



THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, CULTURE, SPORTS, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
FY 2020 PROGRAMME TO FOSTER LEADERS FOR THE ACHIEVEMENT OF SDGS (ESD)

SUPPLEMENTARY READER
THE VIDEO LEARNING MATERIAL
"TEACHERS ENGAGED WITH THE LOCAL
COMMUNITY - TOWARDS DEVELOPMENT OF ESD-"

OKAYAMA UNIVERSITY ESD PROMOTION CENTRE

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1. VIDEO LEARNING MATERIAL ‘TEACHERS ENGAGED WITH THE LOCAL COMMUNITY – TOWARDS THE DEVELOPMENT OF ESD’

‘Teachers Engaged with the Local Community – Towards the Development of ESD’ is an online video learning material, produced in cooperation with the Okayama Prefectural Board of Education and the Okayama City Board of Education as part of the FY 2020 Programme to Foster Leaders for the Achievement of SDGs (ESD). The program by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, encourages the ‘Development of digital teaching materials to improve “The Capacity to Engage with Local Communities (Engagement Competency)” of teachers working on ESD’.

PURPOSE OF THE VIDEO LEARNING MATERIAL

In response to the current matter of how to develop teachers’ ‘Engagement Competency’, which is important for the further development of ESD, we aim to provide materials for collaborating with schoolteachers by identifying authentic yet familiar examples of ESD and including the most recent opinions of practitioners.

Rather than presenting answers, such as ‘Here’s how to make ESD in collaboration with the local community work well’ or manuals, we focused on the experiences and professional development of teachers who have actually promoted ESD in the field of education and local people who have collaborated and explored perspectives to overcome various difficulties.

In the production process, the participation of teachers, students, and citizens involved in ESD was emphasised and their opinions were incorporated. This process can be thought of as stimulating new educational practices or as a process of formulating ESD communities of practice in which learning is shared, reflected, and attributed meaning.

Similarly, video materials are posted on the Internet and are simultaneously produced with English subtitles. By making watching videos more convenient in various locations and regions, we hope to create opportunities for mutual learning using video materials across schools, regions, and countries.

ABOUT THIS BOOK (SUPPLEMENTARY READER)

The purpose of this book, which is a supplementary reader for the video material, is to enable more effective use of the approximately 15-minute video material for training and classes at universities. Similar to the video material, it can be viewed online and downloaded.

(See page 39 for details on viewing and downloading methods).

We provide detailed information regarding the areas and people related to the video material content. In addition, you can learn more about what was stated in the video during the interview data collection.

After watching the video, I hope you will learn more, depending on your interests.

2. HOW TO USE THE VIDEO MATERIALS

This video is primarily intended for schoolteachers who are interested in ESD, and for students seeking to become teachers. We also hope that those involved in activities, in cooperation with local schools, will be able to watch the programme. In addition to individual viewing, it is possible to hold ESD teacher training sessions using this video material, as follows:

EXAMPLES OF LEARNING AND TRAINING THEMES

‘What are teachers’ critical perspectives in addressing ESD?’

‘Why should ESD be promoted in collaboration with local communities?’

‘What are the important perspectives and mechanisms for promoting ESD in collaboration with local communities?’

‘Considering the necessary mechanisms within our schools to promote ESD in collaboration with local communities’.

‘What measures should be implemented to improve the quality of local activities?’

‘What is the meaning and significance of children going out into and learning in the community?’

[EXAMPLE] ESD SCHOOL TRAINING SESSIONS

- The training theme (question) is set in advance in collaboration with participants.
 - If possible, ask stakeholders working in cooperation with the community and coordinators to participate.
 - ① Introduction – ESD Fundamentals
 - ② Watch videos with everyone (or watch them by yourself beforehand.)
 - ③ Participants are divided into groups and share what they have noticed, what they have learned from the videos, what they think is important, what has left an impression on them, etc.
 - ④ Thereafter, based on the theme set in advance, the discussion is conducted among all groups members.
 - ⑤ Create a ‘Call to Action’ for the development of ESD at your school based on shared opinions.
 - ⑥ Call to Action Announcement/Summary
- Check the progress of the action plan and evaluate each other (or self) after a certain period of time.

3. EXAMPLES USED IN THE VIDEO (LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND ORGANISATIONS)

Yakage Town: Yakage town has a population of approximately 14,000 and is located in the southwestern region of Okayama Prefecture. In the Edo period, the town flourished as a post station on the old Sanyo Road and, even today, a trace of the old town remains, a region rich in nature. Most parts of the town are located in mountainous areas, and there are many challenges such as the aging population and the outflow of the young population. On the other hand, the efforts of YKG and Yakage High School are well known as ESD and are good examples of regional cooperation; the efforts of the entire community are attracting attention.

Y K G 6 0 : Yakage Elementary, Middle, and High School Children's Union. The programme commenced its activities in 2015. The purpose of the programme is to encourage children to become active and familiar with the local community, and to become members of society who support the community across all ages. The overall purpose is to make them aware of the role of young people in the regional development and revitalisation of hilly and mountainous areas and to contribute to the development, enhancement, and promotion of Yakage. Working in cooperation with towns and communities, the 'town development led by children' initiative is being promoted, and both local residents and children recognise that they are members of the local community and should take part in community activities. The opinions of children were incorporated from the planning stage.

Yakage High School: After the reorganisation, Yakage High School became the only one in town. It is certified as a UNESCO school, which is also a base for practicing ESD. In addition, a unique approach called 'Yakage-gaku' is familiar and is positioned as a subject that differentiates and develops the component of cooperation with the community, including volunteer activities within the established subject of 'environment' in school. Students leave school, engage in activities for a long time in local elementary schools, assist with facilities for the elderly, etc.; through such activities, they develop as more sociable and communicable human beings.

Minan region: The Minan region is a school district located on the east coast of the Sasagase River, approximately 5.5 km southwest of the centre of Okayama City. It used to be a purely rural area; however, with rapid economic development, it has been transformed into an urban one. Since the Okayama Prefecture Wholesale Centre opened in 1968, local land readjustment has been conducted, and it has become a major wholesale centre in Okayama. In recent years, owing to the opening of the JR Kitanagase Station and the opening of the traffic bypass, traffic has greatly improved; and with the increase in population, the flow of traffic has significantly increased. The school district population at the end of December 2019 was 31,739.

Minan Junior High School: In FY 2020, there were 877 students and 28 classes in Minan Junior High School. Four schools (Ima Kindergarten, Nishi Elementary School, Minan Elementary School, and Minan Junior High School) in the Minami Junior High School District were designated as community cooperation schools by Okayama City in October 2012. It consists of six subcommittees: the evaluation subcommittee, the school education subcommittee, the sound development subcommittee, the school support subcommittee, and the public relations and enlightenment subcommittee. Each of the six subcommittees consists of the teachers and staff of the four schools and community members. Based

on the common recognition of the ‘development of children in school districts’, the subcommittees are making steady progress while making the most of their respective functions. A volunteer team, the ‘Minan Junior High School’s School Partner’, was established in 2013 with the aim of enhancing students’ guidance through cooperation with local communities and relevant organisations. They have been reaching out to students and participating in school beautification activities.

4. ABOUT THE INTERVIEW

● In the first half of the video, we observed YKG's activities in Yakage and interviewed the two founders of YKG (Ms. Itsuji & Mr. Muro). YKG is well recognised in the community and was successful in developing good relationships with schools. Adults observing children's activities share a vision of developing the children's power. We also spoke with Mr. Takagi of Yakage High School, who is connected with YKG and has created a mechanism for promoting ESD, collaborating with local communities, and continuing activities. In addition, Ms. Higashiyama, a university student from Yakage Town, met Mr. Muro and Mr. Takagi, and through her experiences at YKG encountered ESD, experienced various local activities and touched on the thoughts of Ms. Higashiyama, who is still involved in ESD as a university student.



Mr. Takayuki Muro: Mr. Takayuki Muro was a physical education teacher at Yakage High School. Inspired by students' bright eyes and observing the scenes of fish laying eggs in nature, the school initiated environmental education by focusing on local experiences. He worked hard to promote ESD and launch the ‘environment’ courses, and currently works on projects to attract high schools at the High School Education Division of the Okayama Prefectural Office of Education.



Ms. Mio Itsuji: Ms. Mio Itsuji lives in Yakage Town. She began YKG through various experiences such as raising her own three children, participating in the activities of a mother's group, and attending overseas workshops. She is currently working as a regional coordinator at Yakage High School and is a member of the prefectural social education committee.



Mr. Jun Takagi: Mr. Jun Takagi is a teacher at Yakage High School. As a former colleague of Mr. Muro, he supported the establishment of the ESD system at Yakage High School by connecting with various people in the community, including YKG and Ms. Itsuji. He is also attempting to develop a cross-regional network, including promoting exchanges between UNESCO member schools in the Okayama Prefecture.



Ms. Ruka Higashiyama: Ms. Ruka Higashiyama is a university student from Yakage town. When she was in junior high school, she served as a guide in Yakage town for an excursion programme for overseas participants at the ‘UNESCO World Conference on ESD’ held in Okayama City. She also worked as a member of the YKG when she was a student of Yakage High School. She is currently active as a

student staff member supporting the activities of the ‘Okayama UNESCO High School Network’.

● The second half of the video was conducted in an urban area of Okayama City and featured the Minan region, which is currently active in sustainable community building. Two people were interviewed, Ms. Imamura and Mr. Eguchi, who worked to improve junior high school education.

Rapid development of the Minan region: There was a time when they were apprehensive about the problematic behaviour of junior high school students; however, as the school cooperated with the community to promote education, positive results were gradually attained. One approach where junior high schools connect with the community is through volunteer activities. Minan Junior High School, which is also a UNESCO Associated School, is working on the ‘UNESCO ESD Passport Project’ and actively supports the community activities of students. An increasing number of children have become involved in community activities as volunteers. Junior high school students who learned much from the image of the local people grew up as the main body supporting community development. The teachers who were inspired by it began to connect their schools with the aspirational people.



Ms. Emiko Imamura: Since its early days, Ms. Imamura has played a central role as a member of the ‘school partners’ of Minan Junior High School. While gardening in the junior high school courtyards, she has been working to give its students a warm and heartfelt voice and to create a place to live in the community.



Mr. Mineo Eguchi: Mr. Eguchi is the principal of Minan Junior High School. Based on his experience in social education programs, he has been working in close cooperation with local communities on education, emphasising students’ direct experiences, fostering independence, and promoting education. He visits locations where students are active and presents handmade trophies to praise their growth, sending out messages through the ‘principal’s office bulletin’.

We compiled a series of interviews and summarised the content of each. They contain stories that could not be told in the video and ideas and perspectives that could be helpful.

INTERVIEW RECORDINGS

MR. TAKAYUKI MURO, CO-FOUNDER OF YKG

Question: First of all, what made you start working on ESD?

