AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Nancy R. Rosenberger

This thesis examines the cultural context in which Japanese children are constructing their own perspective of the environment because in the development of environmental education in Japan, the perspectives of children and teachers have not been taken into consideration. Although educators have made efforts to give direction to environmental education, relatively few have focused on the teachers’ and children’s ordinary activities from the point of view of environmental education. This ethnographic study helps education policy makers to understand the actual state of a public elementary school, an institution expected to produce environmentally literate people.

The data presented in this study were collected in my fieldwork at a public elementary school in Osaka, Japan between September and December in 2005. Main methods utilized in this research are participant observation in classrooms, school events, and casual conversation, and in-depth interviews with twenty teachers, administrators, parents, and community members.

Throughout the research, I have two main objectives in mind. First, I explore whether children are completely removed from nature or not, a question that is dependent on how nature is defined. It is a tendency in Japan to view nature and culture as blending with each other, but in different ways according to the context. Thus, when observing children playing with a small part of nature (e.g., insects and flowers), some argue that children still have a connection with nature while others say that children lack opportunities to feel close to nature. Increasingly, people today accept the latter perspective, and regard nature as something distant from children’s ordinary lives. This view of nature is reinforced by the dramatic images of nature broadcast on TV. Additionally, the social circumstances that prevent parents from allowing their children to play outside freely lead them to think that they need to invest considerable time and money in order to let their children experience nature. As a result, parents tend to believe that nature hardly exists in their
neighborhoods. The pervasiveness of this view has led to the strong influence of parents’ sense of values and families’ socioeconomic status on how their children experience nature.

Second, I describe what kind of environmental education has actually been implemented at a public elementary school. Children are constructing their perspective of the natural environment not only in the classes officially regarded as environmental education, but also in other aspects of their everyday school lives. Even when teachers do not think that they are teaching about the environment, their words and behavior convey culturally accepted ways to think, act and speak, and make decisions; this in turn influences the way students deal with nature. Thus, teachers are officially and unofficially, consciously and unconsciously, implementing environmental education. Nonetheless, today’s teachers believe that they conduct environmental education only in a weekly “Period of Integrated Learning.” While their preparation time for environmental education is limited, they realize the existence of various obstacles for the implementation of environmental education, such as lack of time and resources and the fact that children do not have enough knowledge and experiences to understand environmental problems. They eventually come to conduct environmental education through the lens of their own values. Yet, because of the lack of efficient criteria to judge whether the activities have a positive influence on the children, teachers do not seem to have confidence in the ongoing environmental education and underestimate the value of environmental education in comparison to other subjects like Japanese and mathematics. Teachers’ perceptions of environmental education have been shaped by the official discourse of environmental education, which has been widely accepted by common people and environmental educators. A significant effect is the pervasive belief that environmental education can be conducted by an add-on approach. This generates the tendency to ignore the fact that the curriculum itself has a deep cultural perspective on the human-nature relationship, which is highly problematic from the point of view of environmental education.

In conclusion, I strongly argue that environmental educators and school officials who accept the importance of environmental education should comprehend the status quo of public elementary schools before turning over the responsibility of children’s education to teachers. Japan must build a society that affords the essential needs of education in order for teachers to give all their time and energy for the children they are currently facing. Before teachers can concentrate on environmental education, education officials, policymakers, and the public must understand the limitations of individual schools and teachers in relation to environmental education within the present education system. I recommend that environmental educators pay heed to insiders’ voices and experiences, examine what the voices represent from a broader perspective, and make these findings the basis of future plans for environmental education.
A Public Elementary School as a Cultural Context:
Japanese Children Learning to Perceive their Environment

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Taichi Sugai, Author
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When I look back over the many people whom I met in the process of writing this thesis, it becomes obvious that all texts are constructed in relationships. This thesis involves many participants’ voices and the descriptions of their ordinary interactions. However, there are certainly many people who do not appear in the following chapters even though they had undoubtedly took a role in shaping this thesis. I would like to offer this work to them as a way to show my appreciation. For reasons of confidentiality, I do not name the many participants, but I express my gratitude to them all.

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As an introduction, I am going to present a brief description of the background of this study because I believe that it will clarify its characteristics. To be an elementary school teacher, I majored in child education at the university in Japan. However, while taking a course in environmental education during my sophomore year, I became conscious about the environment where the future generations will live. While studying environmental problems, I have come to think that it is our responsibility to protect the natural environment that is a foundation of the future generations’ lives.

In order to explore ways to bequeath natural resources to future generations, I entered graduate school in environmental studies, and learned theories of environmental ethics. However, I had gradually lost my fascination for reading the thick books of environmental ethics because I felt that I could not find the voices of the sufferers of environmental problems. When reading the books about Japanese view of nature, I always felt that what was labeled the “Japanese view of nature” in such books was to some extent different from my perspective of nature. Many scholars and writers have argued that the Japanese have intrinsically had a love for nature and a sensibility to its beauty. However, such arguments seemed incongruous with the history of environmental destruction. I eventually became unable to be completely satisfied with studying the “must-do list” to protect nature. Rather, I was intrigued with studying what was preventing them from living in environmentally conscious ways on the ground. If I kept studying environmental ethics, I might have been able to find some answers to my questions in the discipline of environmental ethics. However, my interest in people’s real voices and outlook on environmental education found in everyday lives has been gradually growing over time.

In my eyes, as well as making a list of “must-do list” to protect the environment, revealing what implicitly leading people not to be sensitive about the impacts of their activities on the earth’s ecosystems seems significant to protect nature. I hypothetically thought that there is some relationship between the fact that Japan has destroyed the natural environment and the social acceptance of the argument that the Japanese have intrinsically had a love for nature based on traditional work of art like haiku poems and Japanese gardens without referring to the modern Japanese people’s real voices. Thus, I wanted to spotlight the lifestyle, behavior, and words of the
ordinary Japanese people who are not especially sensitive about environmental problems to reveal how they view the natural environment and what kind of values they find in it.

As I studied theories of cultural anthropology, I became interested in the idea that people’s ways of thinking and behavioral patterns are culturally and socially constructed. Culture encompasses patterns of meaning, reality, values, actions, and decision-making that are shared by and within social collectivities (see Goodenough 1963). By viewing schools as social institutions assuming a pivotal role in cultural transmission, including the transmission of tradition, new knowledge, cultural patterns from anybody who knows to anyone who does not, cultural anthropologists have focused on all parties involved in educational systems, transactions, and the social situations and cultural contexts within which learning is presumed to take place. This perspective enables me to relate the study of the Japanese perception of nature with children’s education. I acknowledge that the school is not the only source of information that contribute to children’s view of nature, but this thesis concentrates on this part of children’s lives. The school clearly has a strong impact on the construction of the children’s “eyes” and personality. While recognizing the significance of other aspects of their lives on the construction of their sense of values, I think that spotlighting the children’s school lives enable me to uncover both the today’s children’s perceptions of the environment and what kind of view of nature the today’s adults are unconsciously and officially transmitting to the children.

Another important event that has given me an impetus to directly observe the teacher-student interactions and listen to their voices was a personal conversation with a scholar who has recently studied environmental education. One day, in conversation with him, I asked: “Discussion on environmental education has been recently accumulated at home and overseas, and there have been constructed a number of sophisticated definition of environmental education. How can the results of such sophisticated discussions be transmitted to teachers who are actually having interactions with children and taking responsibilities to educate them? How can such discussions improve today’s environmental education?” He answered: “It will be done if teachers will study them in any way.” However, from the words of my wife, a public elementary school teacher, I had acknowledged that the today’s teachers were already bewildered due to their busy lives. When comparing the scholar’s opinion with my wife’s words, I came to feel the necessity to make a bridge between a scholar who has been advocating the importance of school environmental education outside of schools and teachers who are actually facing students on the ground. As a researcher, I decided to devote myself entirely to listening to the insiders’ voices and investigating the logic that exists behind their words.
I conducted fieldwork at a public elementary school located in Sakai city, Osaka prefecture, Japan between early September and late December 2005. This school was not especially placing considerable emphasis on environmental education in comparison with other schools. The status quo of this school is not completely different from other elementary schools that a majority of Japanese children aged between six and twelve are attending. There are some studies and reports of model schools that promote environmental education. Nonetheless, from the teachers’ perspective, the conditions of ordinary public schools are different from those of the model schools that have financially supported by the government. Those teachers tend to consider that the activities conducted at such schools are put into practice due to the blessed conditions. In order to avoid causing such reactions, I selected a general public school as my research field.

While observing and listening to students, teachers, and other staff working, I became familiar with my participants. I participated in virtually every aspect of the children’s school life. I played with children in the classroom and on the playground between classes. In class hours, I sat in my chair and listened to what teachers were talking about with students while assisting teachers if required. I ate lunch and cleaned classrooms with the students. Also, I attempted to observe the teacher’s behavior and utterance both in front of the children and when the children were not looking at them (e.g., a teacher’s office). I took part in the fourth grader’s excursion and accompanied them to Yamato River, participated in the community-wide clean-up activities of Chûkan (a central belt highway in the school community), which was an important part of the fourth grade environmental education, and went to Kyoto with the sixth graders. I could take part in some school events including the Sports Day, and took a number of photos of the children at the teachers’ request. In addition, I was asked to make presentations regarding environmental problems a few times. It was not involved in my preliminary research plan; however, the preparation for the presentations enabled me to view the environmental problems and teaching about the topic from a teacher’s perspective. These experiences helped me to understand what the teachers were trying to tell me regarding environmental education at a public elementary school.

While looking at the way I established relationships with students, the teachers have opened themselves to me. Those who were wondering about what I intended to do at school during the first few weeks had come to open up and frankly expressed what they were thinking in front of me. Without successfully establishing rapport with my participants, I might not have been able to finish this research. I realized the fact that I had come to be trusted by teachers to greater or lesser extent when I was invited to the year-end party (bounenkai), and some teachers seriously expressed this thought to me: “Please do not be a researcher who does not care about and does not listen to teachers and children actually living their lives at school.”
During my stay in the field, I had two main objectives in my mind:

- To explore the child-nature relationship in children’s everyday school activities. This exploration takes place in the context of questioning the pervasive argument that today’s children are removed from nature. In order to accomplish this point, I present the description of not only children’s school lives but also their after school lives. How teachers’ and parents’ views of child-nature relationships affect the children’s experience of nature will be explored.

- To describe what kind of environmental education, either officially or unofficially, intentionally or unintentionally teachers have actually conducted at school. Here I investigate the validity of the argument that certain classes or new content in traditional classes is necessary for proper environmental education. In order to accomplish this point, I determine teacher’s views of environmental education and identify obstacles for the implementation of environmental education from insider’s perspective. I also focus on the images of people that teachers are either consciously or unconsciously trying to make at school both in and out of environmental education.

This study may not present a clear model and desirable model of environmental education although teachers will want it at most. However, this study will provide the clear description of the status quo of a public school and school environmental education that should be ultimately required by environmental educators and policy makers outside schools, who have power to reform the educational system. I do not intend to make broad generalizations about today’s children’s lifestyles. I intend to provide an intimate look at what is going on at today’s school and explore ways to make environmentally literate people through education.

Chapter two is a literature review. I divide the chapter into three parts: literature review on Japanese view of nature; that on the modern educational system in Japan; and that on environmental education. Drawing on these reviews, I clarify the importance of focusing on actual people’s activities in order to explore how today’s Japanese people really treat their environment. Also, the chapter argues that it is significant today to take account of the scale and rate of changes occurring in the earth’s ecosystems in the discussion on today’s educational system and to make reform plans of the system.

Chapter three shows the methods employed in this research: in-depth interview and participant observation. I also present the background and statistic sketch of the field. I explain reasons for choosing these methods and the field.
Chapter four gives background information likely required to read the following chapters. I first sketch a brief explanation of Japanese national curriculum and recent changes on it, and second present background and history of school environmental education in Japan.

Between chapter five and nine, I describe what I observe and listen to in the field. Chapter five describes child-nature relationship based on the description of child’s play between classes and after school. This chapter clarifies the child-nature relationship from the insider’s perspective.

Chapter six and seven are explicitly relevant to environmental education. In chapter six, I reveal insider’s perspective of environmental education and obstacles for the implementation of environmental education based on the interviews with teachers. In chapter seven, I describe the actual the fourth grade environmental education conducted in the Period of Integrated Learning: the creation of digital environmental map and participation in a clean-up event. This chapter clarifies what kind of environmental education my participant teachers are conducting based on their perspectives of environmental education.

The following two chapters are relatively indirectly relating to environmental education. Neither of them is regarded as a part of environmental education from the teacher’s perspective. Chapter eight clarifies teacher’s view of traditional classes like arithmetic and social studies, and describes ordinary student-teacher interactions. This chapter reveals the message that teachers are either intentionally or unconsciously passing down to students. I discuss the relationship what teachers are teaching in those classes and the children’s view of their environment. Chapter nine describes teacher-students interactions embedded in the Sports Day. I consider that there are no articles or books on environmental education that incorporate the description of school events. However, what teachers are either consciously or unconsciously teaching through the Sports Day seems to influence the way children deal with the environment. I explore the relationship between the two.

Finally, in chapter ten, I discussed two points: Distance between children and nature; what teachers are teaching and what children are learning in relation to environmental problems. In the former part, I explore whether today’s children are actually removed from nature. It is not a simple question to answer because this relates to Japanese people’s view of nature. In the latter part, I explore official and unofficial environmental educational activities. Although I appreciate the importance and validity of environmental education, it is true that there are always gaps between what teachers intend to teach and what students actually learn in relating to environmental problems.
Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1 Between Japanese people’s “love of nature” and the environmental degradation

Since the publication of Shiga’s *Nihon fûkei-ron* in 1894 and Haga’s *Kokuminsei jûron* in 1907, Japanese people have proudly thought of themselves as possessing an aesthetic sensibility to the beauty of seasons as well as a love of nature (*shizen*) (Saito 1978). Not only Japanese but also observers of Japan have contributed to expand the commonly held view that Japanese have a particular love for nature (Kalland & Asquith 1997). Since Meiji era (1868-1912), the Japanese view of nature has been one of the central themes that has been laid out in *Nihonjinron*, a highly popular genre of writing purporting to examine the characteristics—national, social, cultural, behavioral and spiritual—which are presumed to be unique to the Japanese people.

A large number of scholars and writers have attributed the sentiment for nature to the qualities of the land. According to Nakamura (1980), the sentiment for nature is due to the influence of the land and climate; the mild climate, the variety of scenery, the rich flora and sea-products, and absence of beast of prey. In his masterpiece *Fûdo* published in 1935 (1978), Watsuji also ascribes Japanese people’s sentiment for nature to the unique characteristics of the landscape although he does not consider that such sentiment is derived from the mild climate, but from the inclemency of nature (Befu 1997, see also Terada 1948; Imanishi 1978, 2002; Sasaki 1993; Yasuda 1995). Another group of scholars and writers have argued that Japanese people inherently have a taste for feeling the beauty of nature based on the analysis of nature described and illustrated in the traditional arts, including poems, paintings, sculptures, gardens and others. For example, in a recently published book, Ito (2002) claims that Japanese people have traditionally had a sensibility to the beauty and wonder of nature by comparing poetry listed in the *Manyôshû* (*A Collection of a Myriad Leaves*) that was made between 7th and 8th centuries to the poetry written by Homer and major Romantic poets (such as, William Wordsworth, Lord Byron, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe).

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1 According to Kalland and Asquith (1997), there is no Japanese term that completely covers all the meanings that the term “nature” can have in English. Yet, it is no doubt that *shizen* (自然) is the word often used to refer to “nature.” Before importing the term *shizen* from China, Japanese lacked a noun to denote the totality of mountains, rivers, oceans, plants, animals and so on.

2 While the environmental deterministic philosophy had been ubiquitous in society during Meiji era, there were a few scholars who were not comfortable with the school of thought. For example, In his book, *Jinsei-chirigaku* (*Geography of Human Life*) published in 1903, Makiguchi attempted to examine the human-nature relationship from various angles in order to explore the impacts of human life on the natural environment and how nature influences and shapes human life.
Still others have compared the Buddhism and Confucian view of nature—such as the philosophy of cycle of rebirth (rinnekan) and the continuity between human and nature—to the view of nature that is inherent in the Christian cultures in order to characterize the Japanese view of nature (see Callicott 1994). According to Suzuki (1940), in the minds of Japanese people, the appreciation of the beautiful is at bottom religious because without being religious one cannot detect and enjoy what is genuinely beautiful. This is reflected in the dominant view of nature in Japan, or the view that boundaries between people and nature is blurred and dissolved (Berque 1992; Rosenberger 1997).

In contrast, Japan is also famous for causing severe environmental problems during the period of high economic growth (e.g., Honda 1992; Murai 1988; Tsurumi 1982; Shoji & Miyamoto 1964). An important question to ask is this: How can these phenomena be reconciled? Considering the history of natural destruction long caused by Japanese people, scholars and writers have recently begun to challenge the claims that the Japanese people innately have a love of nature in the country and overseas (e.g., Berque 1992; Callicott 1994). These scholars and writers have closely and thoroughly examined Japanese view of nature “in terms of what nature is being talked about and held up as a model for a healthy view of the environment” (Kalland & Asquith 1997:5). Scholars (e.g., Saito 1978; Callicott 1994; Kalland & Asquith 1997) are raising a number of important questions: Whose perceptions of nature are labeled as Japanese view of nature? Why can monks and haiku poets be taken to represent Japanese sentiments and attitudes? To what extent is Japanese appreciation of nature reflected in praxis? Saito (1978) encourages the readers to cast a cold eye at the ways Japanese policy makers and citizens have dealt with the natural environment in pursuing high economic growth.

Let’s take a look at around. In the country, where the government has taken the initiative in loosening up the control over automobile emissions, and placing a lower priority on human life, how can the natural environment be protected? While claiming the lives of a wide variety of types plants, keeping birds away, contaminating the river where fish and insects are living, and causing harm to the natural environment on the one hand, why can Japanese people proudly identify themselves as people who congenitally have a love for vegetation and the respect for nature. … Such an argument seems less than flattering. (1978:105)

In the same article, Saito also argues that Japanese have traditionally regarded the descriptions of nature in poems, haiku, and literary calendars as evidence of their love of nature. Japanese have overlooked the fact that they have aggressively taken the lead in destroying the natural environment because their fascination with beautiful descriptions of nature has not
allowed them to perceive the present state of their ecological landscape (1978:109). Based on a comparative study of people’s attitudes to wildlife in Japan, German, and the United States, Kellret (1993) argues that he could not confirm the notion of a special Japanese love for nature. According to him, Japanese appreciation for nature was limited and idealized, and Japanese people tend to ignore and pay little attention to environmental features falling outside the valued aesthetic and symbolic boundaries. More recently, some empirical studies on Japanese concepts of nature have been presented by scholars based on their own field research (see, Asquith & Kalland 1997). For example, Knight (1997) reveals the conflict between the view of the environment possessed by local farmers viewing their environment from a pragmatic perspective and that possessed by urbanites labeling “natural” farming as an alternative lifestyle. Similarly, Moon (1997) points out that there is a gap between local farmers’ attitudes toward nature and visitors’ attitudes. According to her, farmers’ perceptions of nature today are strongly influenced by attitudes held by nature tourists from the cities.

Certainly, people in urban cities can no longer view the landscape that Roka Tokutomi described in his masterpiece entitled Shizen to jinsei published in 1900 (1933), the scenery of the white trails of smoke floated from a chimney of a small farmhouse in a small village. He was deriving happiness from living quietly and calmly while looking at the scenery on a small rise of land. As Giddens (1991, 2001) points out, in the world of high modernity, or a world deeply textured with complex technologies as a consequence of thorough modernization, in which the living environment is not untouched, and more or less altered by the development of technologies, people are always forced to answer crucial questions: “How do you live in this world?” “What are you going to do in your life?” “What should you do now?” Facing these important questions, Japanese are required to move beyond the cultural belief that they have and innate love and respect for nature while paying little attention to the history of environmental destruction as a consequence of their activities. As Saito wrote in his book, it is crucial for today’s people to sincerely review the history of environmental problems and explore the reason why Japanese people have been able to take the initiative in destroying the natural environment in and out of the country while having pride in their own view of nature.

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3 Giddens (2001) calls the environment, which is constructed by the development of science and technologies and by the alternation of the natural environment, “the created environment,” and Imamichi (1990) calls the similar environment “gijutsu renkan 社會 (society consisting of the mixture of technologies and the natural environment).
2.2 Culture of capitalism, environmental problems, and the modern educational system

In spite of the people’s belief that environmental crisis is a product of modern technology and a world brimming with billions of people, or a somewhat new problem in human history, cultural archaeologists and other scholars have revealed and spotlighted that the environmental crisis is not a new problem (cf., Redman 1999). People as individuals, communities, and entire societies have altered their surrounding environment by making decisions on how to obtain food, how to use the land, and how to construct and arrange their shelters in order to live in concert with their surroundings since prehistory. Not surprisingly, such decisions have been made under the influence of a variety of factors such as the present state of the surrounding physical environment and their cultures. As Redman (1999) points out, human beings have always been living their lives by constructing a wide variety of types of relationships with the surrounding environment throughout the whole human history up to today. There were no histories of people who could survive without any relationships with the surrounding environment either natural or artificial, what has changed are the technologies with which we operate, the size of population, and the extent of the impact. The more people in a given area, the more potential there is for environmental disruption, and the more technologies developed, the more pervasive the influence of the human activities. Conventional agriculture, which is characterized as highly mechanized and with chemical inputs, alter the environment more drastically than traditional farming with hoes or plows.

In the capitalist societies, virtually all people are, either intentionally or unintentionally, and either directly or indirectly, contributing to the environmental alteration by the consumption and production of commodities, which are central building blocks for the culture of capitalism. People in the culture of capitalism tend to engage in consumption for a number of reasons, such as to signal their comparative degree of social power by obtaining difficult-to-attain things (e.g., brand-name products and valued species of plants and animals) (Veblen 1979; Hirsch 1976), to achieve other-regarding ends revolving around their norms and social ties, or sentiment, to save time, and to participate in certain communities or strengthen social ties through gift exchange. It seems that the pervasive belief in the close relationship between the acquisition and accumulation of goods and happiness gives an impetus to people to consume more than they need, or even more than

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4 Here, I use the term “culture” in the sense of Geertz; that is, “Culture is best seen not as complexes of concrete behavior patterns—customs, usages, traditions, habit, clusters—as has been the case up to now, but as a set of control mechanisms—plans, recipes, rules, instructions (what computer engineers call “programs”)—for governing of behavior” (2000:44).

5 Advertisers often try to appeal to our sentiments. One technique is to claim that a product is made out of concern for you. Green consumerism can also be part of this category. People tend to buy goods with a tag of “Be Environmentalist!”
they want. Consequently, people have either consciously or unconsciously contributed in the creating of the modern society of mass production, consumption and production. Bell terms the “whole process of moving materially ahead without making any real gain in satisfaction,” the “treadmill of consumption” (2004:49).

Note that although any consumption could require more or less extraction and use of natural resources (wood, ore, fossil fuels, and water) and require the creation of factories and factory complexes, which create toxic byproducts, and while the use of commodities themselves creates pollutants and waste as Robbins describes (2002), it does not in itself lead to overwhelming environmental damage. The problem is the consumption patterns playing a pivotal role in the today’s capitalist culture, which tend to overwhelm efforts to direct economic growth in ways that do not damage the environment (e.g., Shoji & Miyamoto 1964, Miyamoto 2006). Since money is now the principal means of arranging for one’s material needs and wants, nearly all people with a desire for economic growth find themselves continually seeking more money. That is, people tend to struggle to achieve the highest returns for labor and capital, and minimize costs as Robbins aptly points out (2002). In order to maximize profits, each firm tries to produce more goods more cheaply than others. It is not good enough to make a profit. Unless a firm continually maximizes its profits, investors will withdraw their support and put their resources in a firm that does. Thus, firms are forced to make decisions to increase their profits whether or not they are eager for economic growth (see Douthwaite 1992). This “mutual economic pinching that gets people struggling to increase production, often with little regard for social and environmental consequences” has been termed the “treadmill of production” by Bell and other scholars (Bell 2004:55-56).

Capitalist societies have a large variety of cultural mechanisms to create individuals, or “tsuyoi kojin” (強い個人, “strong individuals” in English) (Kaneko 1999), who can stay on the treadmills of consumption and production, or the essential parts of the culture. Doubtlessly, it is the modern educational system that has assumed a critical role to educate such individuals. While there are widely divergent views of education today, there is no escaping the fact that it is a sociocultural process. From a cultural perspective, education, either formal or informal, can be viewed as “the deliberate means by which each society attempts to transmit and perpetuate its notion of the good life, which is derived from the society’s fundamental beliefs concerning the nature of the world, knowledge, and values” (Pai & Adler 1997:4). In other words, education is the intentional attempt to pass on culture from one generation to another. Just as the definition of education varies depending on the culture, the concept of an “educated” individual, or the goal or product of education, differs among cultures (Levinson et al. 1996). Today, in the capitalist
society, it is one who can maintain or even accelerate economic growth by running the treadmills of consumption and production as fast and steadily as possible that is tagged as a well “educated” individual.

