Editorial

Environmental Education Research in Asia
—Exploring the possibility of international collaborative research—

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I. Context and focus

Environmental education research and practice in Asia have been developed mainly by local academic societies, who have discussed within themselves what environmental education should be and what challenges it faces. However, despite the relative closeness of the countries within Asia, these discussions have been conducted in different languages and mutual exchange and collaborative research in the field has so far been limited. This has led to a decline in the interest of Asian environmental education researchers regarding progress in the field being made outside of Asia, and a lack of recognition from outside of Asia of the significance of Asian research within global environmental education.

To address these issues, in the summer of 2004, researchers from Japan, Korea, and Taiwan held workshops at the annual conference of the Japanese Society for Environmental Education (JSFEE) in Tokyo (Takano et al. 2015). At this conference, a plan was made to publish a special English-language online issue of the Japanese Journal of Environmental Education to explore the theme “environmental education in Asia”. In the summer of 2015, this idea was approved at the JSFEE General Assembly and preparation of the special issue began in the fall of 2015. In July 2017, the first special issue was published (Furihata and Ninomiya-Lim 2017).

The intention of publishing this special issue was to clarify the current state of environmental education research in Asia and to clarify the similarities and differences in environmental education practice and research in the different countries in Asia. To do this, the discussion was centered on five core themes: 1) Development, current situation, and challenges of environmental education in formal education; 2) Development, current situation, and challenges of environmental education in non-formal education; 3) Research trends in environmental education, particularly during and since the decade of education for sustainable development; 4) Insights into environmental education in Asia from outside of Asia; 5) Review, comparison, and synthesis of findings to highlight issues of wider relevance. Contributors from Taiwan, Korea, and Japan were invited to explore topics 1, 2, and 3, while also clarifying the specific contexts in their countries. For topic 4, leading researchers from outside the region were invited to provide their insights, ideas, and suggestions regarding the future development of environmental education in Asia and on Asian participation in international or transnational collaborations. For topic 5, some of the editors, which included members of the JSFEE, Korea Environmental Education Society, and Chinese Environmental Education Society (Republic of China), reviewed and compared the discussions on topics 1–4 to highlight the similarities and differences in environmental education among these countries and identify emerging questions and issues requiring further exploration (Ninomiya-Lim et al. 2017).

To build upon the foundation laid by the publication of JJEE-EEA2016 the JSFEE Board of Directors decided to publish a special issue of the Japanese Journal of Environmental Education titled “Environmental Education in Asia 2019” (hereafter JJEE-EEA2019). Since the term of office of the current directors is until June 2019, it was confirmed by the board that JJEE-EEA2019 would be published before this date.

II. Challenges for international collaborative research

Our new challenge is to further develop the practice and research of environmental education as represented in JJEE-EEA2016, and to increase the significance of Asian studies outside of Asia. To do this, we invited more people to join us in reflecting critically on the environmental education practices in Asia within ecological, geographical, social, political, economic, and cultural contexts, and to find ways to further develop global environmental education collaborations (Ninomiya-Lim et al. 2017). Collaboration between researchers from different countries is key in this
regard, although the language barrier is a huge obstacle to overcome. However, it will be possible to overcome this issue by connecting arguments made for one country with research results collected in another country. In addition, we are considering how to increase opportunities for young researchers to participate in international collaborative research projects.

To help address these challenges, JSFEE launched an international environmental education collaborative research project. In April 2017, as a result of a call for research proposals for international collaborations from domestic members, 10 proposals were received, and seven research topics were selected at the Asian Environmental Education Meeting held at Iwate University in September 2017. As the result of a second call for research proposals in the fall of 2017, four more proposals were received. Furthermore, as a result of a call for participation in international collaborations in Asia, a proposal on energy environmental education was made by the Korea Environmental Education Society.

International collaborative research has a number of barriers to overcome, including the language barrier, the securing of funds and time to go abroad for face-to-face discussions, and a number of political issues. However, if we can begin to overcome these barriers, it will be possible to establish a new solidarity in the environmental education field that cannot be obtained by domestic discussions alone.

JJEE-EEA2019 is a place to present the results of research exploring the challenges presented in JJEE-EEA2016. Projects from 12 research topics were considered for publication in JJEE-EEA2019, and in the end 10 research projects were selected as finalists.

**Acknowledgements**

We would like to thank the following people who made a significant contribution to the publication of this special issue: The JSFEE Board of Directors who launched the international joint research project, in particular Chairman Tetsuro Suwa, Vice-President Mitsuharu Mizuyama, Executive Director Kazuhiko Nakamura, Research Director Toshiya Kodama, International Exchange Director Ayako Takao, and Tatsuya Fujioka, Editorial director of the *Japanese Journal of Environmental Education*. We also extend our thanks to all contributors for thoughtfully responding to our request for a comprehensive overview and discussion within a tight word limit, and to the reviewers who provided valuable comments on each paper. Finally, we thank all members of the international editorial team, drawn from the JSFEE, KOSEE, CSEE, AAEE, NAAEE, and NZAEE (Table 1).

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<th>Table 1. List of Editors and Guest Editors for JJEE-EEA2019</th>
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<td>Chief Editors:</td>
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<td>Shinichi Furihata, Tokyo University of Agriculture and Technology</td>
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<td>Ryo Sakurai, Ritsumeikan University</td>
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<td>Editors (JSFEE members):</td>
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<td>Go Hagiwara, Takasaki University of Commerce</td>
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<td>Kazuyo Nagahama, University of Tokyo (Ph.D. student)</td>
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<td>Fumiko Noguchi, United Nations University</td>
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<td>Yusuke Sakai, Kagoshima University</td>
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<td>Sachi Ninomiya-Lim, Tokai University</td>
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<td>Kantaro Tabiraki, Matsumoto University</td>
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<td>Ayako Takao, Ferris University</td>
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<td>Kazuyuki Tamura, Naruto University of Education</td>
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<td>Jonbin Won, Gakushuin University</td>
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<td>Kimiharu To, Aomori University</td>
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<td>Reiko Iwasa, University of Tokyo</td>
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<td>Yuki Ishiyama, Tottori University</td>
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Tzuchau Chang, National Taiwan Normal University (CSEE)
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Sally Elizabeth Birdsall, University of Auckland (NZAEE)
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JSFEE partner associations: Chinese Society for Environmental Education (CSEE), Korean Society of Environmental Education (KOSEE), Australian Association for Environmental Education (AAEE), and North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE). The New Zealand Association for Environmental Education (NZAEE) has not signed a memorandum of understanding with JSFEE, but has joined the committee with the approval of the JSFEE board.

References