Mr. Muro: It was in the PE class that I teach in which I started so-called environmental education. One day in May, I was about to go run with the students as I do once a week outside the school and I thought running is not very interesting if we do it only in the school playground. My students and I saw the inside of the river from the bridge. It was the spawning season for fish, and males and females chased each other. For the students at that time, the fish was an unusual thing to see in daily life; they were not very familiar with the natural environment. As we were looking down the river from the bridge, a male pressed a female with a big belly to the bottom of the river, and the female laid her roe the next moment. Then, we saw the male spawn. One student was so excited and said, with her eyes shining, 'Did you see that, teacher? Did you?' It was the first time for me to see such a thing live, so I was also very excited. At the same time, I felt 'What have we been doing in school education?' I have never experienced this in my usual classes—high school students expressing something with such an emotional attitude. Then I thought, 'I am sure such an experience will touch the heart of the students', which was the first reason I began environmental education.

Q: What specific activities have you organised since then?

A: At that time, I thought it was important for the students to have an authentic experience. For example, when we engage in activities that directly connect high school students with living creatures in rivers and streams, they could think about environmental problems and garbage problems. I did some kind of eco-activity, like garbage pickup,



but it was a one-off activity until then. Instead, I thought it would be nice if students could think from the point of view of the river or creatures living in the river. We started breeding fireflies. Fireflies are bred, eggs are laid, and larvae are raised and released. In that case, students could feel as if they were the parents of the fireflies, and so I thought they intensely felt that the river had to be clean.

Q: Did the activity take place at school?

A: It was more of an after-school activity than any formal or official activity set within the curriculum. However, at the time, there was a cooperative science teacher who taught us a lot of things, such as how to observe and sketch in the science class; so I think that extracurricular activities and in-class activities were linked well.

Q: How did the other teachers react when you started various activities like that at school?

A: At first, they felt like I was doing something strange or doing something selfish. I think the teachers might have seen me as playing. However, over the next few years, there was a plan to introduce an integrated study period in high schools. The fact that these activities were cross-subject learning and that students were able to understand the content of the subjects by clearly linking it with things outside of school was very helpful in designing the integrated study time. Through this, the teachers around me also showed understanding.

Q: I think collaboration with the local community is essential for integrated study. How did you work as a schoolteacher in that area?

A: Collaboration with the community was considered necessary, not because the integrated study period was going to be introduced, but because the school I was working at during that time was in a closure crisis. We needed to appeal that our school is essential to the local community. We were widely communicating what we were doing in the school, and I think that it was quite natural for us to ask the local people to cooperate. Therefore, it was not that difficult at the time to implement the integrated study period at the school I was working at. Rather, when two different high schools (the commercial and academic high schools) in Yakage were reorganised into a single school, through integration and abolition, we experienced greater resistance to creating a new school subject.

Q: Could you tell us a little about the time when the new subject was created?

A: The integrated study period was going smoothly, but I thought it was necessary to have someone to teach and communicate in a more responsible manner because it was left up to the skills and capacity of the teacher in charge. It often happens that the level and volume of the work easily declines when teachers change (※ In Japanese public schools, about every four or five years, teachers have to transfer to another school). I wanted to make it possible for teachers of various subjects to be more involved in the special subject, which can be set up at each school, which is the subject titled 'Environment'.

Q: Have you experienced changes in students and teachers since you started the environmental subject and ESD activities?

A: In addition to classes, we also included extracurricular activities, after-school activities, and activities on weekends and during long vacations. We also tried to teach students about a sustainable society. More and more students are

starting to speak, understand, and see things from the perspective of ESD... like, by thinking 'Is this sustainable?'



Until then, the purpose of both activities and studies had been rather vague for students, but I felt that they had found their own goal as, 'creating a sustainable society'. Therefore, I think that the increase in the number of students who choose universities on the basis of the things they want to learn rather than the name and brand of the university is one of the outcomes of these activities. The number of students who go to universities with specific goals has been increasing, such as studying energy, researching electrical wires that transmit heat with less load, and researching microorganisms that break down plastics. An increasing number of students took the entrance examination of the universities that placed value on their activities more than their exam scores.

Teachers changed significantly when they saw such transformation in the students. At first, my colleague teachers seemed to feel that they should stay away from such activities with the local community or that extra work would increase. However, when they saw the changes in the students, they felt that this might be meaningful. Thereafter, they have become very cooperative, and the number of teachers who participate in ESD activities has increased. I think it has changed a lot.

Q: Mr. Takagi, who used to be one of these colleague teachers, says that now his days are filled up with 'ESD'.

A: Yes. Maybe myself, too. However, I realised that ESD is not something to be done only in schools or at home. A person's entire life is about ESD. It's not something special, but I think it's important for each person to live with an awareness of, 'Is this sustainable?' and 'How can I get there?' The students happened to be able to help or produce results in the entrance examinations but to tell you the truth; from then on, they live with that perspective in their daily lives. The aim was to increase the number of such students.



Q: It has been about 20 years since you started working on ESD. Has anything changed in your career?

A: Yes. I felt that there was a limit to what high schools could do on their own. I thought that if teachers were transferred to other schools, ESD itself would probably fade away, so I wanted to create a local support system for schools and a vertical relationship for elementary, junior high, and high school students. At the same time, I was transferred to Yakage Junior High School, where Mr. Takagi was at that time. I knew many elementary school teachers through *Yakage-gaku*, a special course at Yakage High School. Therefore, I created a school-based organisation called 'The children's union of elementary, junior, and high schools in Yakage'. Around the same time, Ms. Itsuji, a mother raising her three young children,

planned an event to create a place called 'a café to discuss the future of children growing up in Yakage'. When we participated in the project, we found that the members of both groups were almost the same. Therefore, we decided to make it into one programme together. The students who participated in the programme started the activities voluntarily and named themselves YKG 60. With the establishment of YKG 60, I think that the shift in educational focus from school to the local community was very large.

Q: Could you tell me more about the 'remote *somen nagashi*'* event organised by YKG this summer?

**Somen nagashi* = fine white noodles flowing into a small flume.

A: YKG 60 began with an activity to think about the good and bad points of the town and to spread information about the good points and improve upon the bad points. At the time of the flooding disaster in western Japan in 2018, we started a night market by ourselves, collected recycled goods, asked the victims to take them home, and so on. This year, due to COVID-19, we could not conduct any activities. Adults thought it would be difficult this year, but when the children said, 'I want to do something', we quickly got together and said, 'So what do we do?' In the course of that discussion, the idea of *somen nagashi*, which was supposed to be cancelled, was to think if it could still be conducted with consideration for COVID-19'.

Q: How did you feel about the event?

A: The children's idea itself was amazing. I thought that it was very powerful that junior high school students, who were the leaders of the project, could think of everything by themselves, including video editing and location selection. Adults have this notion that children only do little at school and at home, and adults have to prepare for this. However, I really felt that the children received various kinds of cooperation and that they were able to think for themselves to do what they wanted to do. I thought that each of these activities would be a source of

confidence and a driving force for them to move on to the next stage.

Q: I do not think that type of creativity or independence emerges suddenly. I think that *somen nagashi* was created because you always encourage children to be creative. Please tell me if you have any thoughts or stances that you usually put into YKG activities.

A: I often use the word ‘grazing’. I think that children need a place where they can do what they want as freely as possible. I do not think it is good for adults to draw too much of a line between the to-dos and not-to-dos. It can destroy possibilities for the children. At first, however, many children asked me, ‘Can I do this?’ In those cases, I would ask, ‘Why don't you try?’ or ‘Do you want to do it? Don't you want to do it?’

I think that when children find out that they are able to do it, they will be released from their constraints and their abilities will expand. All of them have great abilities, and these abilities are developed on their own.

Q: Have you ever failed in any of the YKG activities?

A: There are a lot of things that we could not complete within a year as originally planned and carried over to the year after. However, what might be considered a ‘failure’ could also be a ‘good starting point and good material’. So, I do not think that it was a failure of the YKG activities. I admit that there would be many things that other people in general think are failures. The YKG activity itself may have been a failure, though I do not really care.

Q: Living in Yakage town as a local citizen and the father of three children, please tell me if there are things that you think have changed in the local community as compared to before.

A: Yes. The greatest selling point of Yakage is the post-town, and I think that it is very big and it still has the streets of the Edo period, such as *Honjin* and *Wakihonjin*. I also think that Yakage is moving

forward in a good way, in terms of the importance of having a school, even after the combination and reorganisation of high schools and creating new things while taking care of old things. I do not know if the activities of high schools and YKG are directly involved in that, but I really feel that the town itself has such an energy and background. I was not born or raised in Yakage, but I still feel that the reason why I decided to live here for most of my life is probably due to such ESD factors.

Q: Yakage and the rest of the world are composed of small communities. What role do teachers and schools play in moving communities in a positive direction?

A: I think that the connection between high school and the community, or to those outside the school, was very weak until now. However, I think that in the past few years, we have made considerable progress. I think it is important that various elements, not just schools, get together and cooperate. In particular, I think that it is important for people to feel and understand what is really happening in the community and to think about what we should do while making good connections with school subjects and learning about various issues, considering them as our own problems.

Q: There was a flooding disaster in western Japan that hit Mabi town in 2018. At that time, how did the people of Yakage, including YKG, and the people around you respond, think and act afterwards?

A: Yakage High School was the school with the most affected students in Okayama. I think that ESD has led to the support of the students and subsequent activities from various perspectives. Most YKG members live in areas that are greatly damaged and we have been volunteering to clean up and support families there for the next day. In addition, many local events such as summer festivals and *Bon Odori Dancing* were cancelled. At that time, the children said that they wanted to do something fun, so they decided to hold a night market by themselves, and in the latter half of

August they carried it out. Then, we collected a variety of recycled and unnecessary items and asked the victims to take them home. More than 500 people attended. I think it was because people wanted to be a part of something fun after the disaster too. They said, 'Thank you so much' a lot to us there. After that, the children started to carry out various events on their own. I think that the power of the children at that time was amazing. By the way, after all, children were too busy to enjoy themselves because so many more people than expected came at the night market, which is now another fun memory for us.

ESD allows us to see ourselves from the outside, and we can think of things from the perspective of others. I believe that ESD can provide such a perspective. We can say ESD is the 'education of perspective'. I think it is very important to be able to consider not only yourself but also people who were affected by the disaster and what they feel in such a situation. It is this idea that lies behind the remote *Somen Nagashi* under COVID-19 this time, and I think that it is a foundation for not only YKG but also for Yakage High School's ESD.



MS. MIO ITSUJI, CO-FOUNDER OF YKG

Question: YKG's Remote *Somen Nagashi* event was so much fun. Could you tell me how and why YKG decided to conduct such activities?

Itsuji: This year, due to the impact of COVID-19, we have not been able to conduct many activities. We usually get together for a meeting, decide what

the children want to do, and then act. This year, however, we were unable to get together in the first place. Then, I received an e-mail from the children saying, 'are we not going to do anything this year?' We decided to hold a meeting to talk about what we wanted to do. First, only a small number of core members were gathered. One of the comments we made was, '*Somen Nagashi*' event. In this event, water is poured into bamboo, and the boiled somen is poured into the bamboo. Then, many people put chopsticks into the bamboo at the same time, and the flowing noodles are poured again. In other words, it can never be done during a pandemic. However, the children said they wanted to do it anyway. I told them to think for themselves regarding how to realise it.

