Editorial **Environmental Education in Asia: Questions and Challenges**

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Abstract

This special issue is the result of a 2-year collaborative project involving environmental education (EE) societies/associations from Japan, Korea, Taiwan, North America, and Australia. The aim of the project was to create a platform to share ideas, practices, and theories of EE in the Asian region, with English as the common language. The discussion was organized around five core themes: 1) Development, current situation, and challenges of EE in formal education; 2) Development, current situation, and challenges of EE in non-formal education; 3) Research trends in EE; 4) Insights for EE in Asia from outside of Asia; 5) Review, comparison, and synthesis of findings to go beyond a presentation of EE in various countries and instead highlight the recurring transversal issues. We hope this special issue will contribute to furthering dialogue among EE scholars and practitioners in Asia, and to building bridges between EE in Asia and other regions.

Keywords: Environmental education, Asia, non-formal education, formal education, research trends

I. Introduction

Since 2009, the Japanese Society of Environmental Education (JSOEE – renamed the Japanese Society for Environmental Education (JSFEE) in 2017) has signed exchange agreements (Memorandum of Understanding: MOU) to promote international communication and collaboration with EE societies/associations in South Korea (Korean Society for Environmental Education: KOSEE), Taiwan (Chinese Society for Environmental Education: CSEE), North America (North American Association for Environmental Education: NAAEE), and Australia (Australian Association for Environmental Education: AAEE). At the international exchange forum held as part of the 2014 JSOEE annual meeting, it was proposed that a common platform for joint research on the development of EE in Asia be established as a means of furthering international collaboration (Takano et al. 2015). Based on this proposal, the JSOEE Board of Directors decided to publish a special electronic issue of its academic journal, the *Japanese Journal of Environmental Education*, on the theme “Environmental Education in Asia” (*JJEE-EEA*). This special issue is the result of 2 years of concrete collaboration and aims to provide a platform for the sharing of ideas, practices, and theories of EE in Asia, using English as the common language.

II. Context and focus

The *Japanese Journal of Environmental Education* (*JJEE*), published by the JSOEE/JSFEE since 1991, has provided EE researchers and practitioners with an important space to share their ideas, thoughts, methods, and evaluative analyses, and to participate in theoretical discussions, etc., similar to many EE journals published in other countries and regions. However, since most of *JJEE* articles are written in Japanese (with summaries in English), its readership is essentially limited to Japanese language users, most of whom reside in Japan. Thus, although the *JJEE* has become a critical platform for communication among Japanese EE researchers and practitioners, there is a need to expand these discussions to a wider, global network, so that Japanese EE professionals may participate in international and transnational debates on issues of wider relevance in EE. Similarly, EE research in different journals published in Asian countries, including Korea and Taiwan, is mostly written in the local language and is therefore largely inaccessible to people who do not read these languages. The aim of this special issue, therefore, was to create a space where such discussions may be shared and connected. In addition, we decided to invite several prominent international researchers to provide their insights, ideas, and suggestions on developing EE in Asia, increasing Asian participation in the global EE arena, and promoting collaboration on EE with different countries and regions around the world.

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1. Where are the boundaries of Asia?

There is no consensus on where the boundaries of Asia should be drawn. Asia can be divided into sub-regions such as Central Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, East (or North) Asia, and West Asia (which is itself sometimes considered part of the Middle East and separate from Asia). The region of Asia is vast and diverse in terms of its geography, ecology, anthropology, society, and economy, among other things. In addition, the word “Asia” does not just refer to the region, as its people and culture(s) have moved beyond geographical borders. In this special issue, we focus on three countries in particular – Japan, Korea, and Taiwan – all of which are in East Asia. It is not our intention, however, to limit the discussion to these places. Our goal is to link discussions and findings in different countries within this sub-region, and in Asia more broadly, to explore issues of regional and global relevance. We consider this special issue to be an important step towards achieving this goal.