The role of the modern educational system or schooling has been contested from various angles in the sphere of social sciences. It was in the 1950’s that scholars began to study the realm of education in the context of the Western social sciences. Initially, guided by liberal assumptions about the role of schools in a meritocracy, where upward mobility was assumed to be an outcome of talent and effort, scholars, armed with the dual weapons of structural functionalist theory and hard scientific method, described the institution and analyzed educational outcomes in the form of survey and experimental data. As human capital theory drew public attention, people have begun to view the process of acquiring skills and knowledge through schooling as a productive investment although the process was seen as just a form of consumption before (Schultz 1968). Human capital theory especially appealed to pro-capitalist ideological sentiment that resides in its insistence; “the worker is a holder of capital (as embodied in his skills and knowledge) and that he has the capacity to invest (in himself)” (Karabell and Halsey 1977:13, italics his).

Since the mid-1970’s, specifically in Western countries, schooling has become a topic of a critical literature, and investigations of a more historical and ethnographic sort have appeared in lieu of surveys and experiments (Levinson and Holland 1996). With the collapse of structural functionalism and hard scientific hegemony in the social sciences, the “new sociology of education” offered astute insights into the study of the modern educational system. In arguing that schools were not “innocent” sites of cultural transmission, but actually served to exacerbate the inequality or perpetuate social inequalities, scholars such as Althusser (1971), Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), Willis (1977) and other ethnographers revealed the ways that capitalist societies and cultures are reproduced and the processes that people have, perforce, come to adopt in schools to produce a culture of capitalism. Thus, it would be fair to say that, for over 50 years, the studies on schooling have repeatedly spotlighted the strong connection between schooling and the culture of capitalism (see Spring 1998, also Amano 1996 briefly describes education within various theories of economics).

Regardless of the diversity of the definition and goals of education, a major role of schools is to socialize children and let them play a certain role to maintain the culture with all their heart and soul. If the culture of capitalism has functions that have caused a significant damage on the

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6 Theretofore, it was almost only some prominent figures like Œmile Durkheim, Marx, and Weber that directed their eyes to the subject.
natural environment, and if schooling has traditionally sustained the culture, it would not be an
exaggeration to say that schooling has, either intentionally or unintentionally, been contributing to
bring about today’s global environmental problem, rather than protecting the natural environment.
Despite the fact that there is accumulating research revealing the close relationship between the
culture of capitalism and the occurrence and magnification of the environmental crisis on the one
hand, and that clarifying the relationship between schooling (or the modern educational system)
and the culture of capitalism on the other hand, relatively few researchers have shed light on the
relationship between the environmental crisis and schooling (Orr 1992, 1994; Bowers 1997,

From here I move on to a review of the literature, along with discussions of modern
schooling in Japan and environmental education in general, to show the tendency that the
relationship between schooling and environmental problems has been underestimated.

2.3 Modern schooling in Japan

A number of studies of schooling in Japan are available in the English language to date.
According to Shields’ study (1989), the books and reports published in English in the 1970’s
were fascinated by the issues related to university student protests, the history of Japanese
education (the main focus was on the Meiji period), the teachers’ movement, higher education,
and the schooling modernization-westernization relationship. In the 80’s, other education-related
issues, such as equity (women and the handicapped as controversial issues); social, cultural, and
psychological factors related to education in the home and the early levels of schooling; and
teacher education have come to be subjects of controversy. Although Cummings (1980) and
Rohlen (1983) pioneered ethnographic research on elementary and secondary schools,
respectively, only a few publications on the subject are based on detailed ethnographic accounts
in those two decades.

Until the 1990’s, relatively few studies were aimed at investigating and bringing to light the
existence of weakness and inconsistency embedded in the Japanese modern schooling.7 Instead,
as Shimahara and Sakai (1995) point out, most have watched with fascination the effects of the
educational system on Japan’s industrial development and competitiveness in international trade.
Particularly, the schooling during the Meiji modernization and in the post-war period attracted
increasing attentions because the implementation of the educational reforms of those times
brought about a number of positive outcomes: such as, the improvement of people’s reading,

7 Okano and Tsuchiya’s 1999 and Kondo’s 1990 can be exceptions. They were valued as a
writing, and numeric abilities, required skills and knowledge in the modern and industrialized society had been effectively transmitted, equal opportunity of education (at least on a superficial level) had been achieved, and meritocratic selection of the young and allocation of them to appropriate places in the adult society had been conducted.

Since Japanese schooling’s contributions in the exceptional success of Japan’s modernization and economic development were seemingly offering as long-awaited ‘evidence’ that schools have the potential to bring about economic development, Western scholars and policy makers have been continuously focusing on schooling’s role in Japan. Indeed, countless overseas observers have presented it as an alternative model with lessons for their own home country. For instance, studies have argued that Japan has outpaced all the other industrialized nations of the world in imparting to virtually all students adequately high levels of the basic skills such as literacy and numeracy (Duke 1986). Some report the high average achievement and low variation in Japanese children’s performance in international mathematics and science tests organized by the IEA and the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) (Cummings 1980; Duke 1986; Lynn 1987; Leestma & Walberg 1992; Lewis 1995).

In contrast, within Japan, the schooling has traditionally been the focus of increasing discontent (Goodman & Philip 2003), and the criticism is now at a peak (Imai 2004). As Goodman (1990) points out, the precise nature of dissatisfaction with schooling differs according to the critique. Some call for more stress on patriotism, Japanese tradition, and moral education from a conservative perspective. Leading figures in business field call for more emphasis on creativity and emphasize the importance of effectively producing good laborers while teachers’ unions call for smaller class sizes and the abolition of high-school entrance exams. Nevertheless, a mainstream discontent in the discourse on education should be detected in the successive reports compiled by the Ministry of Education (MOE) partly due to its reiteration and partly due to the reports status as government-established bodies (Cave 2001). The views developed in the reports are not undisputed; however, they have had a strong influence on the public and media perception of the schooling today.

In his article, entitled Educational Reform in Japan in the 1990’s (2001), Cave pointed out that complaints about education was taking two main forms within the mainstream discourse during the late 1980’s and 1990’s. The first focus of discontents was the series of school-related problems, which have been given wide media coverage. These include bullying (ijime), school refusal (futôkô), violence in schools (kônai bouryoku), and classroom breakdown (gakkyû houkai). As Okano and Tsuchiya (1999) points out, it is not easy to estimate how serious these problems actually are, especially in an international comparative perspective; however, it is true that books
about these school-related problems have stirred up the public’s interest and have become immediate best-sellers (e.g., Sukemune 1996; Kawakami 1999; Asahi Shinbun Shakaibu 1999). While the causes of these problems have received various diagnoses, not only critics of the modern schooling, but also the MOE, have laid the responsibility on the educational system. They have argued that these school-related problems are rooted in the characteristics of the modern educational system, which are supposed rigidity, uniformity, and exam-centeredness that suppress creativity and individuality. The resulting pressures can cause bullying, school refusal, and other problems (see MOE 1998a). Since we cannot deny the possibility of the fact that strict school regulations and tight control over students’ actions can become a hotbed of increasing bullying and school violence, it is crucial to use the students’ school-related problems as a opportunity to review the nature of schooling. However, it is also important to listen to the fact that many educators, such as Fujita (2005) and Hirota (2001, 2003, 2005) have criticized that such a view is too simplistic and the underlying data are alleged and uncertain. By being misled by wrong information reported by the mass media without properly selecting the information based on the understanding of the status quo of today’s schools, both educational reformists and publics have recently tended to lay all the blame for the school-related problems, even those that should be regarded as social problems, on the quality of individual teachers (Ohuchi 2005). As Bourdieu (2000) argued, the process of the creation and distribution of the dominant discourse on education and the status quo of children should be studied today while considering the social tendency to mix up the problems embedded in the structure of the modern educational system, those associated with the social system as a whole, those lying concealed in the cultural context in which today’s children are living, and those considered as the responsibility of individual teachers.

The second complaint is that Japanese education has failed to produce the creative people needed to compete in the new world economy of the information age (Cave 2001). After achieving one of the highest economic growth rates in the world from the 1960’s through the 1980’s, the Japanese economy slowed dramatically in the early 1990’s, when the “bubble economy” collapsed. For over ten years, many scholars including economists and sociologists have attempted to figure out the root causes of the Japanese economic malaise. Among the accumulating explanations for the Japanese malaise, a large number of commentators have

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8 Especially, Fujita (2001, 2005), Kariya (2002, 2003), and Sato (2000, 2001) have explicitly express skepticism about the MOE’s diagnosis that has given an impetus to the educational reforms. Within the discourse on education in Japan, people who point out the problems of the modern educational system and emphasize the importance of educational reforms have a tendency to make remarks on various problems drawing on their accomplishment, thoughts, and experiences (see also, Ohuchi & Miyake 2006).
attributed socio-economic weakness to failure in the educational system (Cummings 2003). The MOE has declared that in the so-called “knowledge-based society,” in which new technologies and information have become the foundation for various social activities including economic activities, the role of the educational institutions in Japan “has come to be recognized once again as a means to strengthen industrial competitiveness and ensure employment. … it is essential for Japan to enhance the intellectual production capacity of each of its citizens to maintain the country’s vitality” (MOE 2003). Furthermore, in Japan’s Education at a Glance issued by the MOE underscores the need for educational reform, stating that “many consider that the education system overall from elementary and secondary education to higher education and the knowledge of those associated with it are not necessarily equipped to deal with the changing conditions of time and society” (MOE 2005).

Here it is possible to detect the close relationship between the movement of the economy and of public education in Japan. Ohuchi (2005) sharply points out the fact that the demands, desires and sense of values of the economic circle for education have historically had a strong impact on the changes in educational policies (see also, Saito 2004a, 2004b). It was explicitly represented in the title of the 1962 White Paper of Education: *Nihon no seichō to kyoiku: kyoiku no tenkai to keizai no hattatsu* (Japanese Development and Education: Spread of Educational and Economic Growth) (MOE 1962). This white paper was published while the Japanese government was struggling to realize the income-doubling plan under the leadership of the then Prime Minister Hayato Ikeda. In the period of high economic growth, the economic circle was eager to create and maintain laborers that were equipped with a sense of loyalty to the company and tenacity and endurance to stand heated competition. Globally admired, Japanese public schooling successfully created the uniform and homogeneous laborers that reinforce economic development. However, between the later 1980’s and 1990’s, the quality of laborers that the economic circle wanted changed under the influence of globalization. While competing against the major companies in Europe and the U.S., Japanese companies came to have a sense of fear for the decrease in the rate of return on capital; thus, they were trying to trim down the labor cost by replacing full-time male employees with part-timers, increasing the marginal workers, and shrinking the enterprise-based welfare. Since the late 1980’s, companies and economic circles have begun to present the perspective that egalitarian educational systems that created the homogenized labors and the individual’s taste for equality, which is instilled in the process of the education, were becoming obstacles to realization of profit. Based on this perspective, it has been argued that public schooling must be reorganized and the expense for public education should be downsized. By slashing the national budget for education, the business circle intended to lighten
the economic burden placed on corporate income tax. Furthermore, the business circle was trying to stratify the employees into upper classes and lower classes in order to minimize the wage and salary costs by reorganizing the public educational system. For example, in the Nikkeiren’s (Japan Federation of Employers Association’s) document, entitled Shinjidai no “nihon-tekiki keiei” (1995), what the business circles tried to achieve in the 1990’s was clearly stated. Based on this document, it becomes clear that in order to win a place in the society of knowledge and information, Nikkeiren was trying to sort out children into three groups of laborers through the educational systems: (1) laborers who have enough knowledge and qualification and can be useful for the long period of time; (2) laborers who have professional abilities; and (3) flexible laborers. According to Ohnuki (2005), the MOE has been standing up against the tendency that demands and desires of the economic world have a direct influence on the educational policies until the 1980’s; however, the MOE has begun to accept this tendency since the 1990’s.

Since the late 1990’s, the MOE has begun to use the term yutori kyoiku (education with latitude) and ikiru chikara (zest for living) in the discourse of the educational reforms. The MOE has emphasized the importance of rectifying the (overemphasized) egalitarianism and has attached a high value to the individuality and diversity of children. It has begun to declare that it is going to implement educational reforms in order to shift school education from cramming and competition to creativity and a more relaxed approach. I am not going to refer to the details of each educational reform plan, but the implementation of the full five-day school week, the reduction in number of the major classes (Japanese, arithmetic, science, and social studies), and the careful selection of the contents of the curriculum are parts the successive educational reforms with the slogan of yutori kyoiku. The educational reform also established new subjects, titled seikatsuka (Living Environment Studies) and sōgōteki-na gakushū (the Period of Integrated Learning). The establishment of these new subjects exemplifies the fact that the MOE has prioritized hands-on learning over transmitting a set of knowledge to children. In addition, elementary schools (as well as junior high schools) are expected to conduct environmental education in the Period of Integrated Learning.

More recently, a big educational reform just took effect in elementary schools. In his book Kyoiku kaikaku to shin jiyū shugi (Educational reform and neo-liberalism), Takao Saito (2004b) points out that the ongoing educational reform is driven by the market logic and the opinions of the business world more than ever. A monthly magazine, entitled Gendai shiso (literally, Philosophies of the Day in English), has annually put together the feature story on the ongoing educational reform since 1999. In the feature articles, a large number of authors, including school teachers, journalists, educational sociologists, educators, sociologist, historians, and others from
different academic disciplines, are discussing the meaning of the rise and justification of neo-liberalism, or market fundamentalism, in educational reform as well as the amendment of the Fundamental Law of Education (e.g., Ohuchi 2003; Sato 2003; Miyake 2005, etc.).

A virtue of the new-liberalism in the discourse of the educational reform is the fact that it can provide a clear vision of the form of education that is appropriate to economic globalization and the knowledge-based society (Hirota 2004). During the period of high economic growth, educators’ voice that education should not be directly driven by the changes in the economic circle was appreciated to greater or lesser degrees. However, today, the call for rectifying the overemphasized egalitarianism and fostering the individual abilities of children can sound more straightforward and realistic for the people who are living in this competitive society and have been exposed to the image of modern schools, which paid little attention to the child’s individuality and abilities because it has overemphasized the importance of egalitarianism. In the recent Diet taken place April 26th, 2006, then Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi strongly argued as flows.

Today, it is crucial to make the educational system appropriate to develop the ability of the capable individuals. … A the same time, it is important to provide a setting that such capable people can support those people who cannot stand on their own feet. … While giving applause to other people’s willingness and accomplishment on the one hand, we have to offer assistance to the people who are getting stuck in the mire. I consider that it is most necessary for individuals, companies, this country, and the government today (quoted from the online database of National Diet Minutes).

In the workplace, regulations that ensure the safety and rights of labor have been relaxed, and a large number of non-regular employments have been structurally and systematically created (see Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare 2006). Under the slogan of “kan kara min e” (from the government to the private sector), market logic has been introduced into the public sector, privatization and incorporation of public sectors, reduction of government employees, and cut in welfare budget have been implemented. As reflected in the Koizumi’s statement, recent educational reforms show the fact that educational circles have been also strongly influenced by the market logic. The characteristics of the past egalitarian educational system that were aimed at the realization of equal educational opportunity—such as, strictly defined attendance areas according to the location in which children reside, the classroom involving the students regardless of their location—have been weakened.

People who have criticized egalitarian educational systems tend to believe that overemphasis on egalitarianism has made the modern Japanese educational system that does not recognize and account for differences in ability.
of the level of their academic abilities, and existence of the national school curriculum that enable the students to receive a standardized and homogenized education anywhere in Japan—have been radically reformed. Instead, the government has begun to take a new departure, such as allowing parents to choose the school that their children attend, and introducing a system integrating junior and senior high schools.

Fujita (2005) regards these new attempts as a representation of the government’s effort to realize the educational system based on the elitism of meritocracy, and strongly criticizes it. Miyake (2005) criticizes the recent neo-liberal educational reform driven by market logic, and argues that educational reformists have recently not viewed educational reform as an educational issue, but as a political or labor issue. Also, after revealing the fact that neoclassical economists and sociologists who do not have clear understanding of the status quo of education have occupied an important place in the discussions on educational reform, and emphasized the significance of neo-liberal educational reform from the viewpoint of economists, Ohuchi (2005) encourages people to deepen the understanding of the possible problems that can be caused by a neo-liberal educational system. The recent climate of the debate on educational reform in Japan reminds us the arguments that have been successively made by educational theorists who are regarding schools as a social apparatus or mechanism to transmit cultural values and norms from generation to generation (rooted in scholars such as, Bowles & Gintis 1976; Illich 1971; Bernstein 1975; Willis 1977; Bourdieu & Passeron 1977). Scholars of this sort have argued that the process of schooling does not operate solely through what is taught in courses of formal instruction; rather, cultural reproduction occurs in a more profound way through the hidden curriculum, or aspects of behavior which individuals learn in an informal way at school. For example, based on his analysis of the record of educational history in the U.S., Bowles strongly argues, “schools have evolved ... to meet the needs of capitalist employers for a disciplined and skilled labor force, and to provide a mechanism for social control in the interests of political stability” (1977:137).

Tanaka (1997) and Kato (1997) are focusing on the keywords, “kojinka” (personalization) and “tayōka” (diversification), both of which have been often appeared in the documents and booklets produced by the MOE, and argue that these words have played an important role to bring the market logic into the modern educational system. These words (kojinka and tayōka) and other ear-pleasing concepts, such as, “kosei sonchō” (respect for the individuality), “saini oujita kyoiku” (education tailored to the diversity of individual talents), “hi-kyoikusha no sentaku no jiyū” (freedom of choice for the people who receive education), have a double meaning in the stratified society. These words and concepts can be regarded as a expression of the consideration
and tolerance for the vulnerable on the one hand, but at the same time, these can be viewed as a measure to realize the social situation in which the strong utilize the educational system to reproduce the culture, in which people who are contemporarily in the strong position can be always stronger than the weaker. From the standpoint of cultural relativism, the importance of multicultural education and international education has been spotlighted since the 1990’s. This tendency can be seen as the protection of the culture, personality, and rights of the children of minority groups. However, it can also create the social situation in which part of the children are actively allowed to enjoy their socioeconomic status because they were born in the upper class.

The discontents about today’s education and the criticisms of the recent educational reforms are important to comprehend the status quo of today’s Japanese schooling. However, from the point of view of environmental education, it is most important to note that although these discontents and criticisms are provided by a number of educational theorists, their analyses have failed to take into account the scale and rate of changes occurring in the earth’s ecosystems. The purpose of overall successive reforms is ultimately to make the children adopt certain skills and knowledge required to live in this capitalist society by fostering or maintaining economic growth. As Foucault clarified (e.g., 2000), any system has an essential disjuncture between primal intention, or essential purpose of the system, and its effect, or things caused by the system. While the culture of capitalism has been dramatically widespread, its aim has not been to cause environmental problems. Nevertheless, the expansion of capitalism has unavoidably damaged and destroyed the ecosystem of this planet, and schools have unintentionally contributed to environmental problems by reinforcing the culture of capitalism. In terms of the consumption of resources and energy, it is obvious that people throughout the world cannot enjoy the living standard of Japanese people. According to Chambers et al. (2005), if everyone in the world consumed as much resources and energy as Japanese people do, they would need about 2.4 planets to support global consumption (the calculation is based on the data listed in WWF’s 2004 report). It is no doubt that people in urban areas in Japan are consuming more energy and resources than those in rural areas. Drawing on these data, it is fair to say that ongoing neo-liberal educational reforms that are trying to make Japan maintain its position of leadership in global economic competition can be continuously harmful to the natural environment.

The MOE has come to cover environmental education in the recent reports and public comments. At first glance, it seems that the MOE has been recognizing the need for a solution to global environmental problems up to today. Indeed, according to the MOE, with a consciousness of the global environmental challenges, it has encouraged each school to conduct environmental education in the Period of Integrated Learning. However, as the public becomes conscious and
anxious about the decline in academic ability of students, the MOE has recently begun to take the initiative to review the value and meaning of the *yutori kyoiku* (education with latitude) and has recently decided to reevaluate the validity and necessity of the Period of Integrated Learning (e.g., Yagura 2005; Saito 2004a, 2004b; Mainichi Shinbun 2005a, 2006; Asahi Shinbun 2006). These recent movements in the educational circles show the fact that the Japanese government has given overriding priority to further economic growth rather than protecting the national and global ecosystems.

As Hirota (2003) points out, while the finite nature of natural resources forces people to review the traditional educational system which is aimed at supporting the permanent development of the economy and society, people tend to pay less attention to the relationship between the modern educational system and environmental crisis, and try to give a good education to the children in front of them with the words such as, “Make the children in front of us be happy” and “Let my child live his/her convenient and affluent life.” On the one hand, they are often scowlingly saying, “Today’s young people just like to hear themselves talk;” but on the other hand, they do not care about the children or people living without ample natural resources in countries half a world away or in the near future, saying “We can’t do anything about problems like a widening inequality in the world and the finite nature of natural resources” (2003:21-26).

In this sense, Bower’s studies (1997, 2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2004) are insightful. For example, he begins his book, entitled *Educating for Eco-Justice and Community* (2001), with an argument that whereas a number of educational theorists have long revealed how public schools (and universities) contribute to the patterns of inequality in society, and have called for broad reforms in curriculum and pedagogy, their analyses have failed to take account of the scale and rate of changes occurring in the Earth’s ecosystems. Social justice advocates such as John Dewey, Paulo Freire, and other contemporary scholars, who frame social justice issues in terms of the categories of race, gender, and class, have tended to unquestionably emphasize the importance of letting the individual members of marginalized groups overcome social barriers and achieve greater parity in the economic and political life of the community. However, such contestations could lead the incorporation of the marginalized people into the consumer-oriented society, which supports a hotbed of ecological problems. Bowers argues that educational theorists ought to cast off the deep cultural assumptions that provide conceptual and moral legitimation for the cultural of capitalism without any considerations of its impacts on the earth’s ecosystems.
2.4 Discourse of environmental education

In this section, I am going to explore the discourse of environmental education. The purpose of this part is not to discuss the history and overall background of the environmental education in Japan. The history and background of the school environmental education in Japan is explored in chapter four.

Regardless of the fact that the influence of economic circles on schooling has been strengthened as discussed above, it is also true that the perception of the severity and complexity of environmental problems has become pervasive, and the public has come to hold expectations for the role of education, especially that of schools (Ecosystem Conservation Society Japan 2001; Matsumoto 2000; Palmer 1997; Barrett et al. 2000; Ministry of the Environment 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005 etc.). The definition of environmental education involved in the Tbilisi Declaration, or a report given at the International Conference on Environmental Education that took place in Tbilisi, the Republic of Georgia in 1977, set a precedent for the subsequent international efforts to define and give direction to environmental education down to this day (e.g., World Commission on Environment and Development 1987; UNCED 1992; UNESCO 1997). The report defined environmental education as follows.

Environmental education, properly understood, should constitute a comprehensive lifelong education, one responsive to changes in a rapidly changing world. It should prepare the individual for life through an understanding of the major problems of the contemporary world, and the provision of skills and attributes needed to play a productive role towards improving life and protecting the environment with due regard given to ethical values. (UNESCO 1978:1-2)

As described in the majority of environmental educational books recently published, the influence of the definition presented in Tbilisi Declaration remains in the definition and purpose of school environmental education today (such as, Ecosystem Conservation Society Japan 2001). In spite of the ardor for displaying the definition and purpose of environmental education, relatively few publications attempt to examine environmental educational practices from a broader perspective. Despite the fact that environmental education is one of numerous tasks assigned to the teachers who are already busy enough to start doing something new, environmental educators have hardly examined what the practice of environmental education would affect the teachers’ lives and the performance of other tasks. Outstanding domestic and international environmental educational practices have been introduced; however, environmental education advocates attempting to introduce such activities rarely refer to the historical
background, cultural context, and both positive and negative aspects of the practices, and what would be brought about by the practices.\textsuperscript{10} Especially, information on the negative aspects of the practices have been lacking in the knowledge base of the environmental education. In this regard, the Palmer (1997) argument is valid. She states, “Many traditional approaches [to environmental education] have been unsuccessful because they were based on narrow perspectives on education, research, communication, and even the nature of the environmental problems we aim to solve” (Palmer 1997:3).