The children said, 'If you eat *somen* while watching the video of *somen* flowing, will it become *Somen Nagashi*?' This was unimaginable for an adult, but I thought, 'That's interesting!' First, they will take a video of *Somen Nagashi*. I left everything to the children to obtain permission to shoot and how to make videos. They were divided into two teams that shot movies in various places and researched the history of *somen* in Yakage.

Q: I think the children were doing a lot of research on the history of *somen* in Yakage in the library. So, how did you talk to them when you deepened their motivation and learning?

A: The children did not know, and they were not interested in the history of *somen* in Yakage, but they knew that it was a specialty. Therefore, we made the following proposals: 'Is it interesting to look at it from the perspective of history?' 'Is *somen* connected to the water wheel that children know?' 'What is *somen* originally made of?' 'Where did *somen* come from?' Mr. Muro said, 'I think there was someone writing a book about *somen*'. Therefore, we entered the library. In fact, when I went to the library and the children explained the story to the librarian, he handed them a book which was too difficult for an elementary school student. When we saw the name of the person who wrote

the book, we knew that he was a neighbour, so we decided to ask him directly.

Q: In fact, you said that you left the creation process of the video to junior high school students. Did you really leave everything to them?

A: Yes. It depends on the child's situation, but basically, I handed them everything. When the children did not make a move at all, an adult could give them a hint. Essentially, this is always a throwaway round.

Q: The children chose a nice view of the town during the filming of *Somen Nagashi*. What do you think of that?

A: I thought that the children also knew quite a wonderful place. Though my hometown is not Yakage, now I know that from their point of view, they already know so many beautiful and wonderful places that they want to take pictures. I am very happy about that.

Q: The real performance of the remote *Somen Nagashi* was turned into a big show in 'Machiya Koryukan'. What did you think when you saw the performance?

A: I am always surprised by the children, but this time I was truly amazed by their progress and the fact that children could have done this by themselves. The completed video was not the entire task. However, it was amazing how they got to the point where they filmed the video and how they got the finished video up to that level. I also handed over the emceeing of the event to the children, and they managed it by themselves. There was support from other adults, but I myself did not do much. It was amazing that the children did everything so well.

Q: Who are the different adults supporting the activities of YKG?

A: There are mothers who support YKG together. Some mothers were first involved in YKG activities because their children participated. Others

continue to support even after their children graduated.

Q: You said that you left the videos to the junior high school students but wasn't it sometimes scary for you to do that?

A: Yes. This could be my personal problem. I used to think in such a way as 'You must do it properly' and 'What is the correct answer?' To be honest, I was always thinking like 'Am I okay with that?' or 'Doesn't it bother others?' or 'Will I receive weird feedback from others?' Therefore, it certainly was scary in the beginning, but not anymore as I know that they can do it much better than we expect when we trust them, no matter how difficult it is.

Q: Since when have the children been able to think freely?

A: Many of the core, long-term members are junior high school students now. When they were in the first or second grade of elementary school, they were influenced by older children or they did it together, despite not fully understanding. However, they gradually developed their own abilities. Since around the third year, I think they have been doing what they want to do.

Q: I got the impression that the children's free thinking was very much brought out. What made you decide to start YKG?

A: I think there are three contexts. The first is about my own challenges. I have been very particular about the good and bad challenges. I have been living a life that is sensitive to others' feelings. While becoming an adult and engaging in various activities, I found it very important to express my own thoughts and feelings.

Second is when I got married and moved to Yakage and felt a bit isolated in the town. For example, there is a very popular local summer event in the shopping district called the 'night market' in Yakage. In the first year, no one spoke to me while I walked around there with my husband. However, my husband is a local and many people spoke to him – he was offered many snacks by them as he walked around. I thought it was a very friendly event, even though I was not really recognised yet. However, as my child was born and my connections spread, an increasing number of people spoke to me in the same event. I also started some activities with the mothers of my children's friends at kindergarten. Through this connection, there were more and more opportunities to have conversations, and they began calling me by my first name. Until then, I had felt like Yakage is a 'new and strange town' or 'the town where my husband was born', but I finally felt like this is 'my town' and was accepted by the people. I felt the love of my hometown and felt comfortable there. It was in proportion to the increase in the number of acquaintances. I thought it was very important to be able to feel comfortable in the town where you live.

Third is when my eldest son was in the fifth grade of elementary school. There are always many Yakage High School students hanging around at the station and my eldest son, an elementary school student, was talking happily with them there. I wondered, 'Why are high school and elementary school students close to each other?' When I asked my son about this, he answered, 'High school students are teachers of 'Yakage juku. 'Yakage juku' is one of the programmes of 'Yakage-gaku' (Yakage local study), implemented at Yakage High School, and in the programme high school students come to the elementary school to teach studies just like the elementary school teachers. I thought it was really nice for children to have friends like a brother and a sister in the town.

Another opportunity that inspired me to start YKG was as follows: There are many temples in Yakage town. One of them is 'Zuiun-ji Temple', where



elementary and junior high school students gather for a two-day overnight training camp called 'Zen meditation gathering', which is made up of students from different grades. My second son was a shy first grader, but he really admired the sixth graders in the same team and grew very much in just two days and one night. He has already become a different person. At that time, I felt that the chemical changes occurring in the groups of children of different ages and spending time with older children had a great influence on younger children. I came to think that it would be great if there were places where children and adults of different ages could connect across various barriers in Yakage.

Q: You began to feel the greatness of the fact that children of different ages and adults are interacting with each other and that encouraged you to start a new project?

A: I was hoping that there would be a place where children of different ages and adults would be able to freely connect and talk with each other, beyond the barriers that children of others and children of their own should be raised responsibly. At that time, there was a recruitment for the 60-year anniversary of the merger of the Yakage town office, and I wrote about it and sent it to the office. Then, I was surprised to receive a call from the town office asking me to tell them about the project I proposed in detail. YKG then scrambled to start a project called 'A cafe where you can discuss the future of children growing up in Yakage town', with the help

of the NPOs who had taken care of us in other activities.



Q: At first, you took on the challenge as a project. Do you mean that it was considered over the span of one year? Please tell me what happened when you started.

A: In the first year, we talked about the appeal of Yakage and decided to do what children executed according to what we found. There, I met a teacher, Mr. Muro, participating among the parents. He felt that it was important to be connected to the elementary, junior high, and high schools, too. He formed an association called 'Yakage elementary, junior, and senior high school students union,' and they were very active. The children from the association and those who gathered at the café were almost the same members with the same purpose. They then joined the Yakage shou-chu-kou Kodomo rengo (YKG). At first, we simply tried to talk about the good parts of the town. However, the children claimed that there was a lot of garbage thrown on the streets of the town. The adults did not realise that very much at the time. Accordingly, we started the first year by organising tours for children to show adults where garbage was thrown away in the town and proceeded to think about how we could reduce it.

Q: When you started the project, what were people's first reactions in the town and the community, including the teachers?

A: First, I explained the purpose of the activities to the local people and asked for their cooperation. However, people in the area did not think that there was something wrong with the area where they lived. I understood that they did not want to be judged as having negative aspects which they would have to fix. So, I thought it is necessary to let them know that this is not what we meant to do, though I felt it was not appropriate if adults explained everything before children. Therefore, I asked the children to explain what they are trying to do, and I just tried to support and follow-up in case they were not understood well. Then, to my surprise, the result was that these people in the local community just said, 'OK! That's great!' At first, I thought that children should not be negotiating with adults they do not know, and I was following them for protection. After a while, I realised that it would be much faster if the children themselves go and visit the people in the town, and they were able to communicate much better than we had expected. Gradually, the children started talking directly to various people in the community. Thereafter, I was not really worried any more. However, the schools in the town were more like observing the situation at that time.

Q: How do you actually feel that the children of YKG have changed?

A: Not all of them, but many did not have much self-assurance from the beginning. There were children saying, 'I'm sure my own opinion will not be accepted'. There were those who couldn't act because they thought, 'Is this correct?' or 'Is this OK?' Even when I told them that they could simply suggest whatever they had in mind, they were still thinking too much and they often could not express their opinions. Later on, when I said, 'You are able to do whatever you want here, unless it is criminal or something to hurt others. Please feel free and go ahead' did the children begin to express their opinions. When an elementary school student gives a great opinion, the high school and junior high students often follow that opinion.

At first, actually, the elementary school students were very nervous when it came to taking the initiative. However, the people in the community, regardless of the kind of activity, said, ‘Thank you’ anyway, and accepted them with the perspective of, ‘You guys are simply great’. Just the fact that these children were trying hard to do something good for the community made the local people happy, even though nothing was successful or done yet. For example, a high school student said, ‘Since I became a high school student, I have never been praised by adults. However, I was very happy when the elderly local people told me, ‘You are doing your best’. So, I asked him what he actually did then, and he said that he did not do anything. There was a chain reaction: I did not do anything big, but I was so happy to be praised by the local people – I wanted to try something again. In other words, just the experience of being accepted and acknowledged in the local community, they became increasingly empowered to try to do it again or challenge themselves with something else. There are many things you can achieve if you cooperate with different age groups among elementary, junior high, and high school students, even if you can’t do it by yourself. Elementary school students have very interesting ideas despite having no experience or achievements. However, junior high and high school students can supplement them. In addition, they can do what they want to do in the local community by directly asking for help from the adults if necessary. When you have such an experience, the belief that you can do it or you can do it together increases gradually. At first, children who said, ‘I can’t do anything at all’, or ‘What is the correct answer?’ changed into those who would say, ‘You can try anyway’, or ‘I’m sure that we can do everything if we try together...’ ‘Let us try everything’, or something like that.

Q: YKG children are accumulating experiences that are difficult to gain at school, while connecting schools and the local community. Now that you are assigned at Yakage High School as a regional coordinator, what do you feel about being involved in the school?

A: First, what surprised me was that, among the 400 students, there were only a few students who actually wanted to do something with or for the community. I now know that there were very few students who were interested in the issues of their local community and who had thought much about their future. Also, the school had various barriers, for example, the prefectural public high school had to overcome the administrative boundary between the town and the prefecture when it tries to do something local. I have been doing activities to connect these across barriers and to put them at ease, and I now understand that there are barriers that are important, too. However, the actual school situation and conditions for community collaboration are totally different from what it looks from the outside.



Q: Could you tell us your thoughts on the roles played by the teachers at the school and what is the meaning of connecting the local community with the school?

A: Teaching someone something is a very powerful and demanding job. I respect these teachers from the bottom of my heart in pursuing such a tough job to nurture someone. On the other hand, if teachers are told to fully operate only within this system of partitions in such a limited space as school, I think they will naturally not be able to do it. As I was observing the teachers, I thought that the only thing the schoolteacher had to deal with was this part of the space, and because they were so connected to the various systems, there must be a great deal of conflict around how much they could

do given that connection. I felt that there was a limit to what the teachers and schools could do.

Q: Could you please talk about the teacher's role in removing such barriers?

A: We need the ability to bring children to the local community and raise them together within it, in the context of national educational trends. However, looking at the school system, I think that this may be difficult. There seemed to be a limit to sending students outside the school to connect with the community and support them in such a school where teachers are fewer than in most schools. That's why I think it would be nice if the local community could deal with it, like my current work as a regional coordinator connecting the community and school. If this system works properly, teachers will be able to reduce their burden, and the community and schools will be connected. An ideal environment can be created in which children can cross barriers and grow while having various opportunities.

