate transformation of students, teachers, schools and communities through ESD to spread the ESD vision, while understanding the essence of ESD.
- Engage in thematic learning and collaborative learning together with UNESCO Associated Schools in Japan and overseas, especially those in neighboring Asian countries. Through such learning we will enhance understanding of, explore solutions and take actions for cross-border global issues such as climate change, biodiversity, disaster risk reduction and sustainable consumption and production.
- Develop a national network, organized voluntarily, with fellow UNESCO Associated Schools in order to learn from each other and to raise the quality of activities. We will promote interaction and collaboration among UNESCO Associated Schools, and then enhance mechanisms for the exchange and use of information.
- Strive to be a practitioner of sustainability in the local community to contribute to the development of sustainable communities together with other schools, non-formal and lifelong learning institutions, NGOs, NPOs, local governments and various other stakeholders, recognizing children and teachers as “agents of change.”
- Continue dialogue and cooperation with various stakeholders to link together the five priority action areas in the Global Action Programme (GAP) on ESD, which is a follow-up to the UN Decade of ESD.
- Encourage UNESCO Associated Schools in Japan and those in all the other countries, as

members of a network spanning 181 countries worldwide, to cooperate in building a sustainable future and, in this context, to learn from each other by creating various opportunities for exchange and collaboration.

Proposal from UNESCO Associated Schools in Japan to further promotion of ESD by schools

Based on the outcomes and challenges of UNESCO Associated Schools in their capacity as bases for promoting ESD under the UN Decade of ESD, in order to fully realize our commitment and to steadily extend ESD to schools outside the network of UNESCO Associated Schools and to the wider community, we make the following proposals to all schools, including UNESCO Associated Schools, and to the supporters of those schools.

- Respect the independent initiatives and ideas of teachers and students, and promote ESD across the whole school by developing creative lessons and by developing investigative and interdisciplinary curricula.
- Consider and share ways for monitoring and evaluating ESD outcomes including methods for voluntarily evaluating children's development and quality of learning through ESD.
- Build policies and systems that provide sustained support for ESD at each school, and arrange the foundation for the school principals to exercise their leadership while respecting the characteristics of ESD.
- Expand the in-service training programmes for teachers and others involved in education to deepen their understanding of sustainability from a local/global perspective while making the best use of their expertise.
- Create mechanisms in the community whereby various stakeholders can participate, cooperate and collaborate in the development of a sustainable society.

All children possess unlimited potential. Around the world teachers share an aspiration to provide quality education so that their potential can be realized. While sharing the same aspiration of parents/guardians and others in the community who nurture these children, we will promote ESD in order to create a peaceful and sustainable future.

8 November 2014

Adopted by participants at the 6th Japan's National UNESCO ASPnet Conference (Okayama, Japan) during the UNESCO ASPnet International ESD Events in conjunction of the UNESCO World Conference on ESD

(Provisional translation: Original Japanese)