Most people would not aggressively, but passively recognize the need to conduct environmental education today. That is, for the ordinary people, it is not so easy to make a direct verbal assault on the ear-pleasing and plausible assertion for such a need. For example, the White Paper on Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2004) explains the importance of environmental education as follows:

The response to environmental problems, including confronting the global warming and protecting natural environment is urgent and critical for our continued existence and prosperity. In order to protect a rich natural environment and bequeath it to subsequent generations, we must establish a sustainable society with the least adverse impact on the environment. To establish such a society, all actors ought to voluntarily and willingly get involved in environmental conservation activities, and learn about environmental problems at every possible opportunity. Especially it is critical to give environmental education to children who bear the 21st century. (MOE 2004)

Whereas this kind of argument actually seems reasonable and persuasive, there are some exceptional scholars having critical views against the ongoing environmental education; such as, Gruenewald (2004), Orr (1992, 1994), Bowers (1997, 2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2004), Martin (1996), and Kitamura (2000). Based on Foucalt’s notion of “disciplinary practice,” Gruenewald (2004) presents a critical perspective on the institutionalization of environmental education within the modern educational system. From Foucault’s perspective, literally every part of school curriculum is constructed to subject everyone to the possibility of surveillance at all times, and make each person discipline him or herself to follow the socially and culturally accepted code of conduct (Foucault 1979, see also Covaleskie 1993 and Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983). Based on the

\textsuperscript{10} This tendency to overlook the close relationship between cultural contexts and learning activities has been criticized by cultural-historical researchers (e.g. Vygotsky 2001). Hence, Jacob (1997) strongly encourages educational anthropologists to research on “what kind of school and districts would be needed to support a particular [educational] innovation and a contextually-sensitive approach to its use” (15).
Foucault’s perspective, Gruenewald states, “the institutionalization of environmental education has [inevitably] muted its potential as a transformative educational discourse practice” (2004:72). While taking a cautious stance on Martin’s (1996) contestation that today’s environmental education practices should be abolished altogether, he agrees with Martin’s and Orr’s (1994) perspective that the ongoing school environmental education is ineffective in advancing its own goal of creating ecologically literate people as long as it disciplines itself to the norms of general education. According to my analysis of the history and background of Japanese environmental education, I agree with Gruenewald’s argument. The political aspect of environmental problems has been gradually diluted over time, and it is now considered that environmental education should be conducted based on hands-on learning activities. Gruenewald strongly prompts environmental education advocates to broaden their perspective to include a larger cultural landscape and encourages educational theorists concerned with a larger cultural context to take more notice of environmental education and its struggle to exist.

Kitamura (2000) also emphasizes the importance of expanding the modern environmental educators’ perspectives. In his book, he notes that “it is not so easy to embody the education of environment … because … teachers already have a long list of things to be done. For the teachers, who are too busy with their present work, environmental education is but one of many challenges to address” (Kitamura 2000:2). He argues that since the modern schools are ill-suited to the implementation of the effective environmental education, environmental educators should avoid creating the impression that environmental education must be conducted at school as it now stands; rather, they must attempt to clarify the school structure that helps the realization of an effective school environmental education (Kitamura 2000:122). Although the subtitle of the book, “What the individual teacher can do,” creates the impression that he develops an argument based on the understanding of the reality of schools in his book, Kitamura provides little ethnographic description of schools, and pays little attention to the actual voices of teachers, children, and parents. Because he just enumerates what teachers ought to do without dealing with the fact that teachers’ and students’ practices in everyday contexts are never the same as the ideal, the tone of his criticism sounds too idealistic to the readers (Bourdieu 1990; Tanabe 2003).

Recently, some environmental educators have begun to investigate children’s perceptions of the environment. Loughland et al. (2002) and Payne (1998) describes the significance of the study of young peoples’ understanding of the environment as follows:

Clearly, research needs to shed more light on young peoples’ understanding of the environment. If students’ conceptions can clarify their relationship, fundamental orientation or understanding of the environment
then educators will have a notion of how to develop worthwhile and useful environmental educational pedagogies. (Loughland et al. 2002:189)

Until environment educators and researchers give clear expression to what is entailed in being a present day learner in environmental education, there is a probability that the range of academic and teacher-driven curriculum theories of environmental education will be relatively ineffective in terms of learner needs, interest and understandings. (Payne 1998:20)

Indeed, some researchers have already begun to reveal children’s perspectives of the environment. For example, Filho (1996) studied European children’s views of the natural environment, and showed that young people leave out humans in their identification of environment. According to Stanisstreet and Boyes (1996), the meaning of environment is not clear to young people. In the eyes of the children, the environment can be “immediate, local, international, global, animate, inanimate, natural or constructed, physical or social” (Stanisstreet & Boyes 1996). Also, according to Cullingford’s study (1996), young people see the environment differently from adults; in fact, they conceive of the environment according to how it affects them. For instance, only if they experienced pollution in their own lives, do the children think of the environment in terms of pollution. In Japan, in order to examine the status quo of today’s environmental education conducted in school, many local government have just begun to study children’s view of nature and understanding of environmental issues based on quantitative data collected by surveys (e.g., Ecosystem Conservation Society Japan 2001; Ministry of the Environment 2002, 2003; Osaka Prefecture 2005a)

However, relatively little research on environmental education has paid attention to the fact that children’s “eyes” are constructed in social and cultural contexts (Bourdieu 1990). Outside the environmental education discourse, a large number of scholars have revealed that the meaning and significance of objects, events, and behavioral patterns should be understood and appreciated within a specific cultural context rather than in terms of their supposed intrinsic properties, and that people bestow meaning on subjects and actions within a specific culture and history (e.g., Bourdieu 1990; Lave & Wenger 1991; Tanabe 2003; Vygotsky 2001; Wittgenstein 1976 etc.). Especially people who argue the significance of environmental ethics education seemingly tend to disregard the fact that people’s conventional practices are socially, culturally, and historically constructed and regulated. Since the Belgrade Charter declared the significance of a new kind of ethic through environmental education,11 many scholars have been attempting to make a list of

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11 We need nothing short of a new global ethic, which espouses attitudes and behavior for individuals and societies that are consonant with humanity’s place within the biosphere, and
abstract virtues and morality to be taught (e.g., Sajima 1992, 1997). It seems to me that in making a list of virtues and morality in abstract terms, environmental educators either consciously or unconsciously disregard the fact that people’s perspectives are not merely an expression of what they just heard from the teachers. Even children construct their own understanding based on what they have learned and seen, their own experiences, their tastes, and their sense of values. Cultural and social factors also have influence on the construction of their perspectives.

The tendency of educational theorists to present their own perspectives of education as a desirable alternative view of contemporary education is also detected in the traditional educational discourse. In this kind of educational discourse, educational theorists have generally simply analyzed the status quo of ongoing education based on the socially and culturally constructed image of education, and presented their own views of education as a desirable form of education that should be realized the “better” educational system from their own perspectives (Imai 2004). In such discourses, it is noteworthy that the theorists’ beliefs in their own images of desirable education can prevent them from casting a critical eye on the images. In trying to emphasize the merits of the images of desirable education in their mind, the theorists tend to forget the fact that they are analyzing the actual state of education based on culturally and socially constructed information, and disrespect the important characteristics of people; such as, real people are not such passive beings; the same education cannot make people the same (Hirota 2005); and everyone who has taken ethics classes in their childhood does not always behave in moral ways (Murai 1967). Here, Vygotsky’s (2005) statement regarding the relationship between the consciousness and moral behavior is insightful:

The reader surely knows that it is one thing to know how to act, and an entirely different thing to act correctly. One can understand perfectly well that alcohol is harmful and nevertheless not have the willpower to give up being

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12 In his masterpiece, entitled *Didactica magna* (often translated as *The Great Didactic*) (1657), Comenius (1592-1670) described the schools as a place that are always filled with the sound of the children being beaten with rods, children’s distaste for learning, and fruitless efforts, and described the desirable schools as a place where children can steadily learn things with less effort in a joyful way. In his book, entitled *Some thoughts concerning education* (1693), John Locke (1632-1704) criticized home education in which parents paid no attention to upbringing, and moaned about their children who were no longer listening to them. What he regarded as desirable education was that parents were keeping their eyes on their child since his/her infant stage, and developing the parent-child relationship from the power relationship to friendship. According to Imai (2004), the root of tendency of educational theorists to present their own perspectives of education as a desirable alternative view of contemporary education is also detected in Herbart (1776-1841), Dewey (1859-1952), and Bruner (1915-).
an alcoholic. Obviously, here it is essential to bear in mind that consciousness, of course, plays a kind of role, though not the decisive one, and that it is only one of several components and, quite often, inferior to other, more powerful instinctive drives. Consequently, it is still not enough to provoke the awareness that some good deed is necessary, rather it is far more important to make certain that this idea dominate consciousness, and this means disciplining the child’s consciousness so as to assist him in gaining the upper hand over all his conscious and unconscious desires. …

There can be no doubt that consciousness exerts a decisive influence on our moral behavior, though there is no direct dependence whatsoever which can be established between the two. (2005:119-120)

As Vygotsky argues (2005), every nationality and every epoch, and likewise every class, has its own morality. That is always a product of social psychology. Moral concepts vary depending upon the society and culture. That is to say, what is considered bad at one time and in one place, elsewhere might be considered the greatest of all virtues. Children in every culture learn the culturally and socially accepted morals through every aspect of their lives. Therefore, in terms of environmental education, before making the list of abstract virtues and morality in order to create an entire personality, and before incorporating the specific period to teach environmental education into the existing school curriculum, it is required to investigate what kind of view of nature and what kind of attitudes toward nature today’s children are learning in their ordinary lives. In addition, it should be kept in mind that children are learning about how they should treat nature and what kind of people-nature relationships they are required to establish not only from what they directly see and listen to, but also from the information they are getting from diverse TV programs and various books.

In contemporary Japan, the images of children, teachers, and schools are constructed under the influence of the information broadcast by the wide variety of types of media. Since commentators and educators are often arguing their views of education based on their own personal experiences without presenting any empirical data supporting their arguments (Kariya 2002, 2003; Ohuchi & Miyake 2006), such images tend to be impressive and attractive, but lack credibility and reliability (Hirota 2001). As Phillipe Ariès (1980) sharply points out, the ways people deal with children vary from culture to culture and age to age. What children are looking at and listening to are dependent on the social and cultural environment. Thus, in order to understand children, it is required to explore their lives as a whole. As Yamamura (1995) points out, the development of media and overflowing fragmented information of children are making various images of children, and, in turn, discourage the researchers from clearly characterizing them. Today, educators need to explore the actual state of schools based on empirical data in
order to prevent significant negative effect on school due to hasty educational reforms without clear comprehension of what is going happening on the ground (Kariya 2002, 2005).

2.5 Conclusion of chapter two

This review of the literature sheds light on the three points that should be discussed in this thesis: (1) the importance of revealing people activities in order to understand how today’s people are really treating their own environment; (2) the significance of paying attention to the possible relationship between today’s schooling and increasing environmental problems, or how the modern educational system has intentionally and unconsciously contributed in causing environmental problems; (3) the need for environmental educators and other scholars interested in environmental education to broaden their perspective to explore the strong, but often implicit impact of culture on the children’s construction of their own perspective of the environment and view of nature.

In the discussion of the Japanese view of nature, the literature has tended to focus on the characteristics of nature in Japan, the description of nature found in some traditional arts, and view of nature in the traditional philosophies and religions, but paid little attention to actual human behavior. In contrast, social scientists including sociologists and anthropologists have studied the fact that Japanese people have been both domestically and internationally destroying nature in the process of economic growth. In this era of global environmental problems, it is not enough for Japanese people to continuously insist that Japanese people innately have a love of nature and a sensibility to the beauty of seasons. Japanese people have to ask themselves: To what extent is Japanese appreciation of nature reflected in praxis, in their behavior in nature?

The literature review of schooling shows the fact that there are growing discontents and criticisms about the modern educational system in Japan from various perspectives. However, those commentators and critiques are generally never referring to the connection between the modern educational system, which serves a pivotal role in the modern world, and environmental problems that have been caused by economic growth and modernization. Thus, there have been successive educational reform plans, and schools have been actually altered based on the market logic; however, it seems that today’s neo-liberal educational system continuously has negative impacts on the natural environment in spite of the fact that the Ministry of Education have argued that environmental education is now widely conducted at schools in Japan.

The last part of this chapter, or the literature review of environmental education, has described the fact that there are widespread tendencies to disrespect how this culture and society influence children’s construction of their own perspective of the environment and sense of values.
As Vygotsky argues, whether one can actually act correctly is not the same as whether one knows what he/she has to do from the moral point of view. Vygotsky’s opinion is important in the sphere of environmental education because it points out the fact that education cannot completely control every act and word of students although it certainly has strong impacts on them. I believe in the possibility of education. Education is a crucial procedure to solve today’s global environmental problems. However, I also acknowledge that a too optimistic view of education and schooling has placed the blame for the education of children and their development at the feet of individual teachers and schools. With the consideration of the limitations of education, it is important to set out the context that is appropriate to discuss the importance of environment with the next generations in society today. In order to do so, it is critical to first listen to the voice of teachers, children, and others who are surrounding today’s children, or those who have been actually engaged in either official or unofficial environmental education.
Chapter 3. Selection of the Field/Participant Population and Methodologies

The purpose of this section is to describe the methods used in this study. In order to examine the *emic* perspective on the environment and the participant’s perceptions of the implementation of environmental education at a public elementary school, I conducted fieldwork at a public elementary school in Osaka, Japan from September through December in 2005.

In order to achieve the purpose of this study, I mainly utilized two kinds of methods: participant observation and in-depth interviews. Pelto and Pelto (1978) call these methods “interactive methods” in order to spotlight the fact that both involve interactions between researcher and participant. LeCompte and Preissle (1993) point out that these methods are most common categories of data collection used by ethnographic and qualitative researchers. After illustrating the characteristics of the field and participants of this study, I discuss these methods in depth.

3.1 Selection of the field

My field site, or KES is a public elementary school located in Sakai city, which is a suburban city Sakai in Osaka prefecture, Japan. I am conscious of the fact that it is hardly possible to discuss all Japanese children living in a variety of types of cultural contexts and social situations and surrounded by ultimately different natural environment based on fieldwork conducted in one place for four months. Rather than making attempts to describe the lifestyle of Japanese children and the view of environment that they are learning in abstract terms, it is more attractive to me to focus on concrete interactions between teacher and student and between students. I selected the public school that does not place considerable emphasis on environmental education in order to examine the interactions between teachers (adults) and children that generally take place in public schools throughout the country because most children are currently going to public elementary schools rather than private or national elementary schools in Japan. I am going to sketch out the outline of the field site, including the status quo of its natural environment and education, based on statistics below.

3.1.1 Current state of the natural environment

Here, I briefly describe the background information and history of the field of my study. The data quoted below are derived from the following sources: White Paper on Environment (Osaka Prefecture 2005b), a book entitled *Osaka no kankyo kyoiku* (Osaka Kyoiku Bunka Center 1996),
the websites of Osaka Prefecture, Sakai city, APEC Virtual Center for Environmental Technology Exchange, Osaka District Meteorological Observatory, Osaka Prefectural Fisheries Experimental Station.

As of September 1, 2005, covering an area of approximately 1,894 square kilometers, or 0.5% of the nation’s total land area, Osaka was the second smallest prefecture in Japan. However, it has more than 8.8 million people, or approximately seven percent of the entire population, making it the third most populous prefecture after Tokyo and Kanagawa prefectures. The population grew from 5 million in 1958 to 6 million in 1960, 7 million in 1967, and passed the 8 million mark in 1973, so that for the twenty years starting in 1960, it underwent a large increase of some 200,000 each year. However, partly as a result of an extended commuting area, the rate of population growth slowed down.

Geographically Osaka extends from north to south, with a slight curve, open toward Osaka Bay on the west and surrounded by mountains on the other three sides (Rokkou, Ikoma, and Kongou mountain ranges). Around the mouth of the Yodo River, which empties into the Bay, extends an alluvial plain. Because large quantities of environmentally harmful emissions and air contaminants that are created in Osaka prefecture and nearby big cities like Kobe city tend to stay within this area, the atmosphere of the prefecture is easily contaminated.

In the period of high economic growth between the late 1950’s and 1970’s as a result of the income-doubling policy, Osaka Prefecture enjoyed economic development. Measures to promote the industry includes the conversion of the Itami airfield into the Osaka International Airport, the construction of a road network, and other measures centered on expanding the industrial infrastructure and upgrading the textile and other local industries. From the late 1950s, Osaka Prefecture became the subject of moves to formulate and implement long-running and far-ranging city planning measures. In 1960, the prefecture created an Enterprise Bureau, which integrated two project areas with its Coastal Development Department and Housing Land Development Department, using an independent budget to reclaim and allot land sites, thus providing an effective and highly functional resource for large-scale development. Based on the Sakai Port Development Plan (1954), Sakai and the coastal industrial area’s land reclamation and development were implemented, and attracted iron manufacture, oil refining, petrochemical and other industries. By 1969, 73 percent of the total land reclamation and development area or 2000 hectares was completed, of which 87 percent was given over to firms and business organizations as industrial land. The most scenic coastline in Osaka prefecture was enveloped in a huge industrial complex. Osaka Prefecture determined to construct the new town (e.g., Senri New Town) in its 1958 document on Residential Zone Creation Projects. While negotiating the land
purchase on the one hand, the prefecture drafted successive master plans, and presented the final version of the master plan in 1960. Two years later, the first residents moved in, and the new town’s population topped 100,000 in 1969. Successively, land development appeared across the prefecture. For example, the creation of Senboku New Town began in the southern part of the prefecture.

The wave of extensive developments has greatly urbanized Osaka Prefecture. It resulted in widespread destruction of the natural resources. Woodland, hillside and seashore which the prefecture have been disrupted and destructed. Around 1970, people begun to protest the destruction of their living environment by pollution and other evils. They called for a change in the prefecture’s high-growth economic policies, which gave top priority to efforts to reverse the weakening of the prefecture’s industrial base. The oil crisis of 1973 brought an end to the high-growth period. After several years of recession, renewed economic development began. It significantly changed the city’s appearance. Most of the coast of this prefecture were altered and replaced by a man-made coast. Indeed, although only less than one percent of the entire coast has been left to revert to the natural state, more than 99% have been altered to larger or lesser degree (Osaka Prefectural Fisheries Experimental Station 2006). In addition, the contemporary land use shows that there are only a few places that have remained naturally intact. The artificial lands—residential land and streets—equal 40% of the prefecture’s total land area. Although they are altered by human activities to a greater or lesser degree, agricultural landscape and forests have dramatically decreased from approximately 300 square kilometers in 1970 to 150 square kilometers in 2000. Contamination of water quality because of wastewater from industries and households still influence residents’ lives (Osaka Prefecture 2005b).

The public elementary school, KES, where I conducted fieldwork is in Sakai city, roughly in the center of Osaka Prefecture. Today Sakai has developed into Japan’s 14th largest city, encompassing a population of 830,000 (approximately 400,000 million male and 430,000 million female) and an area of about 150 square kilometers. More than 5,000 people are living per square kilometer (Sakai City 2006). In April 2006, Sakai became a city designated by ordinance (seirei shitei toshi), the classification that affords the greatest degree of local autonomy within Japan’s system of government.

Sakai is a traditional city with a long history. During Japan’s Tumulus Period, the residents built the Nintoku-ryo tumulus, one of the world’s largest imperial mausoleums. Later, Sakai prospered as a center of overseas trade during the medieval Muromachi Period (1338-1573). During this period, Sakai flourished under the control of powerful merchants as a liberal and self-governing city. The progressive and enterprising spirit of the ancient merchants who extended
their reach to the world beyond Japan’s borders found continued expression by the city’s many remarkable people of culture. For example, Sen-no-Rikyu (1522-1591) was the famous pioneering master of the tea ceremony, and Akiko Yosano (1878-1942) was a composer of *tanka* (31-syllable-verse) through the Meiji (1868-1912), Taisho (1912-1926) and Showa (1926-1989) Periods. Akiko has traditionally cited in school textbooks as one of the leading figures in the history of modern literature.

The landscape of Sakai city underwent a great change in the process of its development. The total of residential land, commercial area, and industrial area occupies approximately 57% of this city (Sakai City 2005). On the other hand, the natural environment of this city has been reduced. According to *Sakai no kankyo* (Sakai City 2005), natural and semi-natural area (such as, forests, mountains, and agricultural lands) equal approximately 24% of the total of this city. The review and reinforcement of environmental regulations and standards has been implemented to minimize reduce industrial pollution, however, environmental degradation caused especially by automobile emissions, increasing waste, contamination of rivers and subterranean water, and destruction of ecosystems, remain. The status quo of the environment of Sakai city is certainly not the worst in Japan, but it is not like that of the rural area with extraordinarily rich natural environment.

### 3.1.2 Statistics on elementary schools

According to the Ministry of Education (2005), there are total of 23,123 elementary schools nationwide, among which 73 (approx. 0.05%) are national, 22,856 are local, and 194 are private schools (as of 2005). Those schools are not distributed evenly throughout the country, and some populated or large prefectures have a larger number of schools than others. Osaka prefecture has the third-largest number of elementary schools in Japan, or 1,050, among which three are national, 1,031 are public, and 16 are private elementary schools (among these private schools, two are girl’s school). Osaka city has the largest number of elementary schools (312), and Sakai city has the second-largest number of them, or 96 (Osaka Prefecture 2005c; Sakai City 2006). Additionally, Sakai city has two private elementary schools. Based on these statistics, it is fair to say that majority of children aged between six and twelve are attending a public elementary school today.

Each school has its own social background dependent on the school district and the history. Some schools are located in somewhat new subdivisions, and some schools have a relatively long history. Indeed, KES is an old elementary school having more than 130 years of history. In the school district, many rice paddies turn a shining golden color every autumn. As the KES school principal and other teachers often told me, residents of the school district are generally sensitive
about and conscious of what is going on in relation to their children and the school. KES teachers tend to manage the students’ school lives with attention to the parents’ intentions, expectations, and complaints toward the school.

3.2 Selection of the Participants

Two major participants of this study are the KES children and teachers. During my fieldwork, I was always attempting to collect data from these participants as much as possible through observation and interviews. In addition, I asked some parents and a few local residents to get involved in my interview.

3.2.1 Children

There were 831 children at KES in 2005. Among them, my focus was on the fourth grade children (9-10 year olds) because KES mainly implements environmental education for the fourth grade students every year. The 136 fourth graders (75 boys and 61 girls) were divided into four classes; thus, every class has more than 35 students. It was especially the 19 boys and 16 girls of Asano-sensei’s (a young woman teacher) class that I spent most of my time to observe what they were doing and listen to how they talked during the fieldwork.

3.2.2 Teachers

In order to examine the cultural context in which today’s children are forming their view of nature and perspective of environmental issues, it is crucial to pay attention to teachers’ language and behavior. There were 44 people working at KES including a principal, a vice-principal, 30 teachers, a nurse, a nutritionist, two instructors, four part-time teachers, etc. Since I was focusing on the fourth grade children, I spent most time with the four fourth grade teachers; Ohnuki-sensei, Tanaka-sensei, Mori-sensei, and Asano-sensei. Especially, Asano-sensei, a key informant, walked me through the culture of the school and showed me the ropes. Based on her understanding of what I needed, she talked to me in a friendly way and provided me a lot of information regarding the school culture. My wife also helped the process of this research. As a teacher working at KES,

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13 I used three name suffixes throughout this thesis: “-sensei,” “-san,” and “-kun.” Literally, sensei means teacher. San is the ending used for the names of people equal to or above you, and generally among adults while -kun is used for males who are below the speaker in age and status. At elementary school, -san is used for the names of girls, and -kun is used for boys. I used “-sensei” after the last name of teachers, “-kun” after the last name of boys, and “-san” after the last name of girls and parents.
she took a role as a so-called “gate-keeper” (Sato 2002), and informed me where I could find valuable data. In fact, she first introduced me to the school principal.

Among the teachers who were ready and willing to have a conversation with me, 20 teachers accepted my interviews. Those who answered to my interviews were both male and female, and experienced and newer (“experienced” teacher refers to those who are more familiar with the KES district).

3.2.3 Parents

Three parents (mothers) responded to my interview questions. Those parents were selected from Asano-sensei’s class; one is a mother with a daughter and other two have sons in the class. Partly because of the influence of the successive cases targeted at the children occurred during my internship, it was somewhat difficult to conduct interviews with a large number of parents as I had preliminarily planned. Nonetheless, these parents provided with me much insightful, valuable information in the interviews.

3.2.4 Local residents

In addition, I interviewed a city employee assigned to the environmental agency, who had exercised his influence to maintain or remedy the status quo of the local environment in the community. I also had casual conversation with people who had been living nearby the KES for an extended period on the street or around the school.

3.3 Methods utilized in this study

3.3.1 Participant observation

Participant observation is the primary data collection technique used by ethnographers. To collect data, I went out and stayed out, learning a new language—a new dialect of a language that I had already known and jargons distributed throughout the culture under the investigation. I experienced the lives of my participants. While spending time with the KES teachers and children as a “participant observer” (Bernard 2002:237), I attempted to blend in and participate in their daily activities, watching what they did, listen to what they said, and interacting with them.

In the process of participant observation, I was perceived as a “learner” or “newcomer” of their culture, to be socialized by the participants into their groups (Burnett 1974). Even children tried to teach me about their culture and to instill what should be known to fit in to their lifestyle—such as, frequently-used language, popular TV programs, popular TV games, and their perspective of school lives. They showed their interests in my words, behavior, what I was doing,
and going to do there. This implies that conducting participant observation was not just a mean to collect anticipated information, but also, a way to seek “a deeper immersion in other’s worlds in order to grasp what they experience as meaningful and important” (Emerson et al. 1995:2 italics theirs). During fieldwork, I devoted my entire attention to get physically and socially close to the activities and everyday experiences of the KES teachers and children, and attempted to put myself in the middle of important sites and scenes of their lives in order to observe and understand them. Immersing myself in the field enabled me to see from the emic perspective how the participants led their lives, how they carried out their daily activities, and what they viewed as meaningful and valuable. As Emerson et al. (1995) states, because of immersion, I could directly, and sometimes compellingly, experience for myself both the routines and conditions that the teachers and the children experienced everyday, and the constraints and pressures they actually encountered in their ordinary lives.