Q: To be specific, who was the most influential person who tried to smooth the connection with the community by appointing you as a regional coordinator at Yakage High School?

A: It was Mr. Takagi. He is in charge of regional cooperation, which is a window for the school's regional activities. From the beginning, Mr. Takagi brings the students who he thinks will develop more if they try community-based activities or who may have an interest in the local community in YKG. I had taken it for granted and thought that it was working smoothly. However, I learned now that such community activities are still a challenge to study at school. Some students have even been said to study academic subjects more and not extend their interest to the local community because it may interfere with their academic achievement. Mr. Takagi has been making an effort to academically contextualise and utilise the students' experience of YKG in the university entrance examination,

opening up their career paths and visualising the outcomes at school.

At Yakage High School, there is a course to send students to the local area which is called 'Yakage-gaku' (Yakage Local Study); the students in that course had many opportunities to experience the local community. However, the students in other courses, especially those in academic courses, have fewer opportunities to interact with the community and were privately introduced to YKG by Mr. Takagi. I have been trying to nurture the students Mr. Takagi brought in through the activities of YKG. After the flooding disaster in western Japan, the school recognised and trusted my work and experience through the activities around the disaster. As Yakage High School continued to exist and advance in various fields, they needed a regional coordinator and wanted to strengthen their relationship with the community. Therefore, I joined the school to strengthen its relationship with the community. Mr. Takagi kept supporting me towards this goal.



Q: What did you think of the student participating in YKG, when you observed how they were connected to you through Mr. Takagi?

A: There were a lot of things that I was aware of since I started to work at Yakage High School. I used to casually call out to Mr. Takagi, 'There will be an activity next time. Why don't the high school students participate?' However, I now understand that it would be very difficult for teachers to take students out of school. I know that it is not possible

without the teacher's passion. Some of the students came with their own initiative, and in such cases, there was also a pattern in which students who had a desire to do something were asked by Mr. Takagi to visit YKG. This is easier because these types of students already had something specific they wanted to do on their own.

The most amazing thing is that Mr. Takagi found out which student should be introduced to the program among the students who did not even care about the local community. Students who were told to go for the time being, and said that they came to YKG simply because Mr. Takagi told them to do so, grew and changed most drastically. Even if we make a lot of flyers for local activities or YKG to be distributed to all the students, most of the students do not attend, except for the students who are interested in community activities before entering high school or the students who already have experience of such activities. Many of the students who came to YKG said that they were told by the teacher to come. I knew, for the first time, that the teachers had such a strong influence. When I asked the coordinator and teacher at other prefectural high schools, they also said that not all students wanted to engage in community activities at first; so it is important to understand it and encourage them to try. However, if teachers do not have the passion, this cannot happen. I felt it was very fortunate for students and schools to have teachers who have this kind of passion. I did not know that Yakage High School is one of the lucky ones to have such teachers until I worked inside.

Q: Could you explain more about those extraordinary, transformative teachers?

A: It's very simple. There are types of teachers who love to do more than they have to as teachers. I think they go beyond their duties because they have a passion for what they do. In terms of crossing the barrier, ordinary people work within the enclosure, which makes them feel safer or more comfortable. However, these extraordinary teachers who move with passion, truly enjoy transforming themselves and crossing the barriers.



Q: I know that there are various restrictions at school, and that there are various things such as the difficulty of human relations in the community. Moreover, there are more restrictions on events and in YKG activities under COVID-19. Do you think that there are any failures?

A: I think that in the course of their activities, the children themselves never fail in what they do. They can go far beyond what adults think they can't. Now, I understand that a failure in terms of not completing an activity cannot be a failure in terms of what the children's attempts.

There are two bitter memories I have: At one point in time, in my first year in charge of the project, which was my very first project, I was obsessed with doing the 'right' thing. I felt that I had to complete this project properly. When you start a project, you usually have to write down the expected outcomes first, though I think that is a little strange. Anyway, I was panicked when the kids did not follow the route of the outcomes that I proposed at first, even though I did not know what would happen. On the day I anticipated that the children would achieve certain outcomes, they did not have an answer yet. The children had been thinking about what they should do to get rid of garbage for a long time and had not reached any answer. I thought this project would fail, and I almost tried to induce or tell them what it is supposed to be. When I tried to give them a desired answer, Mr. Muro said with a smile, 'Ms. Itsuji, let's graze'. Grazing is meant to create a safe and secure space to a certain extent and to let the children try to do whatever they need to do. Thus,

in the midst of that, I was taught that it is very important to let them be free, including facing failure. At that time, I realised that I was very particular about not failing, or in other words, achieving success. Then, I thought that even if it failed or cost a lot of money, it would be all right for me to pay for it with my own money, as this was the first project a housewife had never done before. Rather, if the children were thinking deeply, I wanted to give them time to let them go with the flow and that finally made me calm. They then came up with some amazing ideas and it turned out to be a very good flow, leading to a goal that was much better than the one I was trying to steer towards. I felt that it was really bad of me to try and guide them at that time.

We cannot change easily, however. The second time was when the adults wanted to make sure that everything was in order the day before the café was opened. The children suddenly started to say that they wanted to sell something new the day before the opening. Of course, we wanted to consider what the children thought of. However, I admit that there's a case to be made in us making adjustments to the social standards so as not to cause any trouble. The children were actually working so hard to prepare until late at night the day before. However, the preparations were not going well; so the adults started to worry about whether the children could manage it. Finally, the adults helped them finish the preparations somehow. Thus, there were more customers than expected on the opening day, and we were busy. Due to the failure at that time, it was improved for the next year. Yet, there was a time when I did not understand the feelings of the children who worked hard in their own way. Later, I found that there were children who were hurt by adults who had helped them without understanding that they actually had their own thoughts. The children were trying hard to do it on their own, though it did not look practical to us adults then. This is still a very bitter memory for me. I know that it is impossible to understand the feelings of everyone, but even though the children are

inexperienced in doing things this way, the adults' perceptions of success trampled on their feelings.

Q: Through those stories of failure, I can tell that you value children's independence, freedom, thought of extraordinary things and the freedom to express their desires. On the other hand, there are all kinds of people who have different values and various restrictions in society. Now that you have experienced this, could you tell us what you think about YKG's future activities, and what kind of stance you are going to take in the future?

A: I think that the best thing to do is to create a system that allows us to cross barriers. Regardless of whether it is a prefectural high school or a school in Yakage, children born in Yakage end up in the same field as elementary, junior high, and high schools, but from here on, they lose their connection because of compulsory education. I think it would be good if the education system would allow children to be viewed as human beings from a holistic perspective. At present, through Yakage-gaku, there is minimally progressive cooperation between high schools and junior high schools, as well as between elementary and high schools, creating an environment in which children can interact with each other on a daily basis. I hope that there will be a world where each person can live freely, and a world where people who live freely are not criticised. Now, I understand that not all children want to study Japanese from the first period. Some children want to study Japanese and others are supposed to be in the mood for Math, but they have to adjust their mood the moment they



enter school, which is generally considered to be somewhat 'selfish'. I hope that one day children can express themselves more freely and that individual personalities are more valued, including adults.

What we have done at YKG is to experience interesting things in cooperation with various people, such as the ability to truly transcend barriers to express oneself and believe in oneself. I am now hoping that this kind of thing will happen in more places, rather than only in school-based education or at YKG.

Q: When I look at a sustainable society, I think of it as the process of overcoming the various barriers that have already been created, while making full use of what each person has, as you said. When it comes to education, of course teachers play a major role – but what role do you think teachers can play in the future?

A: While I did not understand the teachers, there were some biased but critical points, such as the idea that it would be good if teachers let the children out of school so that they can experience a wide range of situations. However, once I started working inside the high school, I respected the teachers' great efforts every day. I think they are doing the best they can within the existing framework.

Among the 40 students in one class, most had no interest in the local community. However, teachers are creating opportunities to offer their students something that may or may not resonate with them to broaden their horizons. Teachers are seeing their students, whether they have a specific interest in the local community or not and inspiring them even more. I respect them now more than ever.

Therefore, I would rather create an environment in which it is easier for teachers to work than to ask teachers to make more an effort to improve their skills or capacities to respond to the demands of society. Some teachers love math itself so much, while others love teaching Japanese so much. For example, there are some teachers who know that studying these subjects for the university

entrance exams might not be so interesting to the students but who would like to convey that the essence of Japanese is very interesting and that math is a philosophy. This is a story that can only be heard in the teachers' room and yet the reality of teachers is not generally known or understood. Now that I know how hard the teachers are working, I hope that we create a system in which teachers can focus more on their specialty if they want to. It could be possible that when it comes to the students' minds and attitudes towards life, there will be someone who is good at such things and they can focus on that part. Alternatively, other organisations can be in charge of dealing with these issues. Some teachers can be in charge of regional cooperation, while those who are good at sports could be in charge of club activities. I do not think that it is necessary for one teacher to be good at everything... to be perfect. I think that it would be better to create an environment where teachers can concentrate on what they really want to do in their education, rather than trying to change other teachers or schools.

Q: In Yakage, I think that the educational environment is gradually changing. The flood disaster in western Japan in Mabi, which is next to Yakage, caused serious problems in 2018. At that time, I believe that the people of Yakage and YKG also slowly changed progressively. Could you tell me how they reacted, what they thought and what they were doing, including how you accepted it?

A: When it comes to flood damage in Yakage, Nakagawa was hit by the disaster and I had deep sentiments about the area because many members of YKG are from there. We immediately went to help. The elementary school, community centre, and nursery school were all soaked in water, so I went there to help and clean up. There, everyone did not seem to be forced to do so. Moreover, they enjoyed it while they became muddy. Elementary school students were like almost playing around and having fun in cleaning up the mud with an extremely heavy cloth; they had never had such experiences. This was very impressive. Not only that, but the director of Nakagawa Community

Learning Centre believes that children are treasures and at that time, all the activities of the Nakagawa Community Learning Centre were mainly for children. All the held classes were for children, yet the adults in the area attended as well. I have heard that the idea is to ask local adults to help children do it on their own at meetings, which is unusual for a community learning centre in general. In the end, the residents who were asked to do it became happy because of the children who grew so much by being relied on by adults. I thought that this regional characteristic was very good. However, the place was flooded and submerged, and the director was disappointed and discouraged. The children and the people in the area were willing to help. The children wanted to return something to the director, and it turned out that they wanted to look 'cool' to give the director money to help. It is somehow very childish, but I thought it was also very nice. Moreover, the neighbourhood festivals were almost completely closed due to the mood of self-restraint, and the children were saying that it was not fun at all. It is the same now under the COVID-19 situation... people are not having as much fun as before. The elementary school was also flooded, and almost all the learning materials and personal belongings of the first graders were ruined. The children told me that they wanted to collect indoor shoes and math sets for first-grade students. They wanted to hold an event that they could enjoy by opening a night market. They decided to collect things like a bazaar, give them to the people affected by the disaster and then hand over the proceeds to the director in a 'cool' manner. To my surprise, the children of YKG mentioned that they would like to invite people in Mabi town, who were affected by the flood there, giving them free tickets to the night market to support them. They actually made it. It was supposed to be an event with about 200 people; however, as many as 700 people came. It was really a busy night, but we were able to give the money to the director as we planned. At the time of such a disaster which had hit this area, I realised that, like the Nakagawa area, people can support each other very quickly and on their own when something

serious happens in an area, if they have already established a good relationship with each other in their daily lives. Subsequently, elementary school students made various efforts to develop the local community.

