

Asian-Pacific Environmental Education Research Seminar 2004

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Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to welcome you here today.

Owing to the support from Kesennuma-City's people and the attendance of our guests like the Rector of the United Nations University, Dr. Hans van Ginkel, the Asian-Pacific Environmental Educational Research Seminar could be held here today. As the representative of UNESCO APEID Seminar Committee, I'd like to say thank you to everyone.

This seminar is in effect a basic part of the APEID Asian Pacific Environmental Education Development Plan. This plan is supported by 29 member nations of Asian Pacific UNESCO with UNESCO having been the catalyst since 1974. This plan is also the seventh program cycle (2002-2007) of APEID activities.

Miyagi University of Education (MUE) is the AC (Associate Center) in Japan of UNESCO. This seminar is also a part of the activities of AC. It is sponsored by Japan's UNESCO committee, MUE, and is also supported by Kesennuma-City and Asia Pacific Cultural Center for UNESCO.

This seminar's theme is "Environmental Education for a Sustainable Society: Principles and Practice of Environmental Education for School Children." We hope to bring together specialists in the field of environmental education to share different activities to support school education. In particular, this support is of pressing importance in the training of teachers. The seminar also encourages information exchange among participants, to grasp the present situation and to clarify the theme of DESD (Decade of Education for Sustainable Development).

This year is the year before DESD (2005-2014), which has been adopted by the United Nations in order to play the central role of Japanese government. As a result, it's a very important period in the preparation stage. It also has special significance to the opening of this seminar related to environmental education.

Those working in the field of environmental education in MUE think that the support of schools from institutions outside school is important. In order to discover an ideal method of support, we convened the International Symposium on Environmental Education 2002 last year in Sendai. At the conclusion of that meeting, we considered what had taken place and used experiences at that time to set this current seminar's theme. In short, what we felt to be particularly important was to collect different activities to support school education by specialists in the field of environmental education, especially those involving the training of teachers. This would also involve information exchange among participants in order to grasp the current situation in this field.

As the Asian Pacific Region is the main area in this seminar, we are glad to invite the specialists from 12 countries including Afghanistan to take part in this seminar. I'm sure that it will help us to deepen understanding in each of those countries and also make us pay attention to details of the different regions and communities. Even within one country, culture and traditions differ from area to area. As a result, it's important that we communicate with each other in an attempt to understand each other. In consideration of this point, we finally chose the northeastern city of Kesennuma as our seminar location.

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So, among the many cities in the region, why did we chose Kesennuma-City for this seminar? First, it must be said Kesennuma-City is eager for environmental education. Due to this demand, in the past three years, the Environmental Education Center in MUE had the chance to support Kesennuma-City's Omoso Elementary School for their environmental education practice. Kesennuma-City is located at the furthest place point from the center of Miyagi Prefecture, the city of Sendai: it takes two and a half hours to get to reach here from Sendai.

Another significant point involves a particular project in which we are involved with Omoso Elementary School. Omoso Elementary School, with the direction and support of a Fulbright Memorial Fund, cooperates with Lincoln Elementary School in Wisconsin, USA in a program involving international communication revolving around environmental education. The theme is "the environment of the waterside". We also keep in touch with Professor Paul Williams in University of Wisconsin and share information about how to support the education in each other's elementary schools.

In order to support international education cooperation, institutions of higher education in different countries and regions work in cooperation to support environmental education activities. This cooperation will give us opportunities to see if the EE programs we develop based on our own ideas could be suitable even for other countries, while preventing us from imposing our ideas on the partners in a self righteous way.

This seminar is basically for specialists, but on the first day we will discuss the reports of different nations with simultaneous translation for the public.

We are very lucky to have been able to invite Dr. Hans van Ginkel, the Rector of the United Nations University, to give us a special lecture. Also, we are very happy to have Mr. Tatsuya Ootsuki (the Section Chief of the Elementary and Secondary Education Bureau curriculum at the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology) and Ms. Tomoko Shibao (the Section Chief of the UNESCO Asia Culture Centre, which is the cosponsor organization of this seminar) to be our guest speakers.

Tomorrow, the second day of this seminar, we are going to visit Omoso Elementary School. First, we will be able to see the practical results in detail in the school which can be a reference point for the specialists' meeting later. The project in Omoso Elementary School is also open to the public, so please enjoy it.

On the third and fourth days of this seminar, specialists' meetings will be held in the Kesennuma Kanyo Hotel. These meetings will include teachers and persons concerned with the Board of Education: as a result, the meetings will be characterized by a variety of knowledge and expertise. During this seminar we are also going to talk about the coming ten years, so we are really looking forward to the positive participation of those younger attendees.

To conclude this introduction to the seminar, I would like to say thank you to both the Kesennuma-City Board of Education for their important cooperation and to Kesennuma UNESCO Association for their strong support for this seminar.

Thank you very much.