In getting close to them and making them feel comfortable with my presence, or building a strong rapport with them, I came to view the participants as not only sources of the data, but also, as “partners” in this study. Thus, as I tried to get close to the participants by participating in their day-to-day affairs, the active participation precluded conducting field research as a detached, passive observer. By participating in another way of life, I learned what was required to become a member of the participant’s world, which is “to experience events and meanings in ways that approximate members’ experiences” (Emerson et al. 1995:2). Contrary to the data collected via non-interactive research methods (Pelto & Pelto 1978), such as, experiments or surveys, what can be known and understood via participant observation (and other qualitative methods) is essentially interpretive. With the notion of the interpretive nature of participant observation, Bernard (2002) regards this method as humanistic as well as scientific.

Participant observation also gave me the opportunity to compare what the participants’ words with their actual behavior and attitudes in everyday contexts. As Keddie (1971) notes, I sometimes realized that my participant teachers either consciously or unconsciously talked to center around descriptions of what is socially and culturally acceptable, rather than what they actually did or thought. Participant observation enabled me to spotlight the difference between front stage (omote, honne) and backstage (ura, tatemae), and what kinds of utterance, attitudes, and behavior were viewed as officially allowed (or restricted) from the participant’s point of view. This was certainly significant in the investigation of the children’s thoughts. Lively and active young children are often restless and quickly get tired of things; thus, albeit interviewing children is fun and fascinating, it is unrealistic to expect them to sit face-to-face and express their perspectives in a long dialogue with a researcher (Rossman & Rallis 1998). Indeed, the more they
sensed the formality of the atmosphere of the conversation, the more they tried to hide their perspectives and thoughts. While giving value and significance to the children’s words, I was consciously sensitive about the children’s utterance and behavior during other activities and paid attention to the relationship and differences between their explanations of their behavior and how they actually behaved.

Participant observation was conducted in virtually every aspect of the children’s school life, including in the classroom and on the playground, during lectures, breaks, lunchtime, and cleaning after lunch. In addition, I attempted to observe the teacher’s behavior and utterances both in front of and out of sight of the children (e.g., in a teacher’s office). Fortunately, I could take part in some school events, such as an excursion and Sports Day. For example, I took part in the fourth grader’s excursion and accompanied them to Yamato River, participated in Chiikan clean-up activities, which was an important part of the environmental educational activities for the fourth graders, and went to Kyoto with the sixth graders. In addition, at the request of some teachers, I took advantage of the opportunities to make a presentation regarding environmental problems a few times. Although it was not involved in my preliminary research, the preparation for the presentations enabled me to view the environmental problems and teach about the topic from a teacher’s perspective. These experiences helped me interpret and understand what is happening on the ground from the teacher’s standpoint.

During the participant observation process, I was energetically writing field notes or “the written record of my perception in the field” (Rossman & Rallis 1998:135). Field notes consist of two major components: the descriptive data of what I observed and the comments on those data. That is to say, I described the physical environment and the activities and interactions among the participants in the field as much detail as possible, and wrote my emotional reactions to events, analytic insights, questions to the participants, and notions for changing my research design. Since I could be introduced to the school by the school principal as a person who was studying about the KES children’s ordinary lives, there were relatively few obstacles to write field notes in front of the participants. Indeed, in Asano-sensei’s class, where I spent most of my time during fieldwork, I had a foldaway chair and was allowed to put the chair anywhere in the classroom to observe the activities taken place there. Only during a first few days did some children seemed to alter their behavior because I was looking at them and writing field notes; however, as I built rapport with them, they became accustomed to my presence and my taking field notes in front of them. While writing field notes, what I was sensitive about the most was to avoid hurting rapport with the participants and interfering with the smooth progression of their activities and conversations. For example, when a child noticed that I was trying to write field notes during
conversations, s/he immediately and easily quit the ongoing conversation and showed his/her interest in my behavior. Once they stopped talking, they never came back to the same topic again. Thus, I hardly took field notes during interactions with the children.

This interaction with the children in the process of writing field notes clearly exemplifies that my presence in a setting inevitably had implications and consequences for what was taking place due to my attempt to interact with the participants. While being inclined to be a neutral and trying to discard preconceived notions, I have realized that I could not be an entirely neutral, detached observer, and keep observing the activities from outside without any influence from the observed phenomena. Consequently, I came to view the effects of my participation on the participants’ behavior and utterance, or reactive effects, as an essential part of my research (Emerson et al. 1995:3). When I cared about the impacts of my presence in the field on what I was observing and learning, I repeatedly read the following insightful and encouraging sentences.
• What kinds of words are they using to refer to the environment? How do children see the difference between biological and non-biological things?

• What are the main motives of children’s behaviors? How do children decide what they do or do not do? For example, parental/teacher/peer/adult approval, or self-satisfaction can be reflected in their behavior towards the environment.

• How do children play with their friends during breaks between classes, inside of the classroom and on the in the playground? What kinds of play do they like?

• What do children value most during lectures? What do children value most in their lives?

• What kind of person do children want to be? What kinds of person are they expected to be?

(Although these last three objectives are not related to their attitudes about the environment, I also want to explore the general cultural context of these children.)

Through the participant observation of the teachers:

• What are they usually doing both in and out of the classroom, between classes and after school? (This is just general observation so I can become familiar with teachers’ behavior.)

• What kinds of words are teachers using to refer to the environment, in their lectures or in conversations with each other?

• What kinds of children’s attitudes and behavior do teachers value and compliment or reprimand?

• What kinds of things do they consider while they are talking about the environment? Do they convey implicit, unconscious messages in their speech?

3.3.2 In-depth interviews

Listening to the participants’ voices is key to revealing and understanding how participants view their worlds. Because “different types of interviews produce different types of data that are useful for different types of research projects that appeal to different types of researchers” (Bernard 2002:204), there are various types of interviews. Throughout this study, I utilized three kinds of interviews dependent on the situations and the purpose of the interviews; or, informal interviews, unstructured interviews, and semi-structured interviews.

“Informal interviews,” or casual conversations, are serendipitous, occurring virtually everywhere, if there were some participants, in the classroom, in the corridor, and in the schoolyard, during a class or between classes. In addition, virtually everyone in the field was a
potential participant in informal interviews. Interviews of this sort are characterized by a total lack of structure or control, and I tried to remember conversations heard during the course of a day in the field. Particularly, for the initial period of the internship, when I was settling into the field, I conducted this kind of interviews as a part of the participant observation to learn the language and jargon used by the participants, to build greater rapport and uncover new topics of interest. During the first few weeks, I wondered if the data based on informal interviews could be real data, but they have eventually become a foundation to the whole study. As described above, young children are often restless and quickly get tired of things. It seems that expecting them to sit still during a long more structured, dialogue kinds of interviews are reckless. Instead, children put fascinating and precious words in casual conversations. Indeed, their utterance in front of other people or somewhat formal, face-to-face conversation was different from that in a general conversation. Thus, informal interviews with the children comprised a good part of this study. Moreover, when I could take part in the conversation among teachers, I just listened to their talk and, if possible, took notes on them. Even when not making any single remarks, I could learn about their perspectives on topics in such ordinary conversations.

According to Bernard (2002), both scholars who identify with the hermeneutic tradition and those who identify with the positivist tradition use “unstructured interviews”. The purpose of the interview of this kind was to elicit the participants’ point of view, feelings and perspectives. What I did in unstructured interviewing was to sit down with the participant and keep telling him/her that I was not just engaged in enjoyable chatting, but interviewing him/her. Although I had a clear plan and what I would like to know in my mind, unstructured interviews overall were characterized by a minimum of control over people’s response; thus, the balance of talk was in favor of the participant. I constantly remained open to pursuing topics that the participant brought up. Even when I was planning to conduct semi-structured interviews, I conducted unstructured interviews before moving to more formal interview questions in order to build initial rapport with the participants. If the participant showed that s/he was not fond of a more formal interview, and would not tolerate it, I tried to maintain the already created conversational, freewheeling atmosphere and let them respond to my open-ended questions with long narratives. Particularly when talking with Asano-sensei, or key informants of this study, and other fourth grade teachers with whom I spent most of my time during the fieldwork, I conducted unstructured interview to develop guides for more structured or semi-structured interviews with other teachers.

As with informal and unstructured interviews, it is crucial to create an open atmosphere, letting the participant expound their perspectives on the topics in “semi-structured interviews.” What differentiated semi-structured interviews from the others was the use of an interview guide,
or a written list of topics and categories to cover in the interview. Yet, in spite of the existence of the pre-planned interview guide, the priority was given to the flow of the conversation, and I was careful not to insist upon asking those interview questions in a specific order. While allowing questions to flow naturally based on information provided by the participants, the flow of the conversation dictated the questions asked and those omitted, as well as the order of the questions.

While interviewing the participants, regardless of the kind of interview, I constantly interpreted what I was hearing, as well as sought clarity and a deeper understanding from the participants throughout the interview. Virtually all responses were recorded, typically with audiotape and field notes. In addition, I tried to pay attention to their non-verbal behavior and write down field notes as well. Because utterance itself contains a social history, even an utterance by a single individual can be construed as dialogic, and reflects the speaker’s either conscious or unconscious selection of what to say, or what is allowed to be said. The meaning of an utterance or every word expressed in conversations could not and, thus, should not be discussed without being cognizant of the speakers (e.g., Bakhtin 1989; Foucault 1974; Vygotsky 2001). While some participants made their perspectives explicit, some were not particular when they considered their utterance as unofficial or restricted. Therefore, it was crucial to conduct observation of the participants’ non-verbal behavior in order to uncover the sociocultural background and how they actually felt about expressing their opinions.

Twenty teachers, three parents (mothers) of the fourth grade boys and girls, and one city employee assigned to environmental agency participated in the semi-structured interviews. Because of allowing the participants to choose the venue that was most convenient and comfortable for them, a majority of interviews with teachers and parents were conducted after school in some unused classroom at that time. However, when required by the participants, I conducted some interviews between classes or during school hours. For example, the interview with the city employee took place in his office located at the Sakai City Hall at his request. Interviews ranged in length from about 30 minutes to over 90 minutes.

The interview guide prepared for the interviews with teachers, parents, and local residents consisted of the following questions:

**Interview with the teachers:**
- When and how did you learn about education about the environment or environmental problems? What kinds of information sources have you looked at in order to know how to conduct environmental education in class?
- Could you describe how you feel about today’s environmental education? Do you consider that it should be implemented at an elementary school?
- What kind of relationship with the environment are you trying to teach the students?
- When do you feel difficulties in implementing environmental education?
- How would you describe the general point-of-view of students toward the environment? If you think there are several different points-of-view among students, please describe them.
- If you used to, or are trying to let your students have a good relationship with the environment (nature), could you describe it?
- How do you evaluate students’ understanding of the material and content of the environmental education class? When do you feel that you could implement environmental education successfully?
- If you have an experience when you could successfully implement environmental education, could you describe it? What was the key factor to make the class successful at that time?

**Interview with the parents:**
- Are you interested in environmental problems?
- What kind of relationship with the environment are you trying to teach to your child? How successful do you think you are being?
- What do you think about the environmental education implemented at school today?
- Did you take any environmental education classes when you were a child?
- Could you describe your childhood? Could you describe a typical day when you were child? What were you usually doing after class? What was your favorite thing to do with your friends?
- Have you had any good experiences in which you felt the importance of the environment (nature)?
- Do you think that there is something you can do to improve today’s environment or the future environment where your children will live?
- If you used to, or are trying to let your children have a good relationship with the environment (nature), could you describe it?

**Interview with the city employee:**
- How long have you lived around here?
- Do you think the environment of the community has changed? Could you describe when and how changes occurred?
• Do you consider the change as a good thing or a bad thing? Could you describe why you think so?
• Could you describe a typical day when you were child? What were you usually doing after class? What was your favorite thing to do with your friends?
• If you have a good experience of the environment (nature), could you describe it?
• Do you have any comments on today’s environmental problems or environmental education?
Chapter 4. Cultural and Historical Background of Environmental Education in Japanese Schools

The purpose of this chapter is to briefly explain some fundamental concepts that will be required to read the following chapters. In the first few pages, I illustrate the Japanese school curriculum and its recent changes, especially the establishment of new subjects (Life Environmental Studies and the Period of Integrated Learning) and the introduction of the five-day school week. In the next part, I am going to briefly explain the history and background of environmental education in Japanese elementary schools.

4.1 School curriculum

Japan has had a national school curriculum since the late 1950’s. This is why a standardized, homogenized education is available anywhere in Japan (see Tsuchida & Lewis 1996; Sato 1996; Fukuzawa & LeTendre 2001). The school curriculum consists of both academic and nonacademic subjects (i.e., art, music, physical education, homemaking, special class activities, and moral education). For example, 90 school hours a year are allocated to physical education and 60 to music and art in the third grade while there are only 70 school hours a year to science and social studies. In the case of sixth grade, 157 hours a year are allocated to Japanese, 150 to arithmetic, a total of 195 to social studies and science, and a total of 315 to nonacademic subjects. Life Environmental Studies (seikatsuka) and the Period of Integrated Learning (sôgôtéki na gakushû) are relatively new subjects. In the first grade, 102 school hours a year are allocated to Life Environmental Studies. This means that first graders are studying it longer than arithmetic. Third and fourth graders are devoting 105 hours a year, and fifth and sixth graders are devoting 110 hours a year to the Period of Integrated Learning (I will discuss the Period of Integrated Learning in detail below).

The crucial change has recently occurred in the treatment of the national course of study. Since 1958, the legal binding force of the national course of study had been emphasized and treated as an upper boundary of what to teach in classes. Thus, teachers were not allowed to teach the contents that are not involved in the approved course of study. However, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has re-characterized this course of study as just a guide for helping teachers to educate children according to children’s wishes and demands. The course of study still has legal binding force. However, the MOE is now putting forth the contents of the course of study as the minimum essentials only. This shift in the MOE’s perspective of the course of study has been criticized by educators (such as, Sato 2001, Kariya et al 2002, Kariya et al. 2005).
In spite of the fact that Japanese language (reading and writing) and arithmetic are the academic core of the school curriculum along with science and social studies in part because they are the foundation for all other academic skills, it would be hard to tell from the appearance of the textbooks. In contrast to the American-style hardcover, thick, large-format textbooks that belong to the school, Japanese textbooks are thin, small, friendly-looking paperbacks. The texts for Japanese language and arithmetic are no longer or thicker than those for art, homemaking, and music. American anthropologist Benjamin (1997) described her first impression when she say those textbooks of her children going to schools in Japan as follows:

My initial reaction was that there just wasn’t enough material in these texts to keep a class occupied for a whole year. In fact, for reading and arithmetic there are two text volumes for each year, but they still add up to a very modest number of pages, compared to American textbooks. It seemed that teachers would have to do lot of extra work to stretch these texts into a year’s worth of work. (Benjamin 1997:115-116)

Those textbooks written and edited by private sector publishers, according to each author’s ingenuity, have to be approved by the Minister in accordance with the Courses of Study and the Standards for Textbook Authorization through deliberations by the Textbook Authorization and Research Council. The process ensures that descriptions in proposed textbooks are both objective, impartial, and free from errors, and that proper educational considerations are paid. Local boards of education, which are assuming the authority to set up local schools, determine which authorized textbooks are to be adopted and used at each school in the locality. In order to realize the concept of free compulsory education, as stipulated in the Constitution of Japan, textbooks used at national, public and private schools in the compulsory education levels are offered to students free of charge.

Additionally, there are a number of special school activities and ceremonies—such as, Sports Day, school excursions, and art and music festivals—designed to bring all members of the school together in a shared memorable event. Some of these events including Sports Day are preceded by weeks of preparation, as I shall describe later in this thesis. As some scholars such as Lewis (1996) and Benjamin (1997) point out based on their ethnographic research, these are actually regarded as parts of educational activities. The MOE views the special activities as important educational practices that encourage a student to acquire basic morals and social rules.

*Establishment of new subjects, “Life Environmental Studies” and “The Period of Integrated Learning”*
The curriculum is revised almost once every ten years, coming into effect about three years after publication. The chief feature of the revision published in 1989 (thus, coming into effect in 2002) was the introduction of so-called the “atarashii gakuryokukan” (new view of academic achievement), in which students’ interest and motivation were highly emphasized (kyoumi, kansom, iyoku) as well as the knowledge and understanding (chishi, rikai) that had previously been considered as constituting academic achievement (gakuryoku). The new curriculum instructed teachers to harness the students’ interests and emphasize individualized teaching, independent study, and experiential activities (MOE 1989). Also important in this 1989 curriculum is the merging of science and social studies in the first and second grades into a new subject, Life Environmental Studies (seikatsuka). This was aimed at allowing more integrated, experience-based, and exploratory learning.

The new Course of Study published in 1998 inherited characteristics from the old course of study, outlined above. In the new course of study, teachers are encouraged to be sensitive about students’ interest and motivation in conducting classes. The MOE states:

Children will be encouraged to cultivate well-balanced rich humanity and sociality. Rich humanity includes sympathy, intent to respect each other and live together in harmony, respect for life and human rights, sensibility of appreciating beauty and the environment, volunteer spirit, intent to make efforts to achieve one’s own goal and the like. … There was a tendency for school education to emphasize volumes of knowledge. Now, however, the school education looks at itself from the children’s standpoint and places a high value on the development of children’s intellectual interests and inquiring minds. Thus, the school education positively conducts its activities by emphasizing the importance of motivating children to learn by themselves and helping them to develop abilities to learn, reason, judge, express themselves accurately, discover and solve problems, acquire basic creativity and act independently in response to social changes. Additionally, children are encouraged to use their knowledge and skills comprehensively in daily life in order to successfully relate their knowledge acquired at school with their actual life. This requires the promotion of such educational activities as hands-on learning activities, problem-solving activities and activities to teach how to research and how to learn (MOE 1998a).

To accomplish the purpose described in this quote, a new, cross-disciplinary subject called “Sōgōteki na gakushū no jikan (The Period of Integrated Learning)” was established. And, in order to allow more hours for the new subject, the content and hours of traditional compulsory subjects at elementary and junior high level were shrinking. For example, at primary level, hours for Japanese, arithmetic, art, and music have been cut by 14% each, while hours for social studies and science have been cut by 18% and 17%, respectively. The hours allocated for the Period of
Integrated Learning (105 or 110 school hours a year) are longer than for any other single subject except for Japanese and arithmetic (MOE 1998b).

It should be fair to say that “the 1998 curriculum revision is the most radical since the introduction of national curriculum in the late 1950s” (Cave 2001:179, Kato & Uozumi 1999). The establishment of the Period of Integrated Learning reflects the general reformist approach laid down by the reports of the Rinkyôshin (Ad Hoc Council on Education) and Chûkyôshin (Central Education Council). For example, regarding the Period of Integrated Learning, only very general guidelines are given in contrast to the very detailed prescriptions for other subjects, which are in line with the traditional curriculum format. The MOE states:

The Period of Integrated Learning will be established in order for individual schools to be able to develop distinctive education and to make efforts to conduct interdisciplinary and comprehensive teaching activities. … The specification of the Period of Integrated Learning” in the national curriculum standards will be only its aim, school’s obligation of its establishment in the curriculum and the standard of its school hours. The content will not be prescribed as it is for other subjects. The course title is “the Period of Integrated Learning” in the national curriculum standards, but individual schools can name it whatever they like.

Individual schools are expected to make efforts to develop activities for the “Period of Integrated Learning”. Specifically, learning activities will be developed starting from setting tasks or activities according to the subject. Subjects can be, for example, interdisciplinary and comprehensive studies such as international understanding, information, environment, welfare and health, subjects which children are interested in and those closely related to the community and school’s characteristics (MOE 1998a).

In contrast to the traditional subjects, the curriculum gives teachers and individual schools a great deal of freedom to determine what is to be taught and what kind of teaching methods and study materials to be used (see, Kato & Uozumi 1999; Shimano 2002, MOE 1999). Indeed, in the new Course of Study (1998b), only five pages are devoted to describe the aims of and how to teach the Period of Integrated Learning, in contrast to sixteen pages devoted to Japanese, ten to social studies, seventeen to arithmetic, and eleven to science. Even for nonacademic subjects, seven pages are devoted to music and ten to art. There is no doubt that this is a radical departure in an educational system in Japan that has traditionally been regarded as subject to strong central control.

As you see in the quote above, content related to environment or environmental problems can be taught within the Period of Integrated Learning. The MOE encourages schools to deepen children’s understanding of the environment and energy issues and develop their respect for the
environment, and also to encourage them to develop wills and abilities to voluntarily act to preserve the environment and make it better. Schools are expected to place great emphasis on problem-solving and hands-on learning approaches. Each school needs to enhance environmental education in the Period of Integrated Learning as well as in related classes (such as Life Environmental Studies, established in 1989 as described above) in consideration of the actual situation of the region (MOE 1998a, 1998b, 2005).

In contrast to the optimistic expectations of the Period of Integrated Learning, there are also critical views of it. Especially since many media reports have begun to accelerate the public’s fear of a general decline in students’ academic standards, the Period of Integrated Learning, which is representative of the recent successive educational reforms under the slogan of “yutori kyoiku” (education with latitude) have become a focus of criticism. Even commentators and scholars who used to appreciate the establishment of this new subject have become critical, changing their perspectives and blaming the introduction of a more relaxed education policy for the declining academic standards. I am not intending to judge the value of the Period of Integrated Learning and increasing criticism for this new subject, but it is noteworthy that every educational reform has influenced teachers’ and students’ school life. In contrast to people who are appreciating the establishment of this new subject, there are many teachers who are bewildered by the successive educational reforms (see Akada 2002, 2003, 2005, 2006; Okazaki 2002, 2005, 2006).

4.2 Five-day school week

A major school reform of the 1990’s that has had apparent and direct influence on elementary schools was the move towards a five-day school week, to replace the 5½-day week standard up to 1992. Until then, it was only natural for people that children were going to school every Saturday. Indeed, the introduction of a five-day school week was not envisaged in the 1989 course of study. The proposal was just mentioned in passing by the Rinkyōshin, according to Cave (2001). According to Fujita (1997), a major motive of this change was the desire to align Japanese business and lifestyle with those of leading industrialized Western countries. It was to counter criticisms that Japanese trade competition was unfair because its working hours were too long. Cave (2001) points out, “the policy was given educational rationalization by the argument that giving children more free time would allow freer, experiential, exploratory learning to take place outside school” (2001:180 based on MOE 1996:66). This emphasis on making more free time for children is also detected in the foundation of the establishment of new subjects “Life Environmental Studies” and “The Period of Integrated Learning” as mentioned above.
Consequently, one Saturday a month became a regular day’s holiday from 1992, and it increased to two Saturdays in 1995. Finally, the full five-day school week started in 2002.

Officially, the purpose of the initiation of the full five-day school week was to liberate children from time constraints and mental pressure. However, this introduction of the full five-day school week has become a focus of criticism from multiple perspectives. For example, some critiques have attributed the reason of the reduction of the number of the major four subjects (arithmetic, Japanese, science, and social studies) to the introduction of this new system. Other critiques have argued that this system necessarily widens the gap between the number of classes conducted in public schools and those conducted in private schools. According to those critiques, this trend can strengthen the influence of the parents’ economic status on children’s education. Although not true for elementary schools, as of 2003, 40% of Japanese private high schools have not adopted the full five-day school week, and private high schools are providing almost twice as many English classes and 1.6 times as many math classes as public high schools (Iwata et al. 2003). With an increase in the number of classes that cram schools are conducting on Saturday, it is said that the introduction of this system strengthens the impacts of the market economy on education.

4.3 History of the education about the environment

4.3.1 Origin of Japanese environmental education: between the 1960’s and the late 1970’s

Traditionally, environmental education in Japan was not recognized as a discrete element in the national curricula but was covered under other subjects such as social studies and science (Barrett et al. 2000). Environmental education originated from anti-pollution education and education for nature preservation during the period of high economic growth initiated in the late 1950’s (Fujioka 1998; Fukushima 1993; Yamamoto 1998 etc.). I am going to focus on anti-pollution education in this paper.

In the processes involved in Japan’s development as a capitalistic nation, the Ashio Copper Mine Mineral Pollution Incident has occurred (Ashiodôzan Kôdokou-jiken) in the Meiji era (1868-1912). This was one of the first pollution incidents (Kougai mondai) to claim public attention. What raised the Japanese public’s awareness of the environmental pollution was the so-called “Four major pollution related disease (Yondai Kougai-byô),” or Minamata Disease; Itai-itai disease; Niigata Minamata Disease; and Yokkaichi Asthma which ran on in the 1960’s, or nearly

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14 A cram school is an extra curricular private school that aims at training the students to meet particular goals. In most cases, the main goal is to prepare them for high school or university entrance exams.
half a century later the Ashio Copper Mine pollution. Because of the diversity in the causative agents and in disease activity and damage, it is not so simple to define what kougai (pollution) is. At that time, there were a large variety of types of pollution erupting around the country, but their condition and background were all different.