Among the students at Yakage High School, many of those who participated in volunteer activities grew up in the Nakagawa area. In the Nakagawa area, when children enter junior high school, they would be called 'Tegotai'. Tego, which means helping someone in the Okayama dialect. 'Tai' means 'the team'. Naturally, they say that they are from Tegotai. I believe that such a regional atmosphere is amazing. I know that the activities of the community learning centre in Yakage town as a whole are gradually increasing, such as making children plan something together with adults from the beginning stage by having the children be responsible for it or connecting adults and children to make something together, rather than letting them do it on their own. I feel that the planning of these community learning centres has also been getting better since the first time I saw it and that there are managers who actually care about the children's autonomy more than ever.

Q: Children are actively changing. Do adults see them as the future?

A: The most enjoyable thing for me is to see the moment when a teacher, an adult, or a child changes. The best way is to take the teacher to a field where the children/students are actively engaged. It is much faster for the teacher to observe the children's engagement if you want the teacher to understand the goodness of learning in the community. I believe that some teachers already know this. There are times when schoolteachers tell me this about the children who have always been sensitive to others' opinions: when they began to give their opinions, they were confident, and that children who used to be shy in front of others had now started to voice their own opinions.

I think the adults who saw the change in the children, especially the teachers and the parents

who are involved in education, are the most affected.

Maybe that's what the teachers want to do the most – to see the students change. It is the best part of education that you see children grow, and it also affects others, including adults around them. However, there is a rigid system of school education that cannot be easily changed. Although I understand that there are some things that we should not change in education, I hope it will become more flexible and easier for teachers to be able to fully expand their capacities.

It could be more important for adults to change, and children may have basically not changed. Many children are just doing what they are told to do by adults. When they are told that they do not have to do it in the way adults told them, all of them would just explode with what they can do. Rather, it is we adults who cannot do that, just like I could not say that in the beginning. It is hard for adults to tell children that it is alright to take off the protector you're wearing, or get out of the framework you have been in. However, once we all know it's great to take them off, we can progress very much – and this is what I would like to do.

MR. JUN TAKAGI, TEACHER AT YAKAGE SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Question: Could you tell me about the activities of the Kagura group at Yakage High School, concerning the Kagura in Niiyama that you just showed me?



* **Kagura = A traditional performing art in the countryside that is performed in the autumn in gratitude for a good harvest.**

Takagi: Three years ago, there were students who wanted to revitalise Yakage town with inbound tourism. They applied for the business plan contest, entitled 'We want to make Yakage's Bicchu Kagura a regular performance and make it a tourist attraction', and received an award. We are continuing to do this work as volunteers. The winners have already graduated, but we have been looking for something we can do in collaboration with local festivals.

Q: Could you tell me how students from Yakage High School came to participate in Kagura in this area from the neighbouring town, today?

A: This is the area where I was born and raised. One day, while I was mowing grass with an acquaintance of a group of young people around here, one of them said, 'We're going to do a Kagura event soon. Can you participate?' The students currently in the Kagura group like Kagura performance very much and had actually been a part of the local performing group since childhood. When I told them about this opportunity at school, they were very happy, and we decided to participate in the event.

Q: What made you become involved in Kagura?

A: In the Tankyu (exploration) course at Yakage High School, there was a class where students were divided into teams and they tried to submit plans for a contest. I happened to be in charge of a student team which aimed to study and promote 'inbound tourism'.

Q: Could you tell me what made you start working on ESD?

A: I was born in a rural area, and there have been few people here since my elementary school years. Since then, I have felt a sense of sadness about what to do about the depopulation of my hometown. When I happened to be transferred to Yakage High

School, the school was also in a crisis of disappearance, and it was going to be merged with another school. We needed to clarify the 'selling point' of the new merged high school. At that time, Mr. Muro was playing a central role in environmental education. At first, however, I did not know much about it, and I did not want to be involved. After two or three years, however, I was asked to be a leader and help out. Somehow, I started to go into the field of environmental education and regional cooperation. Over time, I began to feel that these activities could help me think about the low population problems that I had been thinking about since I was a child or that they could help me change the status quo. After Mr. Muro was transferred, I became his successor. I thought it would be a good opportunity, so I started thinking seriously about revitalising the region.

Q: Was that related to the 2014 UNESCO World Conference on ESD, held in Okayama?

A: I feel that our activities for organising the World Conference, and the challenges of revitalising Yakage town through education, worked in parallel in a separate framework. We have to deal with local problems as school matters. Meanwhile, as we knew many teachers had been and would be transferred to another school every year, we needed a way to continue the community activities. At the same time, the school became a member of the UNESCO Associated Schools. Since the UNESCO Associated Schools World Conference was held in Okayama in 2014, I helped the high school network of the UNESCO Associated Schools of Okayama Prefecture. I knew then that there were other member schools that had similar problems. When I asked them about it, they told me that they also have to tackle the regional issues in the future.

My students came up with the idea of bringing in foreigners for inbound tourism about three years ago. I remembered that my students enjoyed communicating with foreign students at the world conference. Accordingly, I thought that addressing local issues at high schools and ESD, which fosters

an international perspective, would go together unexpectedly well.

Q: When you started ESD, what was the reaction of your colleagues around you?

A: Actually, I was one of them – ESD was not mentioned in textbooks and at that time, it had just begun to be included in the national Courses of Study. I think that there were areas where teachers were not confident to teach. In general school education, there is a tendency for students to firmly establish their studies in five subjects and focus on the pattern of passing a written examination in a university. I think there was an atmosphere of expectation among colleagues that teachers who are good at environmental learning and regional cooperation would deal with students individually.

Q: What kind of efforts did you make, either personally or organisationally, to create this kind of atmosphere?

A: At the time, I thought that it was quite difficult to use a top-down approach, so I started it rather slowly. For example, I thought that it would be better to develop the transformation and achievements of students who engaged in such activities. Then, I tried my best to notify colleagues that these students won awards or talked about the ESD activities positively in interviews and passed the entrance examination of university. I started from what I could do with my fellow teachers in terms of student engagement. However, there were still limitations. In order to incorporate ESD into



the school in a more holistic manner, I asked Mr. Muro about what he had been doing to get the whole picture of ESD-related activities that our school has been implementing. After that, I started to put the content in a leaflet or in the newspaper, titled 'ESD bulletin', a little at a time on teachers' desks without saying much.

After a few years of providing ESD information, I thought there was a gradual understanding of the achievements and activities of our students involved with the local community and ESD. We gradually felt that we needed a more focused system in our school that would engage and cooperate with the local community and ESD. This was a time when the number of students in the school was also decreasing. In this context, we established the 'ESD division' to serve as a point of contact for the in- and out-of-school organisations that conducted ESD.

Q: Could you tell us about what you mentioned earlier, the students' achievements, the situations in which they grew up in and the changes that have occurred in the students?

A: Today was the first time for the Kagura team to perform on stage this year. If you look at it from a teacher's point of view, there would be a few aspects that still look a bit awkward. However, the students will grow over time. I understand that as the students have meetings to talk and reflect with each other and go to the site again and again, they will become much more positive than at first. In addition, each student often has something like a spell that they cannot do without a given answer, because they are used to being given the correct answer in their school subjects. However, when they go to a real site, the community outside school, they get various opportunities to make mistakes that they cannot make in class; for example, to suddenly be asked by an unfamiliar old man around to do this and that, to look for an answer which is not found in manuals, and to try it anyway on stage without assistance. The students will get used to making mistakes then. When students learn how to recover by themselves when they make mistakes

and learn what they cannot learn in class, I also learn that they are growing and changing very much.

Q: Do you think that your experience is shared by the teachers around you? In that case, do you think that the school is changing?

A: I feel that there is a clear change in young teachers, especially. After all, it is difficult for experienced teachers to begin the practice from the very introductory stages, since they already established a pattern of raising students well in their own way for a long time. However, young teachers, especially teachers in their first educational experience, if they learn from experience how they think about ESD from scratch and how they can do it even if they fail, you can feel that their movement is completely different within a year. Therefore, I think it will make very good teachers from an ESD point of view if teacher education courses at universities can provide teachers-to-be such courses to experience the reality of the local community and learn how a school can engage with them.

Q: You have experienced ESD in many ways. However, are there any parts of it that have changed you with respect to your way of dealing with education and students?

A: For one thing, I think that I do not like to adhere to schedules. When new things and new materials came in, I thought I would get it done in a certain manner, but sometimes there was a new move or a step that I thought would be better this way. I would like to start doing it without being too particular about what was new. I like to make decisions on the spot. However, I think that being able to act flexibly is one of the challenges for future schools in a sense, and I feel that I have gained something from being involved in ESD, where teachers themselves can be trained while working together with students.

In addition, failure is about where to put the goal and even if I fail here, if I improve it and take the next opportunity to make it better, it is a success,

so I do not have a sense of failure in myself. In the process of turning the Plan-Do-Check-Action (PDCA) cycle around and around, I feel that I have become able to live with the expectation that there will be more success in the future, depending on where I look.



Q: I think that the job of a teacher is pretty tough – you are a teacher and at the same time a family member or a person who lives in your community. What do you think about the hard work involved in being a teacher?

A: I do not know what a tough job feels like. However, I know that my passion does not last long if I myself do not think the job is interesting. I want to mix various ideas and materials so that I can follow an interesting direction as much as possible.

My students often claim that I don't take their activities or ideas so seriously at all, or I am not interested in them at all, which is not true. I usually do not lead them or add comments as enthusiastically as other teachers do. However, personally, the most interesting thing is that their activities and ideas can change by meeting various people. Also, it is not interesting for me when the outcomes come out exactly what I could have expected. Rather, I feel more joyful when the process do not go as it is planned.

Q: What role do you think schoolteachers can play in a sustainable society?

A: Of course, people are the ones who create a sustainable society. I think that educators who are

involved in nurturing such people have a huge role to play. I have liked heroes on TV animation/drama since I was a child. If you talk about so-called ESD, which creates a sustainable society by thinking in terms of, 'This is a global crisis now', and 'How will you deal with that, young man from now on?' ... I feel like I am being a hero for justice. The school looks like a hero training school, maybe? It is impossible to predict and teach what is right and what will happen to humanity's great enemies if things go as they are. I think it will be possible for a teacher to work hard as a member of the Earth Defence Force without exhaustion, if we try to do our best together.