2. Defining environmental education (EE)

The definition of EE is an ongoing topic of discussion. In Japan, the terms *Kogai Kyoiku* (Pollution Education) and *Shizenhogo Kyoiku* (Nature Conservation Education) were already in use and educative practices in this area were spreading before the term EE (translated as *Kankyo Kyoiku* in Japanese) became the standard, following the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in 1972 and the Intergovernmental Conference on EE in Tbilisi in 1977. More recently, terms such as “education for sustainable development (ESD)” or “sustainability education” have gained in popularity. In this issue, we consider educational practices conducted under these alternative headings (*Kogai Kyoiku*, *Shizenhogo Kyoiku*, and ESD) to be part of the Japanese history of EE. This is in line with the argument made by Ando (2015), whereby the “history of EE” can be understood as “a process of ‘environmentalizing’ education”. Moreover, we understand that some EE practices are not even called “education”, especially when they are adopted outside formal educational settings. Thus, we have requested that the contributors to this special issue retain a flexible understanding of EE, without limiting its scope unless there is a specific reason for doing so.

In the past, several academic papers and policy reports have described and explored EE in Asia from different viewpoints. For example, the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies conducted an Environmental Education Project between 1998 and 2000 “to develop a comprehensive regional strategy on EE” and “to establish an international network for the implementation of an EE strategy” in Asia and the Pacific region. The results were compiled in a report (IGES 2001a) and a regional strategy paper (IGES 2001b). The Institute identified innovative EE activities in both formal and non-formal settings in each country in the region. It also identified challenges commonly encountered in the region, such as “resource constraints, persistent poverty, rising population, conflict in resource use, inequity and faulty development project” (IGES 2001b, p.23), though it recognized that these may not be unique to the region. The Institute highlighted the great diversity in the region, with each country facing unique problems requiring special attention. However, it insisted that it was also important to identify common issues and develop a mechanism of regional cooperation (IGES 2015b).

The JSOEE has also made some attempts to explore EE in the region. In 2006, together with the Asia/Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO (ACCU), the JSOEE organized the Asia-Pacific Conference/Workshop for EE Research Professionals – Past, Present, and Future: Reorientation of EE Practices towards EE in the Asia-Pacific. The objectives of the conference were to carry out a “review of EE research developments and achievements in the Asia-Pacific”, consider “measures to integrate EE research and practice,” and effect a “reorientation of EE towards ESD” (JSOEE 2006a). A number of reports on trends in EE research and practice in China, Korea, Taiwan, Philippines, USA, and Japan were published. These reports were then compiled – along with the outcomes of discussions – in a special issue of *JJEE*, in which the conference chairperson concluded that the objectives of the conference had been fulfilled through active group discussions (JSOEE 2006b).

In addition, several UNESCO reports on EE and ESD in the region were published during the Decade of ESD (2005-2014) (UNESCO 2005, 2009).

III. Research Questions for JJEE-EEA2016

This special issue builds upon these earlier reports and discussions. This time, we have framed the discussion around five core themes: 1) Development, current situation, and challenges of EE in formal education; 2) Development, current situation, and challenges of EE in non-formal education; 3) Research trends in EE, particularly during and since the Decade of ESD to follow up on the reports listed above; 4) Insights for EE in Asia from outside of Asia; 5) Review, comparison, and synthesis

of findings to highlight issues of wider relevance. We invited contributors from Taiwan, Korea, and Japan to explore topics 1, 2, and 3 above, while clarifying specific contexts of their countries. For topic 4, we invited leading researchers residing outside the region, to provide their insights, ideas, and suggestions regarding the further development of EE in Asia, and on Asian participation in global and/or transnational collaboration for EE. For topic 5, some of the editors, who are the members of the JSOEE, KOSEE, and CSEE, reviewed and compared the discussions on topics 1–4 to highlight the differences and similarities in EE among these countries and identify emerging questions and issues requiring further exploration.

1. Part 1: Development, current situation, and challenges of EE in formal education

We invited submissions (one article each) from Taiwan, Korea, and Japan on this theme, which provides an overview of EE in formal education (or school education) in each of these countries (Lee and Kim 2017, Kao et al. 2017, Kodama 2017). These three articles explore the following questions:

- How has EE in formal education developed in Taiwan/Korea/Japan? (past)
- What is the current state of EE in formal education in Taiwan/Korea/Japan? (present)
- What challenges does EE in formal education face in Taiwan/Korea/Japan? (future)
- What links can be drawn between the past, present, and future of EE in formal education in Taiwan/Korea/Japan and the local social, economic, political, and/or environmental context?