Nevertheless, they shared something in common. Every pollution-related disease that was generated during the post-war modernization prioritized economic reconstruction (Funahashi 2001, Hasegawa 2001, Shoji & Miyamoto 1964). As Hasegawa (1993) points out, such economic growth-centered strategies for modernization included the successive Comprehensive National Development Plan (1962-1968). The First Plan (1962) was aimed at decentralization of industry. Efforts were made to develop regional hubs, by organically relating them to and promoting interaction with the existing production mass in Tokyo and other metropolitan areas, with a new transportation and communication network. The Second Plan formulated in 1969 was aimed at promoting large-scale projects by developing transportation networks including the Shinkansen (bullet train) and expressways, to mitigate the uneven use of land and solve problems such as overpopulation, depopulation, and regional disparities. That is to say, the government was attempting to clear away obstacles in order to ensure sustainable economic growth.

Yet, not surprisingly, growth-centered modernization led to a tremendous increase in pollutant emissions, and the natural and social environment surrounding around the country was dramatically altered and destroyed (Honda 1992). In the shadow of the flourishing economy, people’s health and lives were jeopardized, and their everyday lives were changed. Because they happened to live in a community with pollution, victims were forced to live with painful diseases as well as suffer under severe handicaps in such areas as school attendance, employment, matrimonial union, and social participation. With indignation towards the government-initiated modernization that forced them into being the weak and unhealthy of society, these victims began to wage a crusade against pollution. They were energetically involved in learning, research, and surveillance activities in order to uncover the deceptions and contradiction embedded in government-led modernization, to transform the pervasive assumptions that were reinforcing modernization, and to establish a new view of modernization reflecting the common people’s will. These learning, research, and surveillance activities gave information about pollution and environmental problems. Therefore, education about environmental pollution was originally “a crusade against the Japan’s economic growth-centered modernization trajectory from the viewpoint of ‘pollution victims’” (Takahashi 1998:163).

It was around 1970 that the government officially decided to give priority to public health and lifestyle issues because of mounting public dissatisfaction at the unwillingness of the national
government to take proper action on pollution issues. The combination of rising public opposition and the success of the pollution trails prompted a flurry of activity on the part of the government resulting in a range of measures such as the Basic Law for Environmental Pollution Control, a special pollution session of the national diet, 14 pollution bills, and the Environment Agency. Certainly, such a social trend affected educational circles, and teachers gradually started to talk to students about environmental pollution at school. The term, *kougai* (pollution) first appeared in the course of study established in 1968 and the textbooks that were reedited based on this course of study.

It should not be overlooked that the education about the environmental pollution that was incorporated into the school curriculum was essentially different from that used as a part of the crusade. This became clear in a discussion about the descriptions of environmental pollution in the course of study and textbooks during the special pollution session of the National Diet. In an argument about a social studies textbook of the fifth grade of elementary school, which was made based on the *Course of Study* published in 1968, Ms. Doi insisted that this text should be abolished because of the following sentence in the textbook: “We cannot enforce strict control over environmental pollution because we cannot break down factories at the expense of preventing environmental pollution.” Responding to her argument, Mr. Sakata, a Minister of Education at that time, mentioned that “contents of the Course of Study could not be easily altered … but, if your words are correct, we will revise it.” Mr. Miyachi, a primary education superintendent, also made the following comment:

> There is such a sentence as Ms. Doi pointed out, but the textbook also states that Japanese people have to put forth effort to the prevention of pollution hand in hand because Japan is still underdeveloped in terms of its industrial location plan and city planning projects. The quote seems to defend firms, but it is not exactly wrong to site the opinion because there are actually people arguing that some environmental pollution should be endured to protect firms. (Asahi Shinbun, December 6, 1970 quoted in Fukushima 1993:76)

This comment reflected the government’s perspective on this issue. At that time, schools were assuming a critical role to promote economic development. Because of the increasing pollution victims and large protests against the environmental problems, the government of that time was forced to incorporate education about pollution into the school curriculum. However,

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15 Ms. Doi’s and Mr. Sakata’s statements are quoted from the online database of National Diet Minutes (http://kokkai.ndl.go.jp/).
the government could not and did not intend to slow down economic development. From the government standpoint, education of pollution carried on by the victims in order to criticize economic development-centered modernization could be viewed as an obstruction to further enhance the growth potential of the Japan’s economy. Therefore, in order to incorporate education about pollution into the school curriculum while promoting economic development, the government insisted that it was not only firms’ and factories’ efforts, but also, and more importantly, individuals’ efforts and collaborations that were necessary to solve such environmental problems. As will be described below, the tendency to regard individuals’ efforts and collaborations as keys to solve environmental problems has been enhanced up to today.

Consequently, the MOE revised the course of study for elementary and junior high schools and social studies textbooks. Nevertheless, there was certainly a huge distance between the officially-permitted education about pollution and anti-pollution education as part of the crusade against the government-led, economic growth-centered modernization trajectory and the government’s view of modernization.

4.3.2 Between the late 1970’s and early 1980’s:
Between the late 1970’s and early 1980’s, some international conferences about environmental problems took place. They originated in the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, or Stockholm Conference, held in 1972, and consisted of such conferences as the Belgrade Workshop (1975) and Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education in Tbilisi (1977).

In contrast, in Japan, the combined impact of the “oil shock” and an economic downturn in the latter half of the 1970’s led to increased criticism of and opposition to pollution controls in business and economic circles, and the government was obliged to modify its stance. The level of public protest had also weakened somewhat, and domestic companies began looking to set up offshore operations, primarily in Asian countries with less stringent pollution controls.

In addition, qualitative change of the conventional environmental pollution had altered the public perception of the problems. In terms of the conventional environmental pollution, there were clear distinctions between victimizers (and causative agents) and victims (Ichikawa 1988:1-2). For example, in the case of Yokkaichi Asthma, where the causative agents were sulfur dioxide in heavy smoke emitted by coal combustion, the victimizer was the petrochemical industries, and the victims were residents of Yokkaichi-city. However, in discussions of new kinds of pollution, the distinction between victimizers and victims became blurred because common people’s lifestyles were seen as the causes of controversial pollution. In other words, it was common
people that were both victimizers and victims. In contrast to the earlier environmental pollution, often called, “Sangyô Kougaï (pollution caused by industrial activity)” (Torigoe 2004:94) or “Kôjô Kougaï (pollution arose from factories)” (Umino 1993:37), the new kind of pollution including air pollution from automobiles exhaust fumes, sewage contamination, and waste problems had come to be called, “Seikatsu Kougaï (pollution caused by lifestyles)” (Umino 1993:37) or “Toshi, Seikatsu-gata Kougaï (pollution embedded in urbanism)” (Funabashi 2001:31).

As pollution caused by lifestyles increasingly gained public attention, it had an impact on the way pollution was treated within educational circles. Indeed, around that time, the term “kankyo” (environment) and “kankyo mondai” (environmental problems) had begun to appear as a substitute for the term “kougaï” (pollution) and “kougaï mondai” (pollution problems). For example, the MOE initiated the fundamental investigation of environmental education curriculum in 1974, and “Zenkoku Shô-Chûgakkô Kougaï-taisaku Kenkyûkai (elementary and junior high school’s society for the study of the measures to prevent pollution)” was renamed to “Zenkoku Shô-Chûgakkô Kankyo Kyoiku Kenkyûkai (elementary and junior high school’s society for the study of the environmental problems)” in 1975. The word “kougaï” highlights the existence of specific individuals or companies who are causing the problems in the environment, and, in turn, the health of victims. To emphasize the importance of identifying the victimizers, “kougaï” was used in anti-pollution movements. According to Miyamoto (2006), by using the term “kankyo mondai” (environmental problems) as a substitute for “kougaï,” the government has attempted to lay the blame on the population instead of attacking certain companies or individuals, which have contributed in economic development at the expense of the environment and public health.

Indeed, by the 1980’s, the influence of the new kind of environmental pollution had appeared in accumulating number of environmental education-related books. Based on his analysis of the environmental education-related publications of that era, Matsumoto (2000) argues that there was a tendency to regard environmental education as a “novelty” by paying little or no attention to the education about pollution. According to him, there were two major viewpoints that tagged education about environmental problems as a “novelty.” People taking the first viewpoint emphasized that there was little or no distinction between victimizers and victims in the case of the new kind of pollution, and stressed the need for teaching children that it might be their own lifestyle that was generating the environmental problems (e.g., Japan Science Society 1982). On the other hand, people taking the second viewpoint hardly referred to the history of the environmental movement in the 1960’s, and were enthusiastic about introducing environmental
educational practices from Western countries (e.g., Kokuritsu Kagaku-kyoiku Kenkyûjo & Kankyo Kyoiku Kenkyûjo 1981).

However, though environmental education-related books had come to be constantly published, those discussions hardly helped the implementation of environmental education at school. Schools needed concrete explanations about how to conduct environmental education within the school curriculum in a way that was appropriate to the school’s cultural and social contexts rather than abstract discussions about environmental problems and information about environmental education practices successfully practiced around the world. While environmental education advocates had energetically translated and introduced goals, objectives, and guiding principles of environmental education cited in The Belgrade Charter (1975) and in The Tbilisi Recommendation (1977), teachers were bewildered. Consequently, most teachers could only talk about environment in a few classes; for example, in the social studies class about the major pollution related diseases.

4.3.3 Between the late 1980’s and early 1990’s

Between the late 1980’s and early 1990’s, environmental problems received greater recognition on an international basis. In 1992, 179 countries participated in the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In this conference, Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (1992) and Agenda 21(1992) were adopted, in which the importance of environmental education was emphasized.

In Japan, the government had been forced to deal with severe domestic environmental problems rooted in mass production, mass consumption, and mass disposal. It was the Environmental Agency (Kankyo-cho, which became Ministry of the Environment, or Kankyo-sho) that instantaneously addressed the problems. It established the Environmental Education Council in 1986, and published the basic guidelines for environmental education, Minnade Kizuku ‘Yoriyoi Kankyo’ wo Motomete (To Establish a “Better Environment” under Combined Effort) (Ministry of the Environment 1988a). In its White Paper (1988b), the Environmental Agency emphasized the importance of environmental education as follows:

In order to address the actual state of the modern environmental problems and to meet diverse needs of people, it is crucial that individuals realize the diverse values of the natural environment, understand the relationship between human activities and the environment, develop a consensus on the importance of the environmental protection through hands-on environmental activities. From this perspective, environmental education takes on a growing significance today. (Ministry of the Environment 1988b, my emphasis)
This statement shows the trend to view individuals’ efforts to alter their lifestyle as the path towards the solution of environmental problems. In the White Paper, causes of environmental problems were attributed to individuals who had hardly recognized the diverse value of the environment, the human-environment relationship, and the importance of the environmental protection. The stance of Environmental Agency on environmental education seemed somewhat over-optimistic because it hardly referred to the fact that people’s lifestyles and customs were reflecting their culture or that their ways of life were more or less molded to the culture of capitalism, and expected environmental education to change their living style. However, it is true that the Environmental Agency directed people’s eyes to environmental education, and gave an impetus to the implementation of environmental education in schools. Indeed, the reports and white papers published by the Environmental Agency were used as the basis of the instructional materials. Moreover, it led local governments to publish the reports and fundamental policies of environmental education, to set up the funds for the environment, and to make guidelines and handbooks to conduct environmental education in schools.

It was in the late 1980’s that the MOE began to emphasize the need for environmental education in schools. In fact, environment-related contents were improved in the course of study for elementary, junior high, and high schools issued in 1988. Also, as described above, “Life Environmental Studies (seikatsuka)” was established in 1992, in which schools was allowed to teach about environmental problems through experiential learning. Some environmental educators appreciated the establishment of this subject. For example, Barrett et al. (2000) states that by establishing the Life Environmental Studies, “environmental education came to focus on fostering the abilities of students to solve environmental problems and to promote attitudes appropriate to responding positively to social change” (93).

In 1991, the MOE issued the guidebook on environmental education, called “Guidance for Environmental Education Teaching” as a reference for junior and high schools. The guidebook for elementary schools was issued in the next year. This guidebook was based on the concept of “The Belgrade Charter” and on the “Tbilisi Recommendation.” As Nogami (1994) points out, it is fair to say that this guidebook reflected the government’s perspective on environmental education. Following the guidebook, a number of environmental education practices have been conducted. Many schools began to make an effort to cultivate a sense of love for nature or the natural environment in the young through a variety of types of experiential learning (Foundation for the Advancement of Juvenile Education in Japan 1995, 1996).
4.3.4 Since the late 1990’s

In the new Course of Study (1998) for elementary and junior high schools, contents related to environmental problems were further improved. Also, as described earlier in this chapter, a new subject, “The Period of Integrated Learning” was established. Since there are no textbooks and no specific guideline for the new subject, every school has been encouraged to design and implement environmental education independently as well as other contents, such as, information, international understanding, and welfare and health based on the children’s interests and the community and school’s characteristics.

This recent emphasis on the school environmental education reflects the ever-increasing call for environmental education, domestically and internationally. It was declared that environmental education should be recognized as an education for sustainable development (ESD) in 1997, and this perspective has become pervasive up to today. Also, in the 2002 Johannesburg Summit, the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014) was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, and environmental education was considered to form an important part of ESD. In Japan, with the backing of international ideas and actions, the Law for Enhancing Motivation on Environmental Conservation and Promoting of Environmental Education was enacted in July 2003. The definition of environmental education in this law is as follows: “Environmental education is education and learning for enhancing the understanding of the conservation of the environment” (Ministry of the Environment 2003). This clearly shows the officially adopted view of environmental education. Based on this definition, local governments have been positively and successively making guidelines and programs to promote the environmental education. For example, Osaka prefecture issued the Guideline for Promoting Environmental Education in March 2005 based on the definition of the environmental education developed in the law.

Whereas the importance of environmental education has been widely recognized, and schools have come to implement various environmental educational practices within new subjects (Life Environmental Studies and the Period of Integrated Learning), many teachers still feel that “what should be conducted as an environmental education is not clear enough” (e.g., Osaka prefecture 2005a). According to Suzuki (2004), who is a past president of Japan Society of Environmental Education, he often faces a barrage of questions about environmental education from teachers, such as: “What is environmental education all about?” and “What should we do at school?” As a response to these teachers’ questions, he generally says, “From nature walks, to surveys of the quality of river water, to field trips for garbage-disposal factories, and town-watching. Please consider all these activities as crucial parts of the environmental education”
(Suzuki 2004:4). Yet, not surprisingly, there are also people criticizing such a view that call any environment-related practices environment educational. Matsumoto (2000) insists, “while it appears that environmental education is widely practiced these days, in many cases, many practices labeled as “environmental education” would have been just a part of science, social studies, or physical education 30 years ago” (220).

4.4 Conclusion of chapter four

The concepts that I explained in this chapter—such as school curriculum, the establishment of the new subjects (Life Environmental Studies and the Period of Integrated Learning), and the introduction of the full five-day school week and the reduction of the number of classes—will help readers understand the status quo of today’s public elementary schools. Some concepts do not directly relate to environmental education. However, I believe that it is crucial to widely comprehend the present situation of schools to discuss the contemporary environmental education because teachers’ and students’ lives are framed in the current sociological situations. By paying attention to only environmental education, many studies have overlooked implicit reasons behind teachers’ decision-making regarding environmental education.

Also, I briefly described the history and the background of environmental education in Japan. I primarily focused on the history of education about pollutions initiated in the 1960’s because, as you will see in the following chapters, a large number of KES teachers were conscious about this history and often explained to me about today’s environmental education in comparison to the education of pollutions conducted in social studies since the 1960’s. Based on the review of the history of environmental education and what the teachers were actually teaching as a part of environmental education conducted in the Period of Integrated Learning, it seems that Japanese environmental education has been depoliticized in the process of incorporation into the school curriculum. In the following chapters, I am going to reveal the obstacles for the implementation of environmental education from the teachers’ perspectives and describe the actual environmental education activities that I closely observed; however, there were virtually no teachers who emphasized the importance of teaching political and sociological aspects of environmental problems.
Chapter 5. Environment and Children

As described in chapter three, the natural environment of Sakai city has been altered and destroyed in the process of economic growth. As an employee of the city environmental agency said, a limited natural area that remained in the southern part of the city has dramatically degraded. This chapter reveals the insider’s perspectives of the child-nature relationship; that is, how my participants, or teachers, parents, and students are viewing their surrounding environment including the remaining natural areas.

Many environmental educators have argued that today’s children are lacking the opportunities to freely play outside and enjoy the natural environment. In his recent book, entitled Last Child in the Woods (2005), after lamenting the fact that today’s children are increasingly disconnected from the natural world, Richard Louv argues, “the loss of natural habitat, or the disconnection from nature even when it is available, has enormous implications for human health and child development” (43). Children’s connection to nature has diminished not only due to the loss of nature in the community. There are a wide variety of number of factors that preventing children from playing outside and enjoy nature.

In this chapter, I am going to focus on both the children’s school life and after-school life. Psychologists have long recognized the importance of play. Play is the leading vehicle for learning in young children; learning happens naturally through play. For children, play and work involve the same actions: interacting with people, manipulating objects, and making discoveries that help make sense of the world. Play is critical for children because it helps their socialization. Play helps children develop rules and understand the purpose of rules. Through play, children learn to make choices and decisions and to solve problems. Physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and language development are imperative for school success, and play is a crucial part of this growth.

Particularly, play in the outdoor environment has positive effects on children’s healthy development. According to Moore et al. (1997), being outdoors in green environments can help maintain the healthy growth of children. Natural settings support children’s unfolding potential in a fluid way so they enjoy every stage of development, including even building knowledge. Cobb (1977) argues that people’s ability to break out of their shells can develop through play in and with nature during childhood. The experience of being sensitive about the status quo of the environment to play naturally fosters the children’s creativity.

Based on this viewpoint that play helps children’s socialization, many environmental educators and policy makers have pointed out that whether children could have experiences of the
natural world has significant impacts on their future behavior and attitudes towards nature. For example, Chawla (1999) states that involvement with nature has positive effects on health, concentration, creative play, and argues that a developing bond with the natural world can form a foundation for environmental stewardship. Recently, in the Guideline for Promoting Environmental Education (2005a), Osaka prefecture emphasized the importance of teaching children a pro-environmental lifestyle by letting them feel connected with the natural environment because it can become a basis for their growth. According to the guideline, children must be given opportunities to play outside, in places filled with trees, flowers, insects, and small animals. In order to explore the perception of the environment that today’s children are learning in their everyday lives, recent studies of the relationship between play and child’s development exemplifies the significance of paying attention to what kind of play today’s children are able to enjoy both in and outside of school.

5.1 Increasing cases targeted at children, parent’s sense of anxiety, and market

There is a strong relationship between how children spend after-school hours and their parent’s sense of values, perspectives of their children, and view of society. The following statement by Nakayama-kun’s show that parents’ feelings of anxiety about their children have recently limited their children’s time spent freely playing outside.

I have hardly played outside after school because my mom has repeatedly warned me these days. She doesn’t feel real safe if I’m going outdoors. She is always saying, ‘It gets dark so early these days, and a suspicious man may be skulking around the neighborhood.’ You know? I just can’t freely play outside. I really want to practice baseball everyday. That is no fun to me! (My Field note, 1206)

Nakayama-kun, a fourth grade boy, had approached me without uttering a word, and then, he murmured why he was disappointed. Baseball is his favorite sport. He was a member of a local boy’s baseball team, and was frequently talking about baseball-related things to his friend. Thus, it was very frustrating that his family did not allow him to play outside.

Since the end of November, many elementary-school children in Japan were dissuaded from playing outside because adults, or parents and teachers, were quite worried about their children. They were routinely exposed to the information on the successive cases targeted at small children, which were rooted in the murder of a first-grade girl in Hiroshima prefecture on December 23. In a weekly morning assembly on December 28, the KES principal, Kawabuchi-sensei, made a speech to the students with carefully chosen words:
Last week, a girl about the same age as you was kidnapped on the way home from school. I do not want to believe that good boys and girls like you were getting involved in crimes, but it has unfortunately happened as you might hear from your parents. I have two children. Both are much elder than you. However, I am always wishing for them to return home safe and sound. I have also heard that a boy was smashed in his belly on his way home a few days ago in Sakai city. Thus, please directly go back home with your friends in a group after school. Do you always have an emergency bell with you? Check that the bell works well later at home. (My Field note, November 28)

The successive TV programs, newspaper reports, and journal articles of the cases targeted at children had given cause for people, especially parents of small children, to become more nervous about ensuring the safety of their children. For example, partly due to the influence of public opinions, a major newspaper, Asahi Shinbun, featured *Kodomo wo mamoru* (Save the Children) and argued over the way to save the children from various perspectives, almost everyday.

To meet parent’s growing demands for the means and tools to protect their children, a wide variety of companies have developed new products such as child-friendly handsets. NTT DoCoMo, the leading mobile communications company serving more than 50 million customers, established the Kid’s Advisory Board of people with expertise in children’s issues to advise the company on the development of products and services beneficial to children. A handset, which is sold with the catch-phrase that “*Kodomo wo mamoru ‘anshin’ keitai*” (‘Reassuring’ cell phone to save the children), has an alarm of about 100 decibels that children can quickly switch on in the case of emergency, and the parents who are signed up for “*imadoko* (literally means, “where are you now?”) search” can also set their phones to receive an automatic e-mail of the child’s location when the child’s handset is switched off (NTT DoCoMo 2005, see more detail, NTT Docomo website). Another huge mobile company, au, has also designed and sold similar child-friendly handsets, called “Junior Keitai, with a catch phrase, “*Kawaii ko ni wa Navi wo Motasero* (Let your dear child have a handset with Navi, or navigation system).” (this catch-phrase has been broadcast on TV as of June 2006, see more detail, au by KDDI website). These advertisements are neatly designed, and seemingly having strengthened parents’ apprehension.

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16 According to the Internet survey conducted by NTT and Mitsubishi Research Institute in January 2006, 11.2% of schoolchildren in the lower grades (between first and third grades) and 21.1% of those in the higher grades (between fourth and sixth grades) have their own cell phones (Nikkei BP Net March 27, 2006). In spite of that, I did not notice that they were so pervasive in KES, it is certain that the market of the products for the safety of children has been dramatically growing.
As a matter of course, the growing media coverage of the cases targeted at small children have sowed anxiety about their own children’s safety in the minds of parents. In the society founded on the basic principle of self-responsibility, the sense of anxiety about children tends to lead parents to think that they are responsible for protecting their children. It is no doubt that the advertisements of the new products have a strong appeal to parents who are wondering how to protect their children. As if reinforcing the parent’s sense of anxiety and responsibility, many books and magazines on how to protect children are published and displayed at bookstores. As parents become aware of new products developed to secure the safety of children, they tend to feel that they should buy them in order to show that they are trying to protect their own children.

It is noteworthy that the parents themselves are not necessarily directly observing cases targeting at children to have such concerns about the children. They know such cases only based on the reports broadcast on TV news and special features and the newspaper articles. In other words, their sense of anxiety about the children and responsibility to protect them is constructed under the influence of culture and society. As argued since the 1920’s in the debates regarding the increasing influence of media on people’s perceptions of the world (such as, Lippman 1987, Balazs 1986, and Benjamin 1999), the way to understand what is going on is dialogically constructed. People’s understanding of “fact” does not either firmly exist outside of their minds or purely generated from their minds. Instead, people construct their own perspectives based on what they are actually looking at, the information and knowledge that they already had, and their beliefs and sense of values. As history suggests, even the concept of childhood is a very new concept, and did not exist until the 19th and 20th centuries (e.g., Ariés 1980). If accepting that people’s perspectives are socially and culturally constructed, it seems plausible to say that today’s parent’s sense of anxiety is also at least partly constructed by the neatly designed and managed information that they got from the media. Moreover, how to act based on such information, or the way to protect the children in this case, is also defined under the influence of the parents’ own values and perceptions of reality.

What is important is the fact that once their sense of anxiety about their own children’s safety and the sense of responsibility to protect them against violent criminals and murders are ingrained in their mind, those can become a part of their sense of values and judgment standards that necessarily affect the understanding of other aspects of the children’s life. Indeed, the parents’ sense of anxiety about the children had a strong impact on how their children spent after-school hours. The cell phones were not very popular in KES. However, it was true that the ways children play after school were influenced by the parents’ values and views of society around the
children. Furthermore, as you will see below, parents’ understanding of the distance between their children and the natural environment was culturally, socially, and historically constructed.

5.2 Children after school: obstacles for playing outside

From the very beginning of my internship at KES, the quietness of the after-school schoolyard had hung over my head. Both before the first class in the morning and between classes, I observed a number of students lively playing and pleasantly chatting in the same schoolyard. No sooner was a class finished than boys and girls ran to their own water bottle in a box on their locker located at the rear of the classroom, and gulped a mouthful of water or tea; then, soon after putting the water bottle back, they burst out of the classroom. With a ball in hand, some boys attempted to acquire a dodge ball court, which the boys of other classes also vie for (there are only four courts). When the boys of the same class successfully acquire the dodge ball court, some girls enjoy playing dodge ball together.17 Doubtlessly, there were also children who were not so interested in dodge ball. Such boys and girls were enjoying playing various games, such as, tag and hide-and-seek while others were gathering around a tall oak tree. Although climbing the tree was prohibited because of its danger, they enjoyed using jump ropes and walking on tall stilts around that oak tree. Still others were hunting insects and gathering beautiful flowers in the schoolyard and around a small pond, named “Nohohon Ike,” which was built up in the backyard in 2003, by KES teachers and the sixth grade students of the year as a part of environmental educational activities in the Period of Integrated Learning.18 It is a popular environmental educational activity to ensure the place where the organisms of a region can live and thrive over the long term; for example, a pond, small forest, marsh, and bush.19

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17 Dodge ball was one of the most popular sports among the KES boys and girls. During my internship, I was often asked to play dodge ball with them between classes. I was frequently appreciated by the KES teachers for playing with the children. One woman teacher said to me, “I don’t have enough time to play and sweat together with the children, but I really want to. It is very important to closely look at the children’s play in order to acknowledge what they are currently thinking and feeling.”