Recently, I have been thinking about compliance. Information is increasingly being shared, and there are many difficult issues to address. For example, in the story of Momotaro (Peach Boy, one of the most famous Japanese legends of a boy called Momotaro), if an old man went to a mountain to mow lawns, he would be arrested for theft; if an old woman went to a river to do laundry, she would be told by a civic group about environmental pollution; if Momotaro brought a monkey or a dog along with him to the ogre's island as his commanders, he would be sued for animal abuse. If there was actually a bad person like an ogre, he would be charged with murder. It is very difficult to realise the ideal of a relaxed life, like in the old traditional tales like Momotaro, since there are regulations in various places and the roles are divided... how to connect roles with others, and how to have fun... I think that that is what we can instantly learn in various situations in the local community. I think that the role of the school in filling this gap is gradually emerging.

Q: Finally, what kinds of things do you want to challenge in order to fill the gap between the divided community and the world?

A: After the 2014 World Conference on ESD, since we had a great experience of communication and sharing our educational practises, we established the network of UNESCO Associated High Schools in Okayama Prefecture. I feel that networking has

been interesting since then. Every autumn, students gather to talk about their school issues and ESD activities. For the students, since different students attend every year, it is quite interesting, and this exchange experience brings inspiration to all. Yesterday, we had an annual meeting, and there was an idea from a student that they would like to collaborate with other schools to do new things.

Thus, it would be more interesting for us, UNESCO Associated Schools, to get along with each other as early as possible, rather than having a hostile relationship between an urban school and a rural school. In addition, personally, I think it would be a new trend to create an opportunity for collaboration between high schools or between elementary, middle, and high schools in the same area. Within the area of Yakage, accordingly, we are building a network of 'regional model' schools, and I think it would be interesting to start with an information exchange and do what we can with various partnerships with elementary, junior high and high schools now.



Q: I heard that children from areas that were severely damaged by the flooding disaster two years ago also attended Yakage High School. I think many people engaged with the community and ESD in Yakage were taking action quickly then. Is there any connection between what you were doing at that time and now?

A: What I really felt at that time was that, as a school, it was difficult to move around because of various

regulations and safety. In the meantime, an NPO called 'Katariba' came to support us and we happened to be able to exchange various pieces of information then. It was attended mainly by NPOs, schools, and towns who were able to cooperate with each other to support school buses for students, and we were able to do something productive. At that time, I felt the effects of ESD activities when I was able to connect with people outside the school quickly. The networking mentioned earlier is certainly an extension of this.

Schools are a limited group of people with various specialties, but when you look outside of them, there are many people who have thoughts about specific fields or themes. At the time of the flooding disaster, there were various offers to help, even if we could not do it in the school or do it together, and I understood that the school accepted the support and ideas of those people. I think that this is the basis of the current ESD.

Q: You have been promoting the idea of having a local coordinator, Ms. Itsuji, enter the school, haven't you?

A: This is helpful. In terms of time, teachers cannot leave school from eight o'clock to five o'clock. There are club activities on Saturdays and Sundays. Therefore, people who act as a bridge for the community, such as bringing information about the area and taking students to the community, are really helpful. It has been two years since I became a regional coordinator, but I feel that education today is unthinkable without this liaison, and I think that it will continue to be so. Therefore, I think that it is necessary for the school and the community to get to know each other through the local coordinator.

MS. EMIKO IMAMURA, A MEMBER OF MINAN JHS SCHOOL-PARTNER TEAM

Question: Ms. Imamura, how did you first get involved with the junior high school?

Imamura: About 10 years ago, I heard from people in areas where schools seemed to be difficult. When

I went to the school, I observed many problematic behaviours in children. The school was in a challenging situation.

Q: Didn't the local people worry about the school?

A: That's right. Local people were also worried about the school. The chairmen and vice chairmen of various local organisations took the lead in discussing how to manage the junior high school together as a community.

Q: Did you ask anyone for help?

A: Yes. We first changed the name of the school support volunteer to a 'school partner'. We recruited more school partners. Approximately 50 people were gathered. First, we did not know what to do. Everyone was desperate. All members were divided into groups and took turns patrolling and talked to the children every day. Among the members, there were opinions that it would be good to scold children severely or to hold them down by force. However, I said it was counterproductive. Why do we not greet them with a smile, with a warm heart? I said, why don't we say something to be considerate such as, 'don't catch a cold'? I also said that if we were not thoughtful, they would not understand what we are trying to say. Many children with problematic behaviour are more sensitive. They feel everything in their hearts. They know what we think. Therefore, we started with a really sweet kind heart, a smile, and a voice. Some members said that they could not say such naïve things. However, after a while, all the members started talking to each other and the children very gently. Subsequently, more children started to slowly greet us. We were able to talk to the children who had problems.

I believe that children who cause trouble do not have a place where they can belong. One of the students said at the time, 'When we go to the park, we are looked at with disdain'. 'I am looked at suspiciously when I go to the store'. I said, then, 'You can come to my house'. The students actually came to my house almost every day. I said the following to the students who came to my house – I

taught the bare essential social rules. 'Let's get the shoes tidy(ied) up in the entrance', 'let's wash your hands', and 'let's say greetings when you enter each other's houses, and after you have the meal. I also taught them, 'let's arrange the bicycles neatly' and 'when it rains, wear a raincoat instead of an umbrella'. They followed the rules honestly. They were very good children. I said, 'Everyone is good. Not 100 percent perfect but 120 percent perfect!' And I asked them, 'You can be a good child at school, can't you?' They responded, 'It's impossible to be a good child at school!' However, the students gradually stopped bothering others and became well-behaved and finally graduated from junior high school. These children are now hard working adults.

Other children also said many things about their families' dissatisfaction, such as their parents always quarrelling with each other, or that they only cared about their younger brothers and older brothers. However, they said they wanted to go to high school, so I consulted with the principal and vice principal. The children then started to work diligently. At the end of the first term, they ran to my house because they rejoiced about their grades which had improved. I said, 'Great! I knew you could do it'. From the second term, they came to my house and began studying. All the children passed the high school entrance examination. They were wonderful. We all brought the notification of acceptance to high school to my house.

I think children with problems are those who are hungry for affection. I hugged every child. They always run to me when they find me. They run to me and hug me for a long time. I thought that hugs and the warmth of one's hands could convey love.

Q: Have you gradually changed after seeing these children?

A: Yes. I think the children are unconditionally cute. Everyone has good characteristics. I think that children can feel safe if we think that they are unconditionally cute.

Those children were most pleased with their birthdays. I would bake a sponge cake on their birthdays. On someone's birthday, s/he waited in the next room. Other children decorated the cake with their feelings of congratulation. When the birthday child came into the room, we all sang 'happy birthday to you' and celebrated. Both the boys and girls would look very happy.

Thus, I cannot help but love every child. A child brought a bouquet of flowers with his or her mother during the graduation ceremony. I was so happy that I cried. I think it's good that we relate to everyone with warm feelings.

When I was working in the school garden, children who had problems came to help. They actually worked hard to draw water and helped me a lot. I was happy, so I said, 'You are amazing, I was really helped. Thank you very much', while we worked together. These children are often scolded by adults or teachers. However, they are rarely thanked or praised by anyone. That is why they did their best to help me with anything.

Q: I think those children had a hard time, but now the school looks very calm and stable.

Right now, we do not patrol together, as we used to. Teachers and people in the community were relieved because they got better.

A: What do you think of this school today?

Imamura: I'm happy. I did not expect it to get this much better. I'm happy. Now, every child greets me when they go to school. They're all very nice. I'm happy.

Q: You've been able to have a very good relationship with the children. What do you think is important to continuing this?

A: Yes. I am already over 70 years old. Therefore, from now on, I would like to be in a position of helping rather than being the leader. I would like to ask someone else to replace me. I want her to take over and continue my activities. The important thing is that it is impossible to continue an activity

if you feel that you have to do something to others. In fact, you are actually getting much more joy from the activity.

Q: A junior high school student said, 'There is a good circle of volunteers in the Minan area'. Small children started to think, 'I want to be like that when I see people. I want to be like this'. People are connected by a circle.

A: Yes, a circle is connected now. I think we should keep it from collapsing. When I do something, I ask everyone to do a favour and assist. There are always people who will help us. I appreciate it. No matter what you do, I appreciate that everyone can do the same.



Q: You have created a very nice circle.

A: Thank you. There was a big problem at first. However, if something bad happens, there will definitely be something good. I am glad that meeting with my successor is the best way forward.

MR MINEO EGUCHI, PRINCIPAL AT
MINAN MUNICIPAL JUNIOR HIGH
SCHOOL

Question: Mr. Eguchi, what are your thoughts, ideas and ideals in your daily activities? What made you produce your current ideas and principles? Please tell me about this, including your past experiences.

A: I think it's fun for everyone to be recognised and sought after by others. I can look for many such

situations in school life, but I would like to expand on these opportunities.

Our school aims to nurture students who accept each other through various experiences and enhance each other. I believe that there are four important points forming the backbone of these efforts. First, make it a school that students want to go to. The second point is to make it a school that parents want their children to attend. The third point is, above all, make it a school where the community understands the school and wants to cooperate with the school's educational activities. It is important to create a system that enables junior high school students to become active 'middle leaders' in the community. The fourth point is to make it a school where teachers and staff are glad to have worked. This is what we strive for at Minan Junior High School. I want to create a workplace where teachers and staff can achieve self-fulfilment.

These four points are not possible without the involvement of parents and local people. I hope that schools will build strong ties with local communities to help children grow up to be sought after and relied on by others. I hope that children will develop a sense of self-affirmation and increased confidence.

Q: Did you have any special experiences or opportunities that led you to that idea?

A: I had a chance to leave school education for a while. I was involved in social education (Prefectural Board of Education Secretariat and Okayama City Office of Education) and youth education (National Kibi Youth Nature House). I learned many things that were different from school education.

There is a part that teachers only see in school education. However, when I took a step outside and looked at school education from the outside, I felt that there were various approaches that could be used. This led to the idea that educational activities should not be completed only within schools, but that the possibility of such activities could be

expanded on even further with the help of local communities.



Q: I heard that people in the community deepened their relationship with the junior high school students by taking care of the flowerbeds and gardens at school. What kinds of efforts are the teachers of Minan Junior High School making?

A: Since it is a school, I think it is most important to create a good school for children. Therefore, I think that the most important aspect is improving the classes by giving students comprehensible lessons and helping them acquire solid academic abilities.

Second, to develop the children's skills and enhance their self-affirmation, the school, grade, and class events were left to the children, rather than led by teachers. The children can think, plan, and prepare for the event. It is important to ensure that their reflection time is guaranteed. It was to create a place for children to take the initiative of activity.

The school's motto is: 'Let's create the winds of experience'. This motto means that students obtain the opportunity to grow through experience. What is important here is independently thinking about the kind of vision we can have, what we can do, and what we can do to think and be active as a group. It is necessary to look back on the results of these efforts and then follow the PDCA cycle to link them to the next stage.

The third point is that the principal's office is the headquarters of local activities, called the 'school support area headquarters'. I came to the conclusion that children should be transformed through creating an unprecedented system of regional cooperation by strengthening the local community.

Q: I have heard from students that there is a circle of volunteers in Minan Junior High School and in the Minan area. From your point of view, how have junior high school students changed in the past, through seeing adults and teachers in the community? What kind of meaning, significance and value do you think such changes have?

