

## Education for Sustainable Development: A comparative analysis of educational policies and practices in primary schools in Japan, China and Hong Kong

Our study is designed to offer an analysis of contemporary aspects of education for sustainable development (ESD) in Japan, China and Hong Kong. Primary schools with an ESD focus (e.g., green schools or schools having participated in ESD related projects) were chosen for analysis from Tokyo (Japan), Beijing (China) and Hong Kong (China).

As regards environmental education policies in China, an Environmental Education Promotion Law was enacted in 2003. In the same year, the Ministry of Education (MOE) of the People's Republic of China (PRC), under the auspices of the Environmental Educators' Initiative (EEI) project, launched the *National Environmental Education Guidelines* (NEEG) (trial) document. It is, however, notable that as early as 1996, the PRC Ministry of Education initiated the *Green School Project*, funded by the State Environmental Protection Administration (now the Ministry of Environmental Protection).

In Hong Kong, the *Guidelines on Environmental Education for Schools* were issued in 1992 and revised in 1999 with an emphasis on environmental education for sustainable development. A Green School Award was organised by the Environmental Campaign Committee, the Environmental Protection Department and the Education Department in 2000 to promote comprehensive green management in primary and secondary schools.

As regards school-based curriculum development for ESD in the centralized education system of China, a case study school in Beijing adopted a slow, progressive approach restricting ESD to social studies in the senior grade, including physical education and the arts, without affecting the principal subjects. In contrast, it was interesting to find in a case study school in Japan that lesson study was integrated with whole-school school-based curriculum development and hardware infrastructure was coupled with software (teacher) development. The Integrated Course of Study was used as the vehicles for integrating conventional school subjects, special activities, moral education, and human rights education. Emphases varied from awareness in the lower grades to discovery in the middle grades and actions in the senior grades. In addition, pupils were encouraged to share their findings from project learning with members of their community. In a case study green school in Hong Kong, the school environmental education curriculum was characterized by an integrated curriculum organized through thematic teaching

and using General Studies as the main subject. Environmental education through the formal curriculum adopted a “permeated” approach infusing environmental elements into themes of “green school environment”, “environment-friendly [school] family” and “community health” in grades three, four and six respectively.

Much could be learned from the Japanese experiences that emphasized the linkage between school and community and the articulation between hardware and software development in school as a unit for fostering ESD. While integrated subjects and courses could be used as vehicles for ESD, more could be done, however, on improving the integration of ESD with the main subjects in the formal curriculum. In addition, green school development in Hong Kong and China could be further enhanced by referring to experiences elsewhere.

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