2. Part 2: Development, current situation, and challenges of EE in non-formal education

For this theme, we again invited submissions (one article each) from Taiwan, Korea, and Japan (Jang and Ju 2017, Y. Hsu 2017, Ando and Noda 2017). Differences in the structure and context of non-formal education among countries are greater than those found in formal education; thus, the articles provide a basis for understanding such differences. Generally, the goals of non-formal education are broader than those of formal education. Non-formal EE can include anyone, from children to adults, and often takes place in communities. The articles explore the following questions:

- How has EE in non-formal education developed in Taiwan/Korea/Japan? (past)
- What is the current state of EE in non-formal education in Taiwan/Korea/Japan? (present)
- What challenges does EE in non-formal education face in Taiwan/Korea/Japan? (future)
- What links can be drawn between the past, present, and future of EE in non-formal education in Taiwan/South Korea/Japan and the local social, economic, political, and/or environmental context?

It is also important to note that collaboration between formal and non-formal education is often evident, and the line between formal and non-formal EE may be blurred in some cases. Such collaborative efforts are mentioned in some of these papers.

3. Part 3: Research trends in EE

Again we invited submissions (one article each) from Taiwan, Korea, and Japan on this theme (Kim 2017, S. Hsu 2017, Nomura 2017). The questions these articles explore include:

- How has EE research developed in each country?
- How does past, present, and future EE research relate to the local social, economic, political, and/or environmental context?

There have been several discussions on EE research trends in EE journals, based on analyses of articles published during certain periods of time (Reid and Scott 2006, Stevenson and Evans 2011, Nomura 2015). A comparison of these analyses shows the particular interests of, and issues raised by, EE professionals in each country. We asked the three authors to present the latest research trends in their own countries. The articles provide information that will be useful for further comparison, and will enable the identification of issues specific to each country, to a larger area within Asia, to the whole of Asia, and worldwide.

4. Part 4: Insights for EE in Asia from outside of Asia

In this section, we invited submissions from NAAEE and AAEE, the partner associations of JSFEE based outside of Asia (Eames and Cutter-Mackenzie 2017, Wals et al. 2017). While Parts 1 to 3 present discussions on EE in Asia

from the viewpoint of EE researchers/practitioners from Asia, this part presents insights from the viewpoint of EE researchers/practitioners based outside Asia. The two papers respond to the following questions:

- What issues are unique to Asia?
- What issues identified in Asia may be generally relevant to other regions/globally?
- How does/might EE in countries outside of Asia relate to EE in Asia?
- Is there any potential for EE-related collaborations between Asia and other regions?
- How can/should EE in Asia contribute to the global development of EE?
- What are your recommendations, proposals, and/or ideas for collaborations relating to, and the development of, EE in Asia?

5. Part 5: Review, Comparison, and Synthesis

At the end of this special issue, a team of editorial members from the JSFEE, KOSEE, and CSEE review, compare, and synthesize the above articles (Ninomiya-Lim et al. 2017). In answering the above questions, the articles in Parts 1 to 4 highlight issues worthy of further exploration that are either unique to Asia or apply more broadly. They also contribute suggestions for furthering Asian participation and collaboration in global EE. The final paper compiles these suggestions and identifies emerging questions and issues that should be covered in future collaborative work.

Thus, we consider this special issue to be a step towards furthering dialogue on EE in Asia, and between Asia and other regions. We hope that *JJEE-EEA2016* will inspire continued discussion of the issues surrounding EE, both in Asia and worldwide.

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Table 1: List of Editors and Guest Editors for *JJEE-EEA2016*

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Jo-Anne Ferreira, Southern Cross University (AAEE)

Charlotte Clark, Duke University (NAAEE)

Arjen Wals, Wageningen University (NAAEE)

About the authors

Shinichi Furihata received his PhD from Tokyo University of Agriculture and Technology, where he currently teaches as a professor. His research covers disaster resilience education and sustainability education. In 2016, he co-authored a book with his colleague for pre-service teacher trainees, entitled *Teaching Theory and Practice for A Sustainable Future* (published by Gakubunsha Co. Ltd.). He is Co-Chief Editor of this special issue, *JJEE-EEA2016*.

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