A: Yes. We ensured that children had the opportunity to experience, but rather than just experience, we wanted to focus our approach on volunteer activities. For many students, the start of volunteer activities is to earn additional points in deciding their future paths. In addition, the people in the areas where we recruited volunteers, who were adults, looked at volunteers as a mere labour force, wanting junior high school students to help with the events that only a few people participated in due to the aging society.

Children want points, and communities want labour. This is, in a sense, a win-win situation. Both types of wishes may come true. However, I wanted to improve the quality. Instead of simply 'participating' in volunteer activities, I asked them that I wanted to make opportunities; I spoke to them about creating opportunities where 'students take part in the planning', if they are going to be volunteers.

It began with a community learning centre. Parents and local residents were very relieved that students went in and out of the community centre. Local leaders gathered at the community learning centre. Volunteer activities should not simply end with a day when children do an activity on the day and do it suddenly. Children should receive an explanation in advance and submit a project proposal about budget, time, and what they would

like to do. As they work on it, they should repeatedly prepare and get involved. It seems like a series of consecutive shots of fireworks rather than a single shot of fireworks. Even if the children fail the first time, they will look back on it, and on the second time they will develop higher-quality volunteer activities to correct this.

Gradually, I hear that the participating elementary school students started to think, 'Ah, elder brother, elder sister, the middle school students are working hard' and 'I also want to be active like them when I become a middle school student'. There are two elementary schools in the middle school district. I have heard from a schoolteacher that an elementary school student said, 'I want to have the opportunity to do volunteer work', in school events and community events. This is just the beginning. In addition, some preschool children say that they want to be like the older students when they see the elementary and junior high school students, so volunteers have become heroes.



At first, volunteer activities began to earn points for high school entrance examination for the students, but they started to think that volunteer activities were for others. One of those students reflected that, 'I feel like I'm doing volunteer work for myself after all'. Since students participated in the project from the beginning, they had an experience that they could not have at school because of the awareness and learning about/being taught by various people. If they volunteer to work the next time, they consider what kind of experience they can have, or whether other people will accept their

opinion. When people accepted the students' opinions, they will gain confidence. I am very happy that an increasing number of children see volunteer activities as a step towards self-realisation. Children who grow up to be independent, gain confidence by expanding their activities not only to schools but also to local communities, and their looks, activities, and dialogue have changed dramatically. The strengths are also shown when we organise school, grades, and class events. This is why power works at school. The current situation is that the people who have recruited volunteers, the students who have been there, and the school are all good, and a win-win situation is connected by a triple win.

Q: You told me that the community centre became the starting point where you could think about volunteer activities, mainly for junior high school students. I heard that they have developed further today, for example, in cooperation with local companies and citizens' groups. Could you tell me a little more about that?

A: Okayama City has an 'Okayamako Development Ordinance'. There is a passage that states, 'Let families, schools, local communities, businesses, and the city work together based on mutual trust to ensure that children are properly raised according to their mental and physical development'.

If you are involved in community centre activities, you will have an opportunity to meet many 'leaders'. The fact that junior high school students were active as the middle leaders of the community was conveyed to the community from the community centre. In addition, there were calls from local groups and citizen groups working towards similar purposes to incorporate junior high school students into their own activities. Currently, there is a civic group active in Kitanagase Station, and junior high school students participate intermittently. Junior high school students are also involved in the management of the school district's sports festival and athletic meeting programmes. Recently, it has developed into a volunteer programme where

junior high school students take the initiative in disaster drills.



Q: You have seen the teachers of Minan Junior High School, many local people and junior high school students change. Some teachers participate in various activities. As these activities continue to develop, how do you think the teachers of Minan Junior High School are changing or growing?

A: Yes. School teachers tend to feel as if school education has made them grow and transform children in front of them. Now, local people come and go to school as school supporters on a daily basis. For example, the volunteers make flowers bloom throughout the year and they help create an environment by watching over students so that they can attend classes with peace of mind. During the school exam period, they helped students study for the test and talked to students from a different point of view. The number of teachers who can understand the fact that school supporters are creating great power that cannot be achieved by teachers alone has increased.

The number of teachers who want to be more actively connected to the local community has been increasing. For example, new classes, such as Saturday classes, are being held, and local people have become instructors. This is an activity of our school, but each teacher has his or her own region when he or she goes home.

If there is no overlap between work and holidays at this school and teachers currently, club activities,

closed on Saturdays and Sundays, are also involved in the areas where they live. I think that the achievements of our school will be returned to their respective regions.

Q: Now, I have some additional questions. I think that you have a lot of work to do because you have been actively involved in so many events. While you are working on many things, what do you think of yourself? What are you feeling?

A: I try to patrol the daily class as much as possible, but I can only stay in class for a short time. The students who go out to community activities on Saturdays and Sundays show expressions that cannot be seen at school. I look forward to seeing this. The activities are introduced in the information bulletin from the principal's office. I am glad that it encourages children and helps local people know that children are active in various situations. That's my life's purpose.

Q: I think you brought a handmade trophy for your students at an ESD competition before. Could you tell me about your thoughts on making it?

A: Yes. I see. This is a simple trophy. This is the process of it being developed. It was made of plastic bottles. You cut a plastic bottle, try to make it work according to the design, and paint it like this. I cut it into these trees and made a hole here. I made a hole and shaved the surface with a chisel, just like I did with the cap of the plastic bottle.

I would like to express my gratitude here for this. You burn characters with a soldering iron instead

of a pen. Therefore, it is only one of a kind. I would like to express my feelings about the trophy. For example, feelings of gratitude to someone for taking care of us and feelings of pride for the students' hard work. I would like to convey my feelings, not as an off-the-shelf product, but as an original message from within myself. I will give it to them as a surprise. Through this trophy, I would like to make adults in the community remember and remind the students that met me a few years ago. I hope that volunteer activities will continue to be a part of their life's work for their self-realisation, and that they will continue to be connected to each other for a long time. I make the trophy with this thought(s) that we would be grateful if it could become a bridge between them and these experiences.



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Sustainable Development is an important idea, but not easy to explain, especially to young learners. Hence, traditional methods of talk-and-chalk may not be the most preferred way to launch Education for Sustainable Development. Framed by the former United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan: *Our biggest challenge in this new century is to take an idea that seems abstract – sustainable development – and turn it into a reality for all the world's people.*

This is where the project on ‘Teachers Engaged with the Local Community – Towards the Development of ESD’ presents a number of innovations in delivering the concept. Firstly, by using online video learning material it could reach a wider audience through the community. Giving English subtitles to the video materials and as posted on the Internet will make the materials more accessible to other students and teachers worldwide. This will facilitate further the promotion and application of ESD.

In a pandemic environment like today, it is an added advantage to promote ESD. Another feature is being produced in cooperation with the Okayama Prefectural Board of Education and the Okayama City Board of Education which is a significant step in co-creating learning material. Thirdly, to coincide it as part of the FY 2020 Programme to Foster Leaders for the Achievement of SDGs (ESD) gives it much relevance, especially when the program is supported by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. Lastly, in this way it also encourages the ‘Development of digital teaching materials to improve “The Capacity to Engage with Local Communities (Engagement Competency)” of teachers working on ESD’ as stated. In short, it augurs well the way of learning by doing rather than merely listening and watching.

Learning by doing sets a platform for “engagement competency” particularly in the context of working with the community in developing clearer understanding regarding ESD. This is more so because the settings chosen are real-world situations with familiar illustrations of ESD. The aim to provide the materials for collaborating with school teachers in this way is applauded.

The training theme (in the form of questions) which is set in advance is well thought out in collaboration with participants. It is also well acknowledged that other stakeholders who work in cooperation with the community and coordinators can also be valuable sources of inputs. Discussion can be better conducted in this way involving all group members. The following ‘Call to Action’ for the development of ESD will further clarify and ensure

that the process of co-learning by doing is appropriately implemented to aid understanding of the materials used within the context of a given school, local community and organisations. The Yakage Town demonstrated this well where the role of young people in the regional development and revitalisation of hilly and mountainous areas are highlighted, and to their contributions to the development, enhancement, and promotion of the town in cooperatively 'led by children' initiative. Similarly, the other examples, like the Yakage High School, being the only one in town, and certified as a UNESCO school, a base for practicing ESD. Uniquely, it introduces an approach called 'Yakage-gaku.' All these are welcome real-life illustrations that are only observable but could be experienced too by the students and teachers alike. This goes for all the other examples in the video as well as the accompanying interviews recorded.

In summary, this is a very commendable exercise in advancing ESD in creative and practical ways. It incorporates a number of ESD-friendly approaches such as 'learning by doing,' community engagement, real-life experiences, realigning with cultural context, and also values-based. These are all very relevant to the achievements of SDG 2030 which are adequately accounted for in the video.

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A school was historically an institution in the community that served as a place for educating the children of the community. A school was a part of the community's institutions to ensure the practices and traditions of the community were running well and the goals were achieved. As a consequence there was no separation between community and the school. In the later development as schools became formal institutions, schools were gradually moved away from the community to become "independent" institutions.

The formal status of schools creates a gap between schools and the community that in some cases bring disadvantages for both. The idea of engaging community in ESD program is certainly a good step to bring back school and community together to their natural positions and to promote the success of ESD program. School should not be alienated from the community. A school is a part of the community and the community is also a part of the school.

Collaboration between community and schools should bring benefits to both parties. Firstly, collaboration allows schools to provide more contextual learning experience for the children. Working together with the community on real issues found in their environment gives authentic experience for the students. Since the issues they are working out are their common problems, both the community and the students share the responsibility. Such experience should touch students' emotions so that learning is not only involving thinking but also feeling. This

will develop students' sense of belonging and love to their community. In addition, working in real problems provides a real challenge for the students to practice their real skills and competencies. In sum, collaboration between schools and community provide learning experience for students to develop their potentials in authentic and meaningful ways.

Secondly, collaboration between schools and community can be the best strategy for the community to ensure that their future generations are properly educated in their aspirations. The essence of education is a process to prepare the future members of the community so that they can play the roles expected by the community. Each community has cultures, values, and aspirations that they expect their children will be able to maintain and perform. Working together provides opportunities for students and the community to share their thinking and feeling. The opportunity for the young and the older generations to meet and share is a good measure for reducing communication breakdown and generation gaps. Behavioral problems between younger generations and the older generation mostly occur due to the absence of communication. In brief, engaging community in the school programs is certainly the right way to prepare the next generation of the community.

Thirdly, working on real issues in the community means solving the real problems. Indeed, many schools have implemented project-based lessons that allow students to pursue their interests. In most cases, however, the projects were done by the students without involving the community. The lack of community's participation reduce the meaningfulness of the projects since the community may perceive that the problem is not urgent to be solved or that the solution is not the one expected by the community. Through collaboration the students and the community can identify problems they want to solve, formulate the strategy to be taken, and design the best solution. Since the project is a joint program, both the students and the community share the same ownership of it. When a solution is finally achieved both the students and the community can enjoy their common achievement. Working on common projects with the community not only promotes the meaningfulness of the project but also ensure the sustainability of the project since everyone in the community took part and own the project.