18 When reading a draft of this paper, my wife, a teacher of KES, laughingly told me, “Officially speaking, children cannot play by the pond between classes to keep them from danger.” Whether they can make the best use of the places and facilities that are constructed in order to provide the children the opportunities to play outside is ultimately dependent on whether they can allocate the teachers or other staffs to keep their eyes on the children while playing there. If the school cannot do so, such places and facilities, or Nohohon Ike in this situation, are easily turning into the place the children cannot play because they are dangerous. While being willing to give the place to enjoy seeing the small insects inhabiting in the pond and plants around there, the teachers couldn’t help but be concerned about the children’s safety and tell them not to play there. Undoubtedly, there is a clear disjuncture between ideal and reality in the teacher’s minds.

19 This activity is called “Biotope creation activity,” which originated in Germany. The word,
According to the teacher who was taking the initiative in establishing the pond, teachers decided to make the pond for the purpose of providing the students opportunities to have contact with nature. She expressed her belief that in order to teach the students about the importance of eco-friendly behavior, it is crucial for them to have real experiences of looking at the beauty of flowers and of enjoying the relationship with small insects and small fish in and around the pond. According to her, the teachers constructing the pond with the students were attempting to broaden the horizon of the students, and to interest them in not only insects, small fish, and flowers around the pond, but also those in the community.

Observing the children playing in the schoolyard even if the mercury reached more than 33 degrees Celsius, or about 90 degrees Fahrenheit, and often being involved in it, I recognized that today’s children love to play with balls or other play equipment. For example, they love using the monkey bars, swings, and horizontal bars, hunting insects, and gathering flowers in and around the schoolyard. On September 12, while I was preparing to enjoy a dodge ball game with the Asano-sensei class students, the school principal Kawabuchi-sensei approached me and said:

> It is so hot today. It has been a hot summer, hasn’t it? I heard that the mercury would rise to over 33 degrees [Celsius] today. However, isn’t it amazing that KES children are playing outside in this heat everyday? They are full of energy. Urban children may not go outside when in the midsummer heat, but children of this school are playing dripping with sweat during every recess time. (My Field note, September 12)

It did not seem that the size of the schoolyard was large enough for the more about 830 KES students. The “Nohohon Ike” was also very small for them, but medaka, or small killfish, and other small pond animals like freshwater snail were very attractive to the children. The children were trying to enjoy playing with their friends in the limited area. Asano-sensei mentioned:

> I do not think that KES students are feeling dissatisfied with the status quo, rather they seem to be content with it. I think that even though they have only a limited area, children exercise their ingenuity to play. … Often I see children scrambling for the space to play, and some are giving up playing

“biotope,” is a combination of the Greek words bios, for biology, and topos, meaning place. The Ecosystem Conservation Society Japan (2000) has regarded the creation of biotope as an excellent educational activity to teach children about the mechanisms and significance of the natural environment. This society’s tribute to the biotope creation activities does not end here. According to the society, this activity will contribute to creating people who have the correct knowledge of nature, transcendent judgment, and the ability to take action to protect the natural environment.
there. Yet, it is the spatial limitations of their play area that teach the children about the importance of ingenuity. (My Field note, November 8)

Partly as a response to the parents’ opinions that today’s children are unskilled at playing with others and making friends, KES provided an opportunity, called “Tatewari katsudo,” about twice a month for students to play with both same- and different-age children, either inside or outside of the school building. In the morning of “Tatewari katsudo” day, students played for almost 20-30 minutes before the first class. Soon after hearing an announcement calling for the opening of the period of “Tatewari katsudo,” each student went to the place, where he/she had been previously told by a teacher and played with the assigned playmates. One day, I heard the teachers frankly chorusing, “We didn’t need such a special opportunity to play with friends when we were kids. It was usual to play with someone of a different age group behind our parents’ back” (My Field note, November 14). For those teachers, it seemed strange that children were raucously playing with previously assigned friends under the teacher’s supervision. However, to prevent children from having troubles, teachers think they must keep their eyes on the children.

For the same reason, KES did not open the schoolyard for children after school with a few exceptions. If children were injured or encountered a problem while playing on the school property, almost all the responsibility for the problem would be placed on the school. The school principal Kawabuchi-sensei expressed his honest feeling:

I understand that some people are calling for the school to open the schoolyard up to public so that children can freely play there after school. In addition, I would like to do so. However, it may bring about a possibility that children playing in the schoolyard sustain serious injuries while nobody keeps an eye on them. To supervise them after school, teachers must undertake an additional assignment despite that they are already so busy that they cannot complete all pressing tasks during working hours. Thus, to my regret, practically speaking, it is difficult to open the schoolyard up to the children after school. (My Field note, November 4)

Indeed, in the debates on the successive crimes involving children occurring at the end of November and December broadcasted in TV programs, commentators were seemingly attempting to uncover where the responsibility lies. Such debates over the focus of the responsibility seemed a blame game. Parents said, “when one got involved in a crime on the way home from school, it should be the school’s responsibility because the child had not reached home yet …,” and schools responded to the parents that they were attempting to keep the children from danger, but it was very difficult to monitor all students’ movement all day long, or between when they left home in the morning and when they arrived home after school. As Kawabuchi-sensei put it:
Kawabuchi-sensei: Once finding out some problem happened at school, media tend to exaggerate it. Moreover, the public is waiting for and interested in theatrical reports. Based on such theatrical reports, it has been required for each school to deploy sufficient safety measures, including making an “Safety map” (Anzen map) and providing anticrime training. Parents call for the information regarding a dangerous area around the school; that is, they want a map indicating where suspicious individuals have often appeared or will likely appear and where many car accidents have occurred. However, from the school’s perspective, it is not so simple. It is not impossible to point out potentially dangerous places. Yet, making them known to the public, or tagging certain places as dangerous areas, can cause a conflict between inhabitants. To point out where incidents and crimes may occur can mean tagging people having been living in the place as people in the dangerous area.

Sugai: I see.

Kawabuchi-sensei: From the school’s point of view, it is necessary to develop strategies for the possible incidents and crimes in collaboration with all residents. Recently, schools have received requests for monitoring students all the way home. I heard that some schools are required by parents to take students, who do not have someone waiting to meet them, home. Such parents argue, “It must be the school’s responsibility to get children home!” This kind of call has been pervasive since the murder of the first grade girl occurred in Hiroshima prefecture. … Yet, a large number of parents in this school district are very helpful, and actively engage in measures for safety. … They have a sense that they must ensure the school in their community from danger. I truly appreciate that. Today, we should stop shifting the responsibility to each other. Instead, we should consider that both have a responsibility to prevent children from troubles, and cooperatively explore an improvement of the safety of this area. (My Field note, December 16)

As long as schools are forced to assume full responsibility for children’s safety, schools cannot open the schoolyard to children who do not have enough play areas and parks in the community even though they love to play outside. Indeed, during December, teachers were pulled into the patrols of the school district almost every day to protect the children from suspicious individuals. In addition, since parents have become more vociferous in their demands for security measures, KES was forced to create a safety map receiving the assistance from all households by December.

5.3 Distance between children and the natural environment

As previously described, the community development has physically decreased empty spaces where small children used to play. Consequently, today’s children have a limited space to play in. In contrast to the Asano-sensei’s perspective that they enjoyed playing in the provided spaces sounded correct, Matsumoto-sensei, a middle-aged male teacher said to me,
Play area for children is too limited today! It is not only because they cannot use the schoolyard after school. Do you know there is an open space near the school? It is actually a private property, but it must be seen as a playground from children’s perspectives. A couple of days ago, some children were playing baseball in that open area in the neighborhood. Then, someone watching the children playing called the teachers’ room and complained about it. He said, ‘Why isn’t the school keeping an eye on them?!’ He is right. They should not intrude into a private property. However, someone owns almost all open areas. Thus, even if children found a relatively large open space, it would be completely separated from a street and children’s world by an iron fence. They do not have any spaces to play in their neighborhood. While emphasizing the importance of experiences of nature in the environmental education, even enough playgrounds for children are not assured. What do you think? When I was a child, Osaka was full of a rich natural environment. I would play with my friends at a river, around a pond, and in a field. We children used to learn what nature is and how to play with the natural environment while actually playing in nature spontaneously. Today, we do not see such places around here. It may cause a change in the children’s perspectives on the natural environment… (My Field note, November 24)

The widely shared experience that children got out of the house as soon as they got back home, and never returned home until it got dark has become hard to find. If anything, elder teachers were worried that play areas for the children of today had become much smaller than before, when they were children. Katori-san, a mother of a fourth grade boy, expressed her perception on the shrinking play area for children:

Katori-san: To my regret, I cannot let my son, Genta, play outside without anxiety because the cases involving children have been increasing and a great number of cars are running on the street. I would love to give them have an experience of the natural environment. Children today are immediately blamed if they get muddy. Nevertheless, I want to have Genta play in a mess. He will not be able to do that in the future, or when he gets into a junior high school. It is only now that he can play with mud. Yet, I cannot allow them to play at ease. If I have a free time, I will take him and his friends to some large open space. There is a green space, called Harumi Park, across the main street, but I want a similar green space in this neighborhood.

Sugai: Do you think the environment of the community has changed? Could you describe when and how changes occurred?

Katori-san: Yes. First, the natural environment in this area has dramatically decreased. I know the change well because I graduated from KES too. When I was a child, there were many rice paddies, but no high buildings and not as many houses at that time. I, with my friends, used to scoop many kinds of insects, such as pond-snail, in the rice paddy with an umbrella. We often found locusts on a tree in a temple, and hunted them. We did not get back
home until it was completely dark outside. I think that the smell of the atmosphere of those days was different from that of today. I think that people had peace of mind more than today, thus we were freely playing. When finding beetles on a tree in someone’s house with the door open, we intruded and hunted the beetles. In retrospect, people knew what we were doing, but they let us play as we wanted, as long as it was not dangerous. Today, children unfortunately cannot play in such a manner. Oh, I want to provide more opportunities to the children to enjoy playing with nature. (My Field note, December 16)

Both Matsumoto-sensei and Katori-san provided an important insight into what has detached children from playing in the natural environment, such as, green open spaces, forests, ponds, and rice paddies. It is true that the children’s experience of playing outside has decreased due to the radical development of the community; however, what has also accelerated is the tendency to prevent children from playing outside because of triggers such as increasing crimes targeted at small children and a growing number of automobiles and motorcycles on the streets. Ironically, while having a desire to let children play outside and have contact with nature, parents cannot do so due to concerns about their children. Tamada-san’s (a mother of a fourth grade boy) words reflect the fact that she, as a mother, was worrying about how to ensure a safe place for Kouki-kun (her son) to play freely.

It is the case involving children that I am worried about the most. Therefore, I have recently attempted to pick up Kouki at school as much as possible. I have been obliged to talk to Kouki that he should play at home, but not play far away. We have a small yard at home, and a small park nearby. I can keep an eye on him while he is playing in the park, which allows him to play there with his friends. Yet, I have persuaded him to come back home at 5:30, when it is getting dark outside, even though his friends are playing until 6:00 or 6:30. When I saw Kouki playing with his friends at home and heard their conversations, his friends said, ‘OK. Where should we go next? We cannot play at Kouki’s house any more because it’s already five.’ While looking at that, I was wondering about Kouki’s feeling. He might feel frustrated. The successive cases involving children have been broadcasted everyday, and I have suspected that it can happen to Kouki. What if anything bad happens to him? (My Field note, December 16)

While willing to let her son play outside as much as he wanted, Tamada-san also could not help worrying about him. She told me that it was painful to make her son understand why he was not able to play outside with his friends until late even though his friends were allowed to. During conversations with parents, I found that each parent disliked embarrassing their children because
they could not enjoy what others were able to do. Those parents wanted to let their children experience whatever other children could experience as much as possible.

Another reason for preventing children from freely playing outside derived from the parents’ understanding that today’s children ultimately lacked experiences of playing outside beyond eye range, especially in the natural environment (such as in the mountains and by the rivers). Thus, children cannot determine the danger in such situations. Miura-san, a mother of a fourth grade girl, mentioned:

Miura-san: I was raised in the country. When I grew up, a person was just naturally outdoors all the time. No matter which direction we went, we were outdoors. We were in a plowed field, or woods, or streams. Therefore, everyday, I was playing in the mountains and by the rivers. In retrospect, what I was doing with my friends was often dangerous, and I cannot allow my daughter to do the same thing today. However, we did not have a sense of caution.

Sugai: Do you prevent your daughter from going such places even if she wants, rather, allow her to go?

Miura-san: Well… Yes, I think so. She will not be able to avoid risks because of lack of experiences. I think that the experience of being acquainted with nature cultivates a sense of caution. Though it is perhaps not their own faults, today’s children have not experienced nature, and they will not know what they should do if they get in a tight spot. It is also applicable to my daughter. Therefore, I cannot let my daughter play anywhere she wants. For this reason, I am willing to go camping with the family as occasion arises, but we have rarely brought it into action in reality. (My Field note, December 15)

All three mothers clarified that it was not only the shrinking play area, but also their sense of anxiety about their children and distrust of the social environment surrounding their children that has forced them to say no to their children’s wish to play outside. Consequently, the parents considered that they needed to keep their eyes on the children while they were playing outside. This tendency has much to do with today’s children’s experiences of nature. The sense of anxiety about their children and belief that the social environment is not friendly to the children make the parents feel that they, as parents, have to give their own time if they want to give their children the opportunities to play in nature. Thus, in conversations, parents tended to tell me about how often they had taken their children to the mountains, the memories of family camping trips, and the most enjoyable day of swimming in the ocean and playing on the beach with family. For the same reason, parents who had to work even during long holidays like summer vacation, felt responsible for their children’s experiences in nature. Katori-san said:
Katori-san: Because both my husband and I have only a few breaks during Genta’s [her son’s] summer vacation, we cannot leave Genta pleasant memories of family outings at all. Since the beginning of this year, my husband and I finally decided to allow him to become a member of a baseball team of this community. He was delightedly saying after the summer vacation, ‘Doing baseball everyday has made my summer vacation wonderful!’ It is because I was not able to spare our time, or my husband’s and my time for him, and had tended to entrust his grand parents to his care. During that time, I had not been able to do family camping at all. Certainly, he was saying that he wanted to go, but my husband and I could not take time to do so.

Sugai: Has he said that he would like to go?

Katori-san: Yes. Yes. Genta said that to us. I have often heard, ‘Why don’t we go barbecue?’ or ‘I want to go camping!’ However, unfortunately my husband’s and my schedules are too tight to allow us to do it. So, we have always said sorry to him. Yet, according to him, his baseball club provides members opportunities to go camping and enjoy barbeques. (My Field note, December 16)

The idea that parents are required to devote their time to let their children be in close contact with nature was ubiquitous among parents and teachers. In their eyes, the local natural environments, such as green open spaces, insects, flowers, and trees in the parks, were not seen as “nature.” Instead, “nature” consists of mountains, rivers, and camping areas, which were distant from their ordinary lives and they had to devote their time and money to visit with their family. Small open spaces in the community were usually separated from the children’s world by an iron fence. The children were taught not to enter such open spaces because those spaces belonged to someone else. Interestingly, although my participants used the word “shizen” (nature) to refer to the natural environments that are far removed from their everyday lives, when talking about the child-nature relationships, the same people used the same word “shizen” to explain the small animals, insects, flowers and trees in their community.

The change in what my participants imagined from the word “shizen” certainly reflected the fact that the natural environment in the community has been destroyed and diminished. However, it seemed that there was another background factor behind the tendency to believe that nature rarely existed in the community. From my perspective, Ohnuki-sensei’s words below seem to give insight into the tendency to view the natural environment as something distant from their ordinary lives. In the following statement, Ohnuki-sensei raised a question about the kind of perspective of nature that was pervasive among teachers and parents:

We need a clear definition of the word ‘nature.’ For example, many parents enjoy camping with their children during summer vacation in today’s society. They may experience various activities, including making a camp, sleeping
under canvas, gathering and chatting with family members around the campfire. I have wondered whether such experiences are ‘natural’. However, they usually use a car for transportation. While setting up a camp and preparing meals in the mountain, people tend to feel as if they are at home with nature and the environment even though they use electricity, water from the faucet, and a pre-established block-oven for cooking. If these outdoor activities can be counted as experiences of nature, today’s children have such experiences in spite of the people’s misgiving that today’s children lack experiences of nature. Can we view this kind of natural environment, including camping sites, as equivalent to the real nature that we don’t usually see and feel today?

It is applicable not only to the camp in the mountains, but also to going swimming in the sea. On a beach, there are a number of facilities, including shower booths, restaurants (uminoie), changing rooms, and bathrooms. Do you think that it is really the ‘natural environment’? When going to a park to play, children are often getting absorbed in collecting insects and plants. However, when you get right down to it, such insects and plants are artificially managed. We provide students an opportunity to collect insects and gather plants as a part of the school curriculum, but are the well-maintained school environment regarded as a ‘nature’? (My Field note, November 21)

Ohnuki-sensei was not comfortable with the opinion that parents must put considerable effort and time into letting the children play in the natural environment (such as in the mountains and by the river) if they hope to open children’s eyes to nature. He recognized the value of camping and family trips, and he told me that he actually enjoyed family trips with his daughters. However, he was critical of the perspective that camping and family travel is the only way to give children the experiences of nature. He was aware that such perspective can cause some parents to feel that their children have somewhat good experiences in the natural environment by enjoying family camping or family trips while some are forced to be unsatisfied with the current situation because they do not have time to do such activities. Here the children’s experiences of nature become dependent on the parents’ socioeconomic status. Based on his fundamental viewpoint that if we narrow nature to only that which is outside of modern civilization, no one would ever get there, Ohnuki-sensei considers that the parents who cannot spend time and money for camping or ecological tours do not need to feel discontent with their situation. In his perspective, it is more important to be aware of the fact that today’s children actually like insects and flowers that are doubtlessly parts of nature, and enjoy collecting popular insects and gathering beautiful plants not only when they are playing with their friends after school, but also during classes such as Science, Life Environmental Studies, and the Period of Integrated Learning. If children can still find some aspects of the natural environment in their lives, the parents will be able to have the experience of feeling nature and finding beauty in it with their children in their ordinary lives.
Ohnuki-sensei added that the common way of seeing the natural environment as something distant from their ordinary lives is constructed under the influence of a number of fancy environmental catchphrases often appeared in newspapers and TV programs. Indeed, there are worldwide websites, such as “Souda, shizen ni kaerô!” (Let’s get back to nature), which was a title of a TV program (see the TV-Asahi’s website), and “There is a business protecting the earth,” which was a subtitle of the popular TV program “Gaia no yoake” (Dawn of the Gaia) broadcasted on May 30, 2006 (see the TV-Tokyo’s website). Moreover, many large travel agencies like H.I.S. have provided a variety of eco-tour packages, and huge automobile companies including TOYOTA have been continuously emphasizing care for the natural environment. The advertisements of these companies, which were created to show that they were conscious of the gravity of environmental problems, have also affected the parents’ perspective on the environment and perception of what they can do for their children. As of June 24, 2006, Eco-Tour.JP, which is a portal site providing information on the keywords, “environment” and “nature,” to the people who want to get involved in some environmental activities, cited more than 243 eco-tours for families with children (see the website of Eco-Tour.JP).

The idea that today’s children have less experience in the natural environment than before because of the lack of natural environment is widely accepted because various media has diffused such information. Commentators and specialists have persuasively announced the severity of environmental problems by using many kinds of statistical data. Thus, parents tend to regard family camping or ecological tours as the only means to let their children experience nature. When parents’ give their children the experiences of nature, it leads to the promotion of consumption for children. Since people have already accepted the discourse that children cannot experience the natural environment in their everyday lives as a fact, the discourse of consumption to make children feel the relationship with nature sounds morally right. However, it is noteworthy if consumption—for example, buying automobile supplies and camping equipment to go camping—contributes to maintaining this environmentally harmful social structure, even the consumptive activities aimed at giving children experiences of nature can be destructive in terms of environmental sustainability.

5.4 What children are doing after school

It is only children registered with an After-school Care Program, called Nobinobi Room, and paying a membership fee, that can play in the schoolyard after school, and those who were not registered with the program are not allowed to enter the schoolyard. The program was organized by Sakai city to care for the children whose parents and guardians are away from home and
unable to take care of them when school is over. In order to let their sons or daughters enter the Nobinobi Room, parents need to pay about 10,000 yen a month.\textsuperscript{20} The instructors take care of children, who are registered with the program, playing in the schoolyard from after-school to 6:30 p.m. on school days (and from 9:00 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. on the days when the school is closed).

Thus, children in the lower grades who were given priority to be registered in the program were in the schoolyard even after school, but the higher graders were not observed there, and were usually in the local small parks. In other words a limited number of children were able to play outside as in the old days. What was different from before was that those children, especially the children in lower grades, were usually playing under the supervision of some adults. Also, today’s children are very busy after-school because of their enrichment lessons and after-school cram programs. Even small children often glanced at their watch while playing with their friends.

It might be an overinterpretation, but a decision to use the program to ensure the place where their children can play seems to represent the idea that people obtain comfortable environments by paying a price for it. Then, through the experiences of purchasing the desirable environment, people have come to assume that the hope to live conveniently and comfortably can be realized by paying a reasonable price. As discussed below, the family’s socioeconomic background has a big influence on what children are doing and how they are playing after school today. Children require the economic support from their parents to play soccer and baseball, to study with friends at a cram school, to play videogames, and to read comics. The children who take lessons in piano or ballet are sometimes asked to perform in a recital, and parents are required to pay a lot of money for the dress and shoes each time. Some mothers murmured: “Raising children is very expensive today. I think everything just costs too much.”

5.4.1 Enrichment lessons and play

To my question about their after-school lives, children answered that they were taking up some form of enrichment lessons, or naraigoto (e.g., piano, swimming and calligraphy, or shuji), and after-school cram programs. Because of this, most children could not play from after-school until after-dark, but until they started their classes or between them.

In Asano-sensei’s class, out of 31 children, 29 (93.5%) were taking some sort of enrichment lessons or cram school classes. Enrichment lessons can be classified into two categories; art/music-related lessons (e.g., shuji, piano, and ballet) and sports-related (e.g., soccer, baseball,

\textsuperscript{20} 10,000 Japanese yen (JPY) is approx $84.5 based on the monthly average rate in December 2005 ($1=118.368 JPY) (X-rates http://www.x-rates.com/).
mini-basketball, and Boy Scouts). Still many were attending the cram schools. Usually, cram schools are depicted as factory-like schools that try to cram as much knowledge into children as possible. Those children of the Asano-sensei’s class called this kind of cram school “juku.” However, most of them were not going to juku; instead, they were going to the “Kumon,” which is aimed at reviewing and helping children understand what has already gone on in class according to the children. This kind of cram school, or Kumon, stands in sharp contrast to the former type of the cram schools, or juku, which exist in many large cities or regional capitals. In contrast to highly structured exam-prep courses of juku, the atmosphere of the cram school of the latter kind is relaxed, and students can freely talk with the instructor and each other (see also, the ethnography written by Fukuzawa & LeTendre 2001).

Most children had enrichment or cram school lessons in two or more places, more than once a week. The children managing their own schedule based on the time-line of the enrichment or cram school lessons were something akin to business people. Children attending cram schools were 17 or 54% of the Asano-sensei’s class; and, more children were going to some form of enrichment lessons. Twenty-one children were learning some sort of sports activities; 14 boys out of 18 (approx 77.7%) and seven girls out of 13 (approx 53.8%) were going to the sports clubs more than once a week. Nine children were going to the sports club once a week, and the remaining (12 children, or approx 34.2 %) were attending practice more than twice per week. Among them, three children had practices four days a week. These numbers show the fact that the today’s parents of children around age ten hope to educate their sons/daughters through sports activities.

The data explicitly bears out what an environmental architect, Senda, argues in his book, entitled Kodomo to Asobi (Children and Play) (1992)—Today, sports, including baseball, and group activities, which children used to freely play with their friends in an open area after school, have been considered as activities that only people who belong to a certain club can enjoy. Indeed, during my internship, I never observed children playing what I used to play outside, including street baseball.4) “Each and every sport is seen as an enrichment lessons today” (Senda 1992). Sports itself may not be viewed as an experience of nature for the children, but children at least have to get out of their house when they play sports with their friends. However, according to Minami (1995) and Oh and Minami (1998, 1999, 2000), the scenery and experiences that people are accustomed to through their childhood play become a part of their deep psyche, and continuously influence their aesthetic feeling and sense of values throughout their life. If it is true, since it takes the children outside, sports has some influence on the formation of their perceptions of their environment, and can affect their future attitudes towards nature.
I am not intending to argue that today’s children cannot play with their friends after school unless they get involved in certain sports schools. Indeed, I looked at some children playing in a park as I wrote. However, such children’s words—for example, “Because I have to go juku at 5:00, I cannot play after that” and “For the swimming club which starts from 5:30, I have to go back home in 30 minutes”—showed the fact that their after-school schedules were tightly managed. Although children who were not going to either enrichment lessons or cram schools seemed free, they also could not promise their friends to play because playmates were often too busy to play. Consequently, in order to play some sports, such as baseball and soccer, they needed to get involved in a sports club.