Finally, collaborating with the community helps schools to overcome shortage of resources. Community is a source of plenty learning resources. In almost every community there are persons with distinguished expertise, persons who own special properties or persons who have a certain privilege, influence, or power. Collaboration with the community can help the school to have access to these resources. A school can be small and has limited resources but collaboration with the community can turn the school to a very big because the whole community is also a part of the school.

Since the "separation" of schools from the community has been practiced for quite long time, bringing them back together can be a challenging effort. It requires more than just dedicated teachers and school leaders or volunteered community members and committed community leaders but it also requires changing in school managerial system and most importantly changing in visions. Individual initiatives from the school and the community members is certainly a good start but to have a greater impact school and community collaboration should be level up to a new schooling. Changing the current paradigm of schooling requires more radical changes

of the school system and the roles of the community. Schools and community need to work together to formulate the goals and the system.

There are number of alternative strategies to start school and community collaboration, such as through extracurricular and parent association. Though many extracurricular programs are focused on in-school activities, however, there are extracurricular programs that allow students to interact with the community. Schools may start building collaboration by engaging community members in the program and then scale up the activities. Another alternative is through parent association. In most schools there is a parent association that supports schools in running the programs. Schools can start joint projects that involve students and parents. Throughout the progress of the project they can extent the project and broaden the participants by involving more community members.

In conclusion, collaboration is the natural relationship between school and the community. The “separation” disadvantages both that unification should be a better way to move forward. Schools and community should not be separated from each other because they need each other. So, let’s bring back the schools to the community and bring the community to the schools.

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General Situationer:

The video shows how teachers engaged with the local community towards the development of ESD. Similarly, with other community-based Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in Asia- Pacific, it is noticeable that academic institutions, teacher, and student participation emphasized ESD in the curriculum.

Statement of Purpose:

The purpose of this paper is to examine whether the video (1) has emphasized the “engagement competency” for teachers to further develop ESD through the provision of authentic yet familiar examples of ESD practitioner’s recent opinions. Moreover, this will also find out whether the video has (2) presented not just the “how’s” in the collaboration process but rather the experiences and teachers’ professional development who have promoted ESD in the field of education and local people who have encountered challenges in the collaboration process. Furthermore, this paper also seeks discussion whether (3) this can be a good reproduction material/ resource for schools in the Asia Pacific and the world.

Comments / Insights/ Reflections:

The video's first presentation shows the interviews from the teachers of YKG, a PE Teacher and a High School Teacher, alongside a university student from Yakage town and the school's coordinator, while the second half was with the Minan region.

In Mr. Takayuki Muro's interview, *the engagement competency highlights when students engaged in the integrated learning strategy referred to as a Project-based Learning (PBL) approach. In his PE class, he also mainstreams environmental education.* This commendable learning process as PE is integrated with an environmental concept as not all PE classes do this practice. **The different activities engage students with living creatures, build an emotional attachment and connection to the environment.** The video expresses how emotional connection builds and engages the local communities with the people and other living things. What makes this experience stand as well, is the idea that PE can engaged students in an off-campus experience making environmental education the heart of the process to achieve the competencies of the PE curriculum. Viewers, in this case, maybe given a definite idea of how collaboration with communities can take place, especially in courses or subjects which are challenging to find relevant connections.

The change process was also highlighted by presenting how students have been changed in the entire ESD journey in terms of the selection of their program interests and focus as they reach the University level. *One noticeable change as well was that teachers have slowly been realizing the importance of ESD work, not just an additional workload, but rather, a process that has to be immersed in the teacher's paradigm.* This is a very important story experience considering that most teachers especially in the Asia- Pacific region have been challenged about additional workloads if ESD is integrated into the lesson. By this experience, teachers can have a grasp of its importance, not just as a concept, but as a practice that must be lived throughout their teaching career journey.

The *interview also clearly expresses the need for a local support system.* This is an important addition to the story- experience since what every institution need are support. The strong teacher support system will enable schools to continue to engage ESD in local communities and at the same time, help them improve and continue what has been started.

Further, other questions provided is inductive. The development of the interview questions range from specific activities in the classroom down to community level concerns (Eg: flooding disaster in Western Japan). Further, the questions did also center on the interviewee's perspective as a father and as a resident of the Yakage town. This is for me, an additional yet interesting story, which can capture educator's perspective about ESD as an important component in family and community life.

The story of Somen- Nagashi by Ms. Mio Itsuji organized by YKG could also be a benchmark for most educators in terms of *tapping students as community leaders who can think of the best projects that work for community development towards environmental sustainability.* What seems to be striking in this story was that students become active collaborators in the process.

It was pretty interesting as well to hear that students were doing their own research about in the history of somen. It is very common for the generation these days to not like history so much as there are other interesting things to explore online. *But the practice of allowing students to “engage” in the YKG activities by exploring partnerships with the adult who are either mothers and other community leaders was extremely a great practice to share. What makes this story –experience commendable as well, is the idea that sustainability is best achieved by this collaboration that even some of the mothers continue to support the program even if their children have already graduated.*

Further, the interview highlights the importance of giving students the freedom to think, create and decide in groups, and use their good exposures and experiences to influence younger students. Also, the highlighting of respect and affirmation from the elders appreciating their good works making them become more empowered to work collaboratively with others.

Similar to the abovementioned comment, questions raised in the interview is developmental. That is, asking the interviewee about the project she created for ESD and her present involvement as the new coordinator for the region, and then asking her of the teacher’s role for ESD collaboration as well as in removing the challenges that might hamper integration of ESD in the process. *At the end of the interview, several reflections could be learned: that ESD work cannot be just coming from one single individual but rather, from the collective efforts and influences of other people working for community development. Also, community- based practices have enabled students to be deeply involved in community works, and it only became possible because of teacher’s passion for sustainable actions. This story- experience of teachers becoming “transformed” in the process may help viewers further reflect on how transformation and transformative process happens through ESD work in communities.*

Another very commendable outcome for this interview is the story of failures and challenges. Viewers need to know exactly or even have an affirmation as to how these can be transformed into opportunities since not all ESD works can be smooth- sailing. This highly noticeable part will make us all realize that ESD work can only become solid where “change” is felt if everyone aims for transformational experiences where collaborations speaks largely.

Mr. Takagi’s interview also shows the reality of ESD. What makes this essential is the highlighting of the absence of ESD in books and other academic resources, then eventually became a little more familiar in schools after his students won several awards for ESD work. *This material speaks volumes about the importance of having achievements and significant milestones first, so that efforts may “ring- a bell” to teachers in terms of student engagement.* Similar to the other interviews, the highlight was to encourage teacher education institutions to look at courses according to ESD’s point of view by engaging teachers and students in more local community works and engagements. These experiences provided stories of change to local communities, expressing, however, that this isn’t a simple job but tough work after all, which can then support the interview given to Ms. Emiko Imamura. What was nice about Ms. Imamura’s interview was her actual sharing of classroom work and the desperation that they all felt at first upon starting the ESD journey. This alone is a

wonderful storyline that was seen from the school- partner team's point of view. What was seen in this interview is the development of societal values among children as they work on community-based ESD efforts.

To sum up all interviews was with the Principal, Mr. Mineo Eguchi. His interview embeds “opportunities” as standalone with the four points he raised on the current ideas and principles he had. What seems to be striking is the question on where he got his idea on the special experiences and opportunities for ESD. His exposure after leaving school education in a while was with social education which probably help him provide ESD directions in school. In my own context after viewing the video, his success for engagement was thoroughly explained in the series of his answers on solidifying academic activities for students, and at the same time, strengthening community relationships while they are learning. This became achievable because the principal's office became the main support system as the headquarters for all ESD activities. *This is a good story- experience since most principals in schools may never have any idea on what kind of support structures do they need to actualize given the limited knowledge and competencies that they have for ESD work.*

Underlining “volunteer activities” adds up to the strategy and approach of involving students in the ESD work to not just experience it, but to embrace more opportunities to experience its whole process. What was nicer about this concept is that such experience leads to the improvement of quality work, by allowing students to reflect, share and act their experiences with local community works. This self-realization process could eventually lead to success stories on how ESD has affected their lives and values as citizens and members of the community.

Implications and Conclusion:

The video implies that it is significant for the teachers, students, and educational stakeholders to be aware of their roles as individuals and how sustainable development creates a substantial impact on the world. The underlying problems of poverty, environmental degradation, and other catastrophic events should be addressed in a specific to a broader sense. This implies that the awareness of individuals in specific schools or society is crucial since it may create impact and change for the future. The root of the problem should be taken into consideration and be addressed specifically before going into the broader solution. This video is an example of how to promote ESD among educational institutions. Later on, all the citizens in the world will be aware of the ESD principles and goals. In that case, the students in school should be well-equipped with ESD principles to share them with the peers and family. That is why teachers should guide them and transform them to become a better individual that is environmentally friendly and a visionary leader. It is therefore imperative for various sectors to look into these challenges in everyday life, instilling to the society that there is a need to be reoriented, to address and understand sustainability in a local and global context. Reflecting on these events, educators at the heart of their teaching must know the most appropriate and essential competencies in making education at present more sustainable.

Using UNESCO’s ESD Framework, the video generally presents the **Content**, where YKG experiences served as an “entry point” for ESD learning; **Methods**, where teaching and learning approach element was seen as a student-centered and participatory; and **Curriculum Mainstreaming** where the teaching and learning and community- based practices especially in YKG and Minan region integrated ESD towards curriculum change.

The video also clearly emphasizes **Policy**, where there is a strong involvement of the community and school leaders at varying levels; **Community**, where stakeholders and other local and communities worked with JHS students, assisting them in shaping education and sustainability; and **Institutional Mainstreaming** where transformative leadership occurred, reflective to the policies developed and implemented using resources that support ESD Integration towards institutional transformation.

As far as the Guide for Effective Dissemination of Asia -Pacific ESD Teacher Competency Framework is concerned, there is a strong presence of ESD highlighting the three competencies and domains on **Facilitating learning, Collaboration** and **Learning creation and continuity** towards shaping sustainability in the local communities especially in YKG.

Over- all, the experiences shared by the practitioners are based on real- life actual evidences and thus contributes largely to the “engagement competencies” that has to be emphasized in community- based ESD in the country.

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University Student Staff of Okayama Prefecture UNESCO Associated High School Network

Okayama Prefectural Yagake High School

Okayama Prefectural Board of Education

Okayama City Board of Education

Okayama Municipal Minan Junior High School

Citizens' Association for the Use of New Parks Formed on the Former Tramway Yard Site

Minamoto Architectural Studio and Kurashi no Tane (Seeds of Life)

YKG 60, Yakage Elementary School, Junior High and High School Students Association

In preparing the video materials and this book, we referred to the opinions of elementary, junior high, and high school teachers and university students who participated in the ESD UNESCO Associated School Workshop held at Okayama University in August 2020.

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Thank you very much.

- Video learning materials and this sub-textbook can be viewed and downloaded from the website of the ESD Promotion Centre, Graduate School of Education, Okayama University.

URL: https://edu.okayama-u.ac.jp/promotion_center/?lang=english

Sub-textbook of 'ESD Video Learning Material "Teachers Engaged with the Local Communities: Towards Development of ESD"'

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