In contrast to the increasing scenes in which the children were learning the official rules under the coach’s supervision and enthusiastically practicing a lot to improve his/her skills with teammates in a specialized sports club, the scenes in which children do all kinds of things to play with limited number of friends in limited play areas have become rare. Today, to supplement a lack of friends to play with, children tend to get involved in certain sports clubs with the economic help of parents rather than putting their heads together. Not surprisingly, to play sports as a member of a sports clubs, they need to have uniforms, shoes, and other equipment. If the team is strong, and arranged a residential training during long holidays like summer vacation, the parents need to pay for that. While I do not attempt to conclude that it is applicable to all cases, it is hardly possible to make an outright denial of the trend that whether the child can freely enjoy playing sports with friends until after dark depends on the parental economic support and their sense of values. In fact, Nakayama-kun who was one of the foremost boy’s baseball team members and had dreamed about being in the starting lineup in junior and senior high schools, came close to me like everyday, and proudly said, “My mother at last bought me a bat that I have long wanted. That cost more than 20,000 yen!”

His friends surrounding him were staggered by Nakayama-kun’s words, and chorused, “How did you get such an expensive bat?” This interaction between the children clearly reflects the fact that in order to play baseball as a member of certain baseball team, a child is required to have economic support from his or her parents.

When I interviewed Katori-san about her perception of today’s society regarding children’s play, she explained how she and her husband had reached the decision to let her son, Genta-kun, belong to a boy’s baseball team:

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21 20,000 Japanese yen (JPY) is approx $170 based on the monthly average rate in December 2005 ($1 118.368 JPY) (X-rates http://www.x-rates.com/).
Katori-san: I feel that today’s children, including Genta, are more or less boisterous and disorderly.

Sugai: In what situations do you especially feel so?

Katori-san: For example, while playing a video game at home, Genta often yells, “Damn!” and takes out his anger on the controller in his hand. Especially when playing some cruel looking games, in which he eliminates the enemy without a break, shouting, “Die!” as if nothing happened. When coming across such a situation, I yell at him quite often for his foul language. I argue, “Don’t spit out such swearwords like ‘Die’ or ‘Fuck you!’” I’m afraid that he uses such swearwords to his friends or other people around him. Seemingly, he sometimes mixes up fantasy and reality. I thus strongly hope that he will become able to clearly distinguish things that happen in the game world, or fantasy, and those that happen in the real world. … I feel that there is a link between the increasing people who cannot distinguish fantasy from the real world, and become unable to control themselves, and the contemporary wave of crimes. While telling him not to spit out curse words and try to control himself, I consider that he understands what I’m saying. However, once getting back to playing the game, he immediately gets into the game world. Partly because the games today are so realistic, as soon as sitting in front of the TV, he stares at the monitor with an intent and sharp look. I’m not sure about what I can do for him as a parent, but I’m trying to control his selection of the game software and his time spent on playing games. Recently, my husband and I decided to let him join a baseball team. It was partly because we wanted to turn his attention to something other than video games.

Sugai: Did you or your husband first suggest for him to join the baseball team?

Katori-san: No. No. Genta has called for our permission to enter the baseball team for about two years… But, you know what? Parents of a boy’s baseball team have many things to do. We’re both working, so we have said no to him and let him give up. However, we’ve at last decided to meet Genta’s wish and he has played baseball for almost six months. We didn’t explain this to him, but a reason for our permission was to pull him away from the video games. “Shocked” does not even begin to describe how I felt when I saw Genta yelling, “Die!” and “Fuck!” As soon as I encountered the scene, I turned off the TV. Genta was complainingly saying, “It’s not only me using such words. My friends are usually saying swear words!” (My Field note, December 16)

From the children’s perspective, video games are a convenient plaything to make better use of their time segmented by various enrichment lessons and cram schools. Indeed, a boy of Tanaka-sensei’s class (fourth grade) told me, “While playing the video games, I can keep an eye on the clock and quit playing when I have to go to cram school. Because the video games have a memory function, I can continue where I left off at night” (My Field note, October 21). Such video games have been developed dramatically. As Katori-san points out, the storyline is so complex, and graphics are very clear. Every scene displayed on the TV monitor is realistic, and not so different from that of movies. Moreover, video games are designed to make players believe
that they are creating the story by themselves; thus, the players tend to ardently devote themselves to playing them.

According to Katori-san, when wondering whether they would allow Genta-kun to belong to the baseball team, she and her husband often heard their son earnestly saying, “Most of my friends, who are enthusiastic about baseball have already been on the boy’s baseball team and play together.” A number of children indeed told me that they were going to enrichment lessons because many friends are going there. Today, not only going to enrichment lessons, but also even cram schools are considered as a means to be with friends after school (see, Fukuzawa and LeTendre 2001:30).

Tamada-san had told me why she decided to let her son, Kouki-kun, become a Boy Scout.

Sugai: Could you describe what you want your son to learn or experience while he is an elementary school student?

Tamada-san: Well… I am always expecting Kouki to show good manners and respect and to make pleasant greetings. Recently, people, both adults and children, have tended to neglect them. However, I do not like it. I sometimes say to Kouki, ‘even if you are able to study well, you are still far from the whole person unless you learn and show good manners.’ More often than I say it to him, he was learning it in Boy Scout training.

Sugai: He is Boy Scout, isn’t he? Can you tell me a trigger for his becoming a Boy Scout?

Tamada-san: First, his elder brother became a Boy Scout. When I was worried that he was not good at making friends, and tended to give a wide berth to the communications loop at school, a mother of his classmates told me about the Boy Scouts. Then, since looking at his brother getting involved in the Boy Scout training, Kouki spontaneously became a Boy Scout later.

Sugai: What kinds of activities and trainings do Boy Scouts do?

Tamada-san: For instance, the elder brother has recently gone camping for four days. In the camping site, there are no bathroom and water. He had to boil water drawn from the river and use it as water for drinking and for washing. In addition, Boy Scouts are instructed to take all of the garbage, including leftover meals, home with them. They never peel fruits and vegetables. Even water used for washing rice is used for washing the dishes after a meal. Through Boy Scouts, my sons are gaining many valuable experiences.

Sugai: Do you have something to do as a parent in order to support your sons’ activities?

Tamada-san: Actually, I am currently taking on the responsibility of leader… You know what? In the Boy Scouts, parents have to be a leader. Nobody works full time as a special instructor for Boy Scouts. Thus, parents, especially leaders, have many things to learn to conduct some activities. I
heard that there is nothing to do as a parent when the elder brother became a Boy Scout, but …

Sugai: Do children involved in such activities seem to be having fun?

Tamada-san: Certainly. Yet, the Boy Scout activities are considered training. For example, we are so strict about time. Nobody can be slacking off or goofing off. Our camp is not as same as a family camp. Thus, I think that some may have a bitter experience every time. Yet, that is why they learn many things from challenges. Today’s children can get tons of information from TV programs. There is both good quality and harmful information. Thus, I am trying to control what my sons watch on TV. I prefer that they learn various things from Boy Scout camps rather than being exposed to a utilitarian and consumerist way of thinking that unfolds on TV programs. (My Field note, December 16)

Tamada-san regarded Boy Scout activities as an instructional tool providing her son a number of meaningful experiences—such as, the practice of getting involved in communication loops and making friends, the experience of feeling the importance of good manners and greetings, and the nowadays-rare experiences of staying in nature. She also considered that by actively being engaged in the Boy Scout activities and continuously turning their attention to them, she could successfully prevent them from being exposed to harmful information on TV. In a similar way, Katori-san sees a boy’s baseball team as a tool to prevent Genta-kun from being too enthusiastic about video games.

The recent successive crimes targeted at children were also giving a motivation to parents to let their children go to enrichment lessons/cram schools. In order to allow their children to freely and safely play with their friends after school, parents decided to have their children spend their time under the supervision of adults, such as instructors and coaches.

Yet, from the parents’ perspective, letting children go to enrichment schools/cram schools was not only a means to ensure the children’s safety. Miura-san explained why she decided to let her daughter go to an enrichment school. “I certainly want to keep a close eye on my daughter and always listen to what she is talking about on the one hand. But, on the other hand, I want to have some private time to enjoy my life.” That is, letting children go to enrichment schools/cram schools to ensure their safety also functioned as a way to let parents have their own private time. No mothers explicitly referred to a gender component during the interviews, but it would especially be mothers who would gain free time if their children were busy after school hours. In the interview, Miura-san never complained that she would not like to be engaged in child rearing or her husband was leaving her in complete charge of educating her daughter. However, it was clear that she was attempting to balance motherhood with what she wanted to do as an individual woman.
While it might be applicable in all ages, today’s parents are considering how they can provide an environment in which their children are able to play safely with their friends. In order to ensure their children’s safety, what parents can do is to invest their time and money. In the former case, for example, parents would go with their children and play together. They would protect their children from danger by keeping their eyes on children’s play, and if dimly foreseeing that their children would be involved in a trouble, they would prevent it from occurring. In the latter case, parents would ensure a safe play area for their children’s in return for money. As Tamada-san pointed out, by letting Kouki-kun join some activities, parents would get extra work to do. Katori-san told me that since Genta-kun joined the boy’s baseball team, she had attended with him and watched his baseball game almost every Sunday. These mothers were spending money and time to enable their sons to play safely. In other words, Kouki-kun and Genta-kun were able to play safely in the shadow of their parents. Consequently, because they do not have opportunities to play beyond the parents’ or other adults’ eyes, they do not become familiar with how to play with friends outside or what they should do if they get in a tight spot while playing in nature, as Miura-san said.

The close relationship between the quality of education of children and the family’s socioeconomic status including their cultural background has been pointed out and recognized. In addition, the conversation with parents revealed that the children’s plays—where they play, whom they play with, and what they play—were also determined by their family background, including socioeconomic status and cultural background. In order to buy sports equipments for their children, let them go to a game, and allow them to join a sports training camp, parents have to spend a certain amount of money. The idea that parents fulfill their children’s hope—such as, “I want to play baseball with friends” and “I want to play soccer with many friends”—by letting them join a certain sports team in the community can be accepted by parents who are ready to spend time and money for their children’s daily activity. However, it might not necessarily be acceptable to the parents who did not feel comfortable letting them join a certain sports team for some reasons, including economic reasons. Thus, the hopes of children are more restricted in these families.

Parents’ socioeconomic situation has a strong impact on the way children spend after-school hours. Whether studying with friends at a cram school or playing sports as a member of a certain sports club, children need their parents’ economic support. Parents even have to pay a membership fee each month for their children to be able to play in the schoolyard. It seems plausible to say that children are either directly or indirectly learning that, in order to obtain the environment that enables people to do what they want, they need to pay a price for it through
everyday after-school activities. Then, while assuming culturally accepted norms, children gradually become members of the capitalist society that is harmful to the natural environment. Today, children are playing in the safe environment under the supervision of adults (e.g., teachers, parents, coaches, and volunteer Boy Scout leaders), with playthings, which are selected and purchased by parents, with friends, who had only limited free time because of their enrichment lessons/cram schools. It was epitomized in the video games and trading card games surrounding today’s children as you see below, in the last part of this chapter.

5.4.2 Video games and trading card games

Video games were one of the most popular topics in the children’s conversations. Because I have witnessed the history of the expansion of video games in my life, it was not unexpected that video games have become a part of the children’s life; nevertheless, I was surprised at their prevalence and the children’s perspectives of them as I heard their casual conversations. Typical conversation was something like this. A boy proudly said, “I pre-ordered a new game software that will be released soon!” The other boy responded in excitement, “Wow! Really? You’ve just bought the game of Dragonball Z recently, haven’t you? I bought that game too. That’s so fun! I woke up at five this morning and played it while my mom was sleeping.” The first boy responded, “Oh, did you buy that game? I liked that too. I’ve already played that game a lot, and mastered it.” In addition, another boy happened to hear the word “the game of Dragonball Z” joined the conversation and said, “Have you guys mastered the new technique? … Tell me how to do that and when we can play that together!” (My Field note, September 30)

I did not conduct any survey research on the prevalence rate of video games in KES or all fourth grade students as a whole, but from the casual conversations, it became apparent that almost all the Asano-sensei’s class students had more than one kind of video game consoles. It was only one boy and three girls that did not have any video game consoles. It was the reason why I often encountered students’ talking about video games during my internship. Despite the fact that boys play and talk of it more than girls, girls were also participating in the conversation at times. According to their conversation, it was clear that they could hardly feel satisfaction with only one video game console. A number of students were proudly listing what kinds of video game consoles they had when I asked about it. One said, “I had PlayStation2 and Game Cube, at home, and portable video game consoles, DS [Nintendo DS] and PSP [PlayStation Portable]. My younger brother also has his own DS.” It is no surprise that they had multiple video games for each video game console. One day, Higashi-kun, who was one of the biggest holders of video games in the Asano-sensei’s class, delightfully told me, “Last night, I found more than twenty
video games that have long been missing.” I asked him whether he had been looking for those
games, and he answered in his usual way, “No. Not really….” I was more or less bewildered by
his reaction. Children’s and their parents’ attitudes could differ among families. Yet, his reaction
seemed to show that losing something was not a big deal for today’s children because a number
of substitutes surrounded them, and they were hardly compelled to look for them. (My Field note,
September 30)

Trading card games are also very popular among children. To play the trading card game,
they need a specially designed set of cards. Elementary school children, mostly boys, are crazy
about “Yu-Gi-Oh! Trading Card Game,” “Duel Masters Trading Card Game,” and “Mushi King
Card Game” today. These cards are designed based on the Japanese comics. Although I could not
directly see it, a first-grade teacher told me that there is a card game targeted at small girls. It is
called “Osharemajo Love and Berry” (meaning Fashion Witches Love and Berry) and was
launched in October 2004 by Sega, which is the same company that created the “Mushi King
Cards.” At the start of the game, players receive an “Oshare Mahou (Fashion Magic) Card”
containing a picture of a fashion item, such as a dress or a pair of shoes. Next, they choose
between two characters: Love, who adores cute clothing, and Berry, who prefers a cool style of
dress. Players then scan their “Oshare Mahou Cards” into the game machine and dress their
characters up in their favorite styles. After making their characters look just right, the players tap
buttons in time with the sound of a tambourine to make their character dance; the winner is the
one who can make their character look and dance best. Perhaps because this game has just been
brought to the market, it was not popular among the fourth grade girls. From the fourth grade
girls’ perspective, “Oshare Mahou Cards” might be seen as toys for the first or second graders. It
could be embarrassing for them to play the cards.

One day, during lunchtime, I was involved in the boys’ conversation about the trading card
game. They were telling each other how many cards they have collected so far. One said, “I have
collected countless cards already.” Then, another said, “Well… I can’t tell the exact number…
But, I should have more than a hundred.” Another boy put, “I don’t know exactly either. But, I
think I have more than two hundred.” All five or six boys involved in the conversation
successively said larger number than others. While listening to the others, the boy who told
people that he has a hundred cards had become dissatisfied with the number he said, and restated,
“Actually, I have a hundred ‘Yu-Gi-Oh! Trading Card’ and two hundred ‘Mushi King Card.’”
(My Field note, September 30) Since his word gave a motivation to others’ desires to win, it
seemed that the conversation finally became a game of exaggeration.
Boys had a serious passion for collecting the cards. According to them, there were three main ways to get the cards, which is one, by purchasing the trading cards with their monthly allowance. Second, is by asking their parents to buy them when they go shopping together. Third, is by making an exchange with their friends collecting the same kind of trading card. An exceptional way is to get them from an (elder) brother as a free gift.

After observing their heated conversation, I asked them, “If you had 3,000 yen in your hand, what would you do?” Then, one answered that he would put all 3,000 yen on “Mushi King Cards,” another said that he would spend a half for “Mushi King Cards” and the rest for “Yu-Gi-Oh! Trading Cards.” Unlike the video games, girls hardly got involved in the conversation of the trading card game; instead, they were giving the boys a cold glance. A girl said, “I don’t understand why the boys can get so serious about only card games…” In fact, to the same question about the way of using the money, a girl answered that she wants to buy a book, and the other three girls chorused, “I would save the money for future use” (My Field note, September 30)

Passion for collecting trading cards has shown in two boys’ (Taguchi-kun and Okazaki-kun) one-minute speeches made in a Japanese class on October 17. In the Asano-sensei’s class, about five students made one-minute speeches before the first class in the morning or during Japanese class almost everyday. Students could freely decide the contents of the speeches; thus, some talked about what they did over the past weekend and some talked about what they ate last night. Asano-sensei regarded one-minute speech as a practice of speaking in front of people; she hardly referred to the contents of the speeches students made. Instead, she often gave advice on the techniques, such as the volume of the voice and the speed of the speech.

When the two boys made speeches, two other boys and two girls had already finished their speeches. The first boy talked about a soccer game, and the second boy talked about a burglar breaking into the next-door neighbor’s house. The first girl introduced her elder brother playing baseball, and the other girl told classmates about an experience of grape picking. Then, the last two speakers were Taguchi-kun and Okazaki-kun. Although independently writing drafts, both happened to talk about the same topic, or about what they thought before when they went for trading cards.

Taguchi-kun’s speech:
September 12, I went to Furuhon-Ichiba with Okazaki-kun. While I bought “Duel Masters Trading Cards,” Okazaki-kun bought “Yu-Gi-Oh! Trading Cards.” Because I found a rare card in a package, I was so excited. Okazaki-kun also got a rare card. I was very happy then.
Okazaki-kun’s speech:

Taguchi-kun and I went for trading cards on September 12. He bought two packages, and I bought five packages. Taguchi-kun got a rare card. Despite that I bought five packages, I also got one rare card. I wasted 1000 yen. It was very frustrating.

(My Field note, October 17)

As these speeches show, it is the collection per se that is one of many things children enjoy. Children sorted out their own trading cards in a variety of ways; such as, whether it was a beautiful card or not, whether it was a strong card or not, and whether it was a “rare” card (“kira” card in Okazaki-kun’s term) or not. In the case of “Yu-Gi-Oh! Trading Card Game,” there are different official levels of rareness. A “rare” card, the name of which is printed in silver foil, can be found in almost every pack. According to children, there are some “super rare” card, which have a holographic foil background, “ultra rare” cards, whose name are printed in gold foil and have a holographic foil background, and still other rare cards. It is no doubt that the rarity of cards affects their value substantially. By this means, boys are spontaneously learning to have or develop an obsession for obtaining something with rarity value.

As they talked, mood changes in Taguchi-kun and Okazaki-kun were honest and explicit. While looking at Taguchi-kun’s packages, Okazaki-kun opened his own packages with a sense of tension. He was not so happy even though he found a “kira” card in his packages because Taguchi-kun also got a “kira” card out of fewer packages. His honest expression of his impatience accurately represented children’s emotions at the mercy of the trading card market.

What Taguchi-kun and Okazaki-kun felt when they bought the packages of the trading cards drew little attention from Asano-sensei. At that time, what Asano-sensei was interested in and actually praised was that both Taguchi-kun and Okazaki-kun could make speeches in a loud voice at comfortably low speeds. While she praised the technical aspect of their speeches, the two boys understood that their speeches were highly valued as a whole. Their shy and contented smiles seemed to indicate that they learned that the mood changes and their desire for rare things were acceptable in their cultural context.

Even in the sunshine, I often observed boys playing trading card games and video games. One day in October, I found that four or five fourth-grade boys were gathered on the street in

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22 On a auction website, or “Yahoo! Auctions,” some cards are priced at more than 50,000 (approx. $422) yen, and I found someone trying to sell a card for 120,000 yen (approx. $1,014) as of June 22, 2006 (Yahoo! Auctions’ website).
front someone’s house. They were relatively quiet, and kept looking down the ground. Wondering what they were doing, I approached them, and soon figured out that most of them were playing the trading card game. Two boys were sitting on the ground surrounded by other boys. While the two boys were playing the game, some were talking over the game, and some were taking a quick look at someone’s A4 card albums of the trading cards. A few children had their own albums for their collection, and others had some bundles of their own trading cards tied up with a rubber band (each bundle was about five centimeters, or about two inches, thick). If one found a card that he wants in someone’s bundle, he asked the owner to exchange it for different cards in his own bundle. When successfully getting the card in the exchange, he got a big smile on his face. On the other hand, the one who was asked to exchange his card for other cards also seemed satisfied because he, or his cards, could win praise from his friend. There were also a few boys who were hardly interested in the two boys’ game, and kept playing Nintendo DS quietly. Only when getting into some trouble during the game, did wear a frown on their face and groan.

Through the observation, it became apparent that such exchanges of the trading cards were usually conducted between boys collecting the same kind of trading cards. In order to find a friend who possibly had a card that he wanted, one usually questioned in the beginning of the conversation, “What kind of the trading cards are you collecting?” Then, when being able to find an appealing bundle or album, he asked the person to show it to him. This exemplified that today’s children’s play were highly dependent on what they possess, or material goods. If one was collecting “Mushi King Cards” while others were collecting “Yu-Gi-Oh! Trading Cards,” he must feel isolated and could not join the seemingly amusing, exuberant conversation that other friends were enjoying in front of him.

Material goods surrounding children, including video games and the trading card games, had a defining influence on their play—that is, what they play with whom, and when. In other words, video games and trading cards were taking a role as a channel to enjoy playing with friends. Other than video games and trading card games, favorite manga and TV programs were also fulfilling a similar function. Children sharing the same favorite manga or TV programs were often gathered and having lively conversations all over the classroom. It is also applicable to the adult society that people having a taste in common can more smoothly establish a close relationship to each other. However, children hardly, if not ever, have many hobbies that they have had for many years; thus, their belongings are very important tools in making friends. Here, it is noteworthy that their belongings are what their parents had bought for the children although of course parents have to compromise too. That is to say, their play was more or less dependent on their parents’ senses of values and family background, including its socioeconomic status.
It does not mean that today’s children cannot enjoy talking and playing with their classmates or friends. During sharing time at school, they have come to have interests in common. Also, they can join conversations in which friends were talking about favorite TV programs or manga. Yet, it is also certain that children who do not have video games and trading card games at home tend to feel loneliness while others were talking about them. When children were asking for such video games and trading cards from their parents or grandparents, they were often expressing their desire to join the friends’ conversations.

It seemed that parents know that by purchasing what their children want, parents cannot only provide what the children play, but also where they play and whom they can play with. Thus, parents have bought many video games and trading cards for their children or allowed the children to purchase what they want with their allowance even though they hardly felt inclined to do so. One mother told me that while hearing from her son, “I want that because my friends have that already,” she had come to feel sorry for him and decided to buy what he wants. If it was impossible to buy it for economic reasons, it is much simpler to explain why she did not feel inclined to buy it for him; however, that was not the case. Thus, she consequently bought such items on special occasions—such as, their birthday, on Christmas, or even when they could get high marks on tests. Yet, in spite of the fact that parents have reached the decision to do their children’s a favor after a great deal of thought, it was not so in the eyes of the children; rather, those children took for granted that they could get what they wanted on special occasions.

Therefore, when children found someone who did not have a video game or the trading cards, they spontaneously asked, “Why don’t you ask your parents to buy it on your birthday?” Indeed, while I was in the field, I was asked sometimes whether I had PlayStation2 or Nintendo DS. Moreover, as soon as they knew that I did not have them, they said, “Why don’t you ask your wife to buy PlayStation2?” (My Field note, December 19)

5.5 Conclusion of chapter five

Today’s children like to play outside. When they had time, such as between classes, they were coming out of school and playing with their friends in the schoolyard. There is a widespread argument that today’s children do not know how to play in nature: however, whether they lack opportunities to play with the nature is dependent on the definition of nature. If nature meant creatures inhabiting in the community, including small insects, fish, flowers, and trees, children had interests in it. Indeed, I often encountered some boys zealously talking with their friends about the insects like beetles and locust that they keep in an insect cage at home with their friends. Some liked to go fishing and happily talked with friends about when they were going to go
fishing next time and what they caught last time. They were familiar with the mode of life of such insects and fish, and often proudly told me about it. Not only boys, but also girls liked small insects. Some girls named their own cricket and devoted their attention to it. It was no doubt that there were children who did not like insects, and could not touch them. Some were unwilling to mess their clothes with mud. However, it is a matter of course that each individual has his/her own tastes. Even small children develop their own tastes in their short life history. It might be true that there were boys and girls who hate to touch insects or to get dirty by playing with mud. On some occasions, I encountered a child who said that s/he did not like to play in the natural environment, but also said that s/he enjoyed playing with insects in the muddy places. According to my close observation of their activities, what they meant by the words, “I don’t want to play with mud,” was that they had not known how interesting playing with mud was.

It is true that the decrease of the natural environment in the community has removed opportunities to play outside for today’s children. In the eyes of the adults, including parents and teachers, nature in the community has been dramatically damaged and diminished. However, it is not necessary to disregard or ignore the fact that today’s children actually have a relationship with the surrounding natural environment. As Asano-sensei sharply pointed out, both boys and girls were actively having a relationship with the given, fractionalized nature around them.

In the analysis of the discourse that children’s contact with nature has been reduced because of the lack of natural environment, I focused on the existence of people and interest groups taking advantage of the diffusion of the discourse. Today, parents tend to think that they have to spend their time and energy to let their son and daughter play in nature, such as mountains and rivers that are far away from their lifestyle. This belief that they have to use much time to enjoy camping and traveling with sons and daughters has increased the number of programs under the name of eco-tourism that are advertised by a wide variety of types of travel vendors. Doubtlessly, the participation in such tours can provide people a good experience of the beauty and wonder of nature. To enjoy relaxing, isolated from crowds and noises of the city, is valuable and precious for today’s busy people. However, such tours require people to spend much time and money. As Ohnuki-sensei aptly pointed out, by narrowly defining environmental experiences as something like eco-tour or camping, parents facing time and economic constraints have forced to feel sorry for their children because they cannot experience nature.

As noted in the beginning of this chapter, parents’ sense of anxiety about their children was strengthened by the successive news regarding criminal cases involving small children. The expanding market targeting the parents, such as the market of cellular phone, was further enhancing the parents’ concerns for the safety of their own children. Parents’ concerns about the
safety of their sons and daughters influenced their perspective of children’s life and play. They were very sensitive about what their sons and daughters were doing after school, and tried to keep the children under the eyes of some adults whom they know. Also, there was a social tendency to lay the responsibility for cases targeted at small children onto schools. Consequently, KES was not opening the schoolyard for the students after school because it did not have sufficient staff to keep an eye on the children playing there. To sum up, the parents’ sense of anxiety about their children’s safety and the public tendency to place the blame for successive cases and criminals involving the small children at the feet of schools ironically and unintentionally have resulted in reducing the play area for the children’s play.

Parents’ sense of anxiety about their own children may not be a completely new psychological state. I presume that what has been altered dependent on the cultural contexts and social situations can be the ways people express their sense of care about their sons and daughters. When hearing the importance of caring about children, some people may draw a mental picture of a mother who is managing her daughter’s entire life as if she protects her precious property, but others may imagine a father who is putting his son through the mill to make him an independent man. In contrast to the widely accepted view of today’s parents as paying less attention to child rearing, the parents who participated in my research were actually very sensitive about their children’s development. Thus, from my perspective, it seems ironic that the parents’ sense of anxiety about the children and their wills to ensure the safety of them leads them to prevent their children from playing in the scarce and valuable play areas.

Video games and trading card games were convenient toys for the children whose time is minutely segmented by the schedule of juku (cram schools) and enrichment lessons. Generally, the children’s tendency to devote their time such video games and trading card games is considered to be a matter of individual children’s preferences. However, there is also a social circumstance that reinforces the tendency to choose to play video games and trading card games with their friends. Children were becoming a kind of people who could not play without those games, which their parents bought for them. Considering that sports and group activities are seen as enrichment lessons, and the children’s wish to play baseball or soccer is granted in a specialized team, it is fair to say that children’s play today is strongly dependent on their parents’ sense of values and family background, including its socioeconomic status. By learning to talk about the given environment as a part of their lives, and the importance of consumptive activities to make their lives more comfortable, today’s children gradually adopt the lifestyle in which consumptive activities are viewed as a way to achieve self-fulfillment and as a means of self-expression (Hirota 2004). In turn, they have become members of the capitalist society (cf.,
Baudrillard 1995), which is highly problematic in the context of environmental problems (see Robbins 2002, Bell 2004).

I am not going to disregard the fact that the natural environment has decreased as the community has developed. In contrast, I am concerned about the degradation of nature and consider that it is one of the most urgent issues to solve in environmental problems. I am strongly opposed to pursuing further economic development based on the personal greed of our generations at the expense of future generations. What must be noted is the fact that by defining the natural environment as something that does not exist in their life and by making the definition of nature ambiguous, teachers are prevented from having a clear picture of what they have to do in environmental education. As discussed in this chapter, whether today’s children have experiences of nature is not a simple question to answer. It should be fair to say that the answer of this question is partly dependent on how to define the concept of nature. If narrowly defining nature as flower, insects, and trees that exist in the children’s lifestyle, today’s children have relations with it, but if broadly defining it as something far removed from their lifestyle, there are gaps between the children who can experience nature and who cannot experience it.

When regarding nature as something mysterious that does not exist in our ordinary lives, the effects and results of environmental educational activities tend to be ambiguous. Teachers may lead children to think of environmental issues as having nothing to do with them. Thus, teachers often consider nature to be animals, flowers, and the landscape of the community when conducting environmental education. However, if nature is defined as just insects, fish, flowers, and trees inhibiting in the school area, children are playing with them regardless of the teachers’ intentions. Therefore, although contents of environmental education of this kind become more specific, teachers cannot clearly see what they teach children in classes regardless of the fact that they spend much time and energy. I will discuss the types of issues that teachers are facing in conducting environmental education at elementary school in the following chapters.
Chapter 6. Images and barriers to environmental education from the teacher’s perspectives

Among the 20 KES teachers who participated in my interview, no one disagreed with the necessity for the implementation of environmental education at elementary school. It seems to reflect the fact that there is a growing awareness of the necessity for environmental education today as many environmental educational scholars have argued. However, it is worthwhile to note that every teacher is visualizing different images of the environmental educational practice when s/he answers that environmental education is important to implement today. And, regardless of their understanding of the importance of environmental education, nineteen mentioned that they had not participated in study sessions occurring in the city hall or in NGOs in order to promote environmental educational activities at schools. The successive interviews with the teachers reveal the diversity and flexibility of the images of environmental education possessed by the teachers.

In this chapter, I will describe the following points: existence of the diverse images of the environmental education in the teachers’ minds; teacher’s perception of environmental education in comparison to other traditional subjects; and the obstacles for the implementation of environmental education. Especially in revealing the obstacles for the implementation of environmental education from the teacher’s perspective, I will refer not only to the teacher’s view of environmental education, but also to the themes that closely relate to the teacher’s everyday lifestyle and even their educational philosophies as a whole. Those points have not been discussed in the discourse of environmental education; yet, as one who actually observed the teacher-student interactions, I think that we should not avoid understanding the teacher’s conventional life and the status quo of the people who are expected to conduct environmental education at a public elementary school.

In addition, in this somewhat long chapter, I am going to clarify the reasons why I spotlight various teacher-students interactions embedded in not only environmental educational activities, but also other contexts, including other classes and the Sports Day in this thesis. By reading this chapter, readers will comprehend some reasons why I am trying to reveal teacher’s and children’s school life through their real voices in the ensuring discussion of environmental education in this thesis.
6.1 Diversity of images of environmental education

The diverse images of environmental education can be divided into three categories;

1. Environmental education to transmit knowledge regarding the environment and environmental problems to children,

2. Environmental education to let the children have a relationship with the surrounding (natural) environment and arouse the children’s interest in the natural environment and environmental problems, and

3. Environmental education to foster people who can logically make decisions about their behavior.

The first image of environmental education, or “environmental education to transmit the knowledge regarding the environment and environmental problems to the children” is represented in the following quotes of teachers: “By nature human beings are living with the natural environment. Thus, it is an essential task for people to keep our environment in good condition. For this reason, people need at least basic knowledge of the environmental issues caused by our lifestyle” (Matsumoto-sensei, My Field note, November 24). “I think that we have to teach the children about the environmental problems. It is an important role of schools to transmit a set of knowledge to the children in an integrated, systematic manner” (Kishida-sensei, My Field note, November 24). “Today, virtually all people should learn the fact that every bit of behavior can cause a serious impact on the earth ecosystem” (Ito-sensei, My Field note, November 29). After making a comment similar to these teachers, Ohnuki-sensei added, “I feel that it is almost our ‘responsibility’ as a teacher to conduct environmental education at school today” (My Field note, November 21).

What the teachers had in common was that after admitting the necessity of environmental education at an elementary school, they expressed that it was not straightforward to teach about the environment or environmental problems to the children. The more important environmental education is, the more they want to conduct it. However, the two points—feasibility of effective environmental education and the importance of such educational activities—are in different spheres. While actually being engaged in environmental education because it seems plausible that today’s children will face more aggravated environmental problems in the future, in contrast to their will, they felt that they were lacking a clear picture of how to teach about environmental problems. Thus, while puzzling about how to realize their will to do environmental education, the
teachers often said: “Though it would be ideal to implement environmental education, I do not clearly know how to implement it.” “Because we actually already have stacks of work, it is hardly possible to act up to all ideals at school.” Inasmuch as they do not have a clear vision of how to conduct environmental education, the calls for the implementation of it at elementary school sound idealistic but hollow to the teachers. I will further explore the gap and discrepancy that exist between what the teachers can teach and what they want to teach by focusing on the obstacles for the implementation of environmental education from the teachers’ perspectives.

The second image is “environmental education to let the children have a relationship with the surrounding (natural) environment and arouse the children’s interest in the natural environment and environmental problems.” Kirishima-sensei’s comment is a good example of this view of environmental education.

We need to conduct environmental education. Today’s children are ordinarily playing video games at home. Where they always go with their family is some kind of beautifully-decorated amusement parks like Disney land or Universal Studio, isn’t it. So, they hardly have a close connection with ‘the natural environment.’ Do you notice that they hardly feel guilty to do littering in the classrooms? They have few experiences to clean up where they are playing everyday. When I took the children in my class to a park to clean up, I notice that some old people living around the park kindly swept and cleaned that place. Thus, without cleaning up the playground by themselves, the children can play in a clean space although I, as a teacher, want them to think, ‘I want to clean up the park because we enjoy playing there.’ … When observing the children changing their attitudes toward the natural environment, I feel the significance of conducting environmental education. For example, the fifth graders have been engaged in rice-cropping activities nearby the school under the guidance of a real farmer. The children had hardly known about rice paddies at all though there are many rice paddies around here. The local farmer, Mizotani-san, kindly taught the children about insects and small animals living in the rice paddies and how to grow the rice. While listening to his instruction and actually growing rice by themselves, the children have gradually realized how precious a single grain is. Recently, they have come not to leave even a single grain on their plate after lunch. We may not be able to feed their mind, which might be a part of love for nature, through only reading textbooks, but through experiential activities. (My Field note, November 10)

After pointing out that the today’s children are lacking a close connection with the natural environment, Kirishima-sensei argued that it was important to provide opportunities for the children to feel the significance of the surrounding nature through environmental education. While telling me about the fifth grader’s rice cropping activities, she was having a satisfied look.
on her face. In her utterance, Kirishima-sensei showed her belief that to feel the connection between their life and natural environment would become a basis of a love for nature. It was not only Kawashima-sensei, but also, some other teachers who said that the today’s children did not feel guilty throwing their garbage in the classroom while talking about the significance of environmental education. For example, Kanazawa-sensei stated:

I grew up in the country, so I love nature, including green trees and beautiful flowers. Thus, based on my experience, it is essential to let the children feel the beauty of the natural environment in terms of environmental education. I have been sensitive to the fact that the children today hardly try to keep their spaces clean. They don’t feel anything when they see the garbage on the floor. Thus, I ask the children to pick up the garbage around their own desk every morning. As a teacher, it should be important to help the children to change their lifestyle and develop a habit of cleaning up their own environment. Clean town, beautiful schools, and organized classrooms are, I believe, essential to cultivate people with a good heart. I believe that it is required to know the beauty of the natural environment to love it. (My Field note, November 29)

Kanazawa-sensei’s interpretation was that the dirtiness of the school and the untidiness of the classroom reflect the state of people’s mind. And, based on this interpretation, she thought that environmental education was valuable if it can contribute to improve such a disorganized children’s environment. She made a natural bridge between environmental education and moral education in her mind.

Kirishima-sensei and Kanazawa-sensei shared the similar experience of enjoying natural environment in their childhoods. Indeed, not only these two teachers, but also other older teachers tended to regard environmental education as a good opportunity for the children to feel close to the natural environment and have an interest in its status quo. Looking back nostalgically at their childhood, when TV games, or even televisions were not pervasive and children were usually playing outside until late in the evening, and comparing a sense of affinity they had toward nature with the distance between today’s children and the natural environment, they often bemoaned that children today lack opportunities to have a close connection to even the natural environment in their community.

The teachers who had this kind of view of environmental education tend to agree with the importance of providing hands-on experience to the students to teach the fact that people cannot survive without connection to the natural environment even though (urban) people today hardly appreciate it. Note that these teachers do not feel satisfied with just letting the children enjoy nature’s beauty and wonders within environmental education. Since they consider that they
should avoid making a class merely a happy hour for the children by letting them play with or in the natural environment, these teachers are always concerned about how to turn playful activities into an educational project. It seemed that the teachers were sometimes hesitant to argue the significance of the childhood experience of the natural environment because the teachers lack tangible evidence of the connection between the childhood experiences of nature and pro-environmental behavior. They know the connection from their own personal experiences, and have been getting the students outdoors based on nostalgia or instinct, without a body of evidence. However, they know the fact that people of their generation who are supposed to have enjoyed nature have been engaged in economic development at the expense of the earth’s ecosystems. Thus, it is clear that experiences of nature do not necessarily lead to environmentally-friendly decision making. In this evidence-based society, their sense of uncertainty about the consistency between the childhood experience of nature and their future pro-environmental behavior prevent the teachers from assuredly saying that the children will be able to live with respect for nature by having experiences of nature through environmental education.

The third image is “environmental education to foster people who can logically make decisions on their behavior and attitudes.” This image of environmental education was presented in the Asano-sensei’s statement. While talking about how she usually conducts environmental education in her class, she told me that she viewed environmental education as only a conduit to accomplish the objectives and targets that would be reached anyway through general educational activities.

In the explanation of the concept of ‘environment,’ I teach the children that everything surrounding us, either visible or invisible and either touchable or untouchable, is an ‘environment.’ Your dilapidated desk and chair, the floor under your foot, and the air you are always breathing, all these things are a part of ‘environment.’ I consider that this is the first phase of the environmental education at elementary school. Then, I go on to the next question, ‘How do you want to treat the environment?’ For example, when I talk about the air, I attempt to let the children consider what they can do to make and keep it in good condition for themselves. I am trying to have the children see a close connection between their lives and the environment, and let them to understand the importance of conscious activities.

However, the children eventually encounter the fact that what they can do is very limited. To clean up the air, using a purifying facility would be required. Thus, I lead them to realize that albeit there is very little they can do to purify the air, they can at least contribute to maintaining its current condition through the selection of things to use and to buy. In this regard, I told the children about the importance of paying attention not only to the price and its physical appearance, but also to its function and performance.
For example, people can select to use bicycle instead of car to not pollute the atmosphere.

I myself am not a kind of ‘eco-people’ who are always taking care not to damage the earth ecosystem. It seems to me that environmental education is important because it is a good opportunity to teach the children about the importance of making informed and logical decisions on their behavior and attitudes. I hardly attach a high priority to transmit a set of knowledge and specific information regarding the environmental problems. I am not going to have them remember what is correct and what is wrong. Thus, from my perspective, a different sort of educational practice can substitute for environmental education so that the children can learn the importance of logical decision-making based on their understanding of the effects and results of their behavior/attitudes.

Don’t you think that today’s children easily believe what they hear and decide what to do depending on the given information without a pondering well over the effect and possible results of their behavior? I would like them to be able to logically explain why they behave in a certain way when they were asked. I consider that they have to be able to rationally make decisions on their behavior rather than have a lot of knowledge regarding environmental problems. … I consider that today’s children are not lacking the experiences of being exposed to the information of environmental problems or the opportunities to play in the natural environment, but the experience of being required to make a logical decision as regards their language and behavior. (My Field note, November 8)

Drawing on her basic perspective of children—that today’s children are hardly able to make a decision based on logical and conscious thoughts—Asano-sensei regarded environmental education as a conduit to teach the children about the significance of the informed and logical reasoning of their own behavior and attitudes. To put it another way, in her perspective, environmental education could be substituted for a different sort of educational practice as long as it can be a chance to teach the importance of logical decision-making. Because environmental problems have come to receive considerable publicity in society, and the contents regarding the problems have been recently increasing in textbooks, Asano-sensei has conducted environmental education. Yet, she does not accept the importance of environmental education as an opportunity to let the students learn about the present state of natural environment or the severity of environmental problems, but she positively brings new meaning to environmental education, which she thinks is more appropriate to the status quo of the children in her class.

The fact that this view of environmental education is derived from the teacher’s perspective of today’s children should be highly emphasized. Both in casual conversation and in the interviews, I often heard from the teachers that today’s children easily believe what they hear and decide what to do depending on their surroundings. I sometimes encountered the teachers struggling with how to deal with children who were keeping quiet and not able to explain the
reasons for their behavior despite that the teachers upbraided them. While talking to them, such children do not even display disobedient behavior toward the teacher. According to the teachers, when they cannot get any reactions from the children, they gradually come to feel guilty for the one-sided argument. Asano-sensei sometimes told me that she wanted the children to show their dissatisfaction if they were not able to understand why they were being scolded because otherwise she could not know what they were thinking. In such cases, according to Asano-sensei, the children actually do not have a specific reason for their behavior; instead, they just did it without any consideration of the consequences because other friends did it. While having such interactions one after the other, the teachers become to feel that it is their responsibility to teach the children about the significance of logical and conscious decision-making. From their perspectives, environmental education can be seen as a good opportunity to teach it.

Every teacher has some visions of what to teach the children in his/her class regardless of whether environmental education is incorporated into the school curriculum. Thus, although the Ministry of Education (MOE) demands that the individual teachers and schools decide the contents and methods to conduct environmental education as a part of the Period of Integrated Learning, once being incorporated into the school curriculum, environmental education is easily altered and becomes a tool to realize what the school and teachers are going to accomplish through everyday school life in contradiction to the MOE’s expectation. In other words, despite the fact that environmental education is ideally aimed at creating environmentally literate people, in practice, teachers might set little, if any at all, store on teaching the details of environmental problems themselves for various reasons; such as, lack of resources and time to conduct effective environmental education and the children’s insufficient knowledge base to understand complex and complicated issues like environmental problems.

It should be noted that each teacher did not have only one of the three images of the environmental education, but had multiple images in their minds. Teachers flexibly change the image of environmental education in their mind depending on the context. Thus, even when one usually emphasized the second image of the environmental educational activities like Kirishima-sensei, it did not mean that she did not have the first and third images. What became clear from the interviews with the teachers is the fact that each teacher constructs the image of environmental education based on his/her experiences, sense of values, perspectives of education, and understanding of the status quo of today’s children. Teacher’s understanding of the meaning and values of environmental education are seemingly constructed regardless of the sophisticated definitions of environmental education that have been developed by environmental education advocates and specialists in the last few decades. In disclosing their images of environmental
environmental education, the teachers spontaneously explained how environmental education could be utilized to achieve the original goals and targets of education in their minds.

It is crucial to keep in mind that this diversity of the image of environmental education is not derived from only the lack of debates on the concept of environmental education among scholars and environmental educational advocates. The ambiguity of the definition of environmental education may contribute in generating the diversity of images of environmental education in the teacher’s minds. However, more importantly, there are practical reasons for the diverse images of environmental education. Every time they face new problems that are related to the students, teachers are required to deal with them based on their senses of value, educational philosophy, and understanding of the students. For example, when they notice that the teaching methods that they used before are not applicable to the students this year, they have to change the way of teaching the students. It is surely applicable to environmental education. In dealing with those kinds of problems, they often need to make some changes to their perspective of education, and generate a somewhat revised view of education (environmental education). Even though the fundamental educational philosophy is not easily completely changed, they continuously create a view of education (environmental education) according to the situation. In other words, on the ground, the individual teacher’s image of environmental education is culturally and socially constructed.

Therefore, although I divided the teacher’s images of environmental education into three categories, this does not cover all views of environmental education in teacher’s minds. What is important to realize is the fact that the teacher’s practices performed at school are governed by logic that outsiders cannot easily see and understand: environmental education practices are governed by their own “structure of structuring” (habitus) and the given situation (see, Bourdieu 2001 [1980]). Teachers are not just relying on the sophisticated concept of environmental education discussed outside of the school to conduct environmental education; instead, they are always and extemporaneously establishing their own view of environmental education.

The argument that the need for environmental education is widely acknowledge by teachers, which is often seen in the books and booklets of environmental education, are not exactly wrong. However, such publications tend to disregard the diversity and ambiguity of the teachers’ views of environmental education. Those books tend to argue that the diversity and ambiguity of the teacher’s view of environmental education is caused by the insufficiency of in-depth debate on the theory of environmental education and the lack of teachers’ understanding of the goals and definitions of environmental education that have been developed up to today. I do not completely deny the validity of these arguments. Nevertheless, considering what I observed and heard in the
field, I cannot but argue that such arguments do not entirely clarify the reason for the diversity and ambiguity of the images of environmental education in the teachers’ minds. It is because they do not understand the insider’s perspective and the logic that is generated and governs the practice of environmental education on the ground. It is noteworthy that although people outside of schools tend to presume that all teachers share a somewhat similar image of environmental education, individual teachers have their own view of environmental education that is constructed by multiplying a wide variety of types of factors, including teacher’s view of education, outlook of society, sense of values, social and cultural expectations toward elementary schools, parent’s view of children and expectations toward teachers, and the relationships among teachers, students, and parents.

In addition, although I have investigated the teacher’s images of environmental education based on interviews with them, those could also be impromptu images. I was certainly attempting to make a comfortable atmosphere to let them speak as much as they wanted. However, the possibility that they were trying to adorn their speech with fancy words should not be completely ignored. At least as far as I actually observed, what the teachers vocalized in cold blood was not put into action everyday because people in general do not always act consciously and intentionally. Instead, their everyday practices are socially, culturally, and historically constructed as described later in this thesis.

6.2 Environmental education and other traditional subjects: teacher’s view

Analysis of the teachers’ perceptions of the relationship between environmental education, which is a part of the Period of Integrated Learning, and other conventional subjects is one of the ways to clarify the fact that the teachers’ perspectives of environmental education is constructed in relation to many factors.

Akiyama-sensei explained her priorities in regards to teaching content to children at school in my interview as follows.

Akiyama-sensei: When there are things that ought to be done like environmental education, people tend to consider that it should be incorporated into the school curriculum; however, we already have priorities at school. We are always snowed under with work. Individual teachers are deciding the priorities based on the children’s status quo all the time.

Sugai: Could you describe how the teachers decide the priority in general?

Akiyama-sensei: We usually define it based on the situations that the children are in now and our own experiences. With many years of experience, teachers have their own style, such as how much homework to give their class
everyday. I don’t say we are always clinging to it, but we don’t want to
change such styles that have been constructed step-by-step. ... Basically, in
terms of the subjects to teach, we generally give high priority to Japanese and
arithmetic because the children doubtlessly need reading and writing skills
and numerical ability in their future, when they will become junior high or
high school students and when they will look for jobs. I do not think that they
need to acquire high ability to read, write, and do arithmetic at school;
however, they need to learn the basics of them. Thus, if someone asks me
whether I prioritize social study, including environment-related contents, and
arithmetic, I will doubtlessly pick out arithmetic. Also within arithmetic,
there is content that should be given precedence over other contents. Thus,
within a subject, there is an order of priority. Moreover, we have to teach how
to use PCs in this information age, and need to offer an opportunity for group
activities because today’s children are not good at establishing a good
relationship with their friends. When sensing the needs of the children in
front of us, we will cover it. Haven’t you seen a teacher changing their plan,
for example, a teacher begins a Japanese class, and then she breaks into it and
spends time and energy to lecture some children in the class due to their bad
behavior? It is a salient feature of classes at elementary school level. Then
after the class, the teacher would regretfully say, ‘Oh, I couldn’t finish what I
had planned before class...’ Elementary school teachers, especially women
teachers, tend to be a ‘mother.’ I don’t mean that we always tend to dote on
them. Yet, if we find a topic that we should urgently talk for the children’s
future, we do so at the risk of the original class schedule. For instance, if
some children get into fight, we don’t hesitate to talk about friendship to them.
In this sense, I doubt that environmental education could be given high
priority. (My Field note, November 16)

According to Akiyama-sensei, teachers have their own style established over the years, a
must-do list and its priority order in the teacher’s mind, which are flexibly altered based on the
children’s status quo. If teachers regard their own style as worthless or problematic based on an
unwanted and unexpected reaction from the children, they can modify or alter it as required to
comply with the children. Indeed, one teacher told me, “We can follow the original class schedule
less than 50%.”

The tendency to prioritize other traditional subjects over environmental education was also
expressed in the following Ohnuki-sensei’s words. Ohnuki-sensei even considered that it was the
teacher’s obligation to conduct environmental education today. However, in the following
statement, he naturally admitted that he was not able to give preference to environmental
education. His statement makes it clear that what are regarded and believed to be important for
the children in the current world takes priority over what an individual teacher personally wants
to teach the children. In other words, regardless of whether one places a high value to
environmental education, he is hardly able to conduct it in accordance with his own personal will.
At an elementary school in Japan, a class teacher has traditionally been responsible to teach most subjects including Japanese, arithmetic, science, social studies, P.E., and others. Then, the Period of Integrated Learning was incorporated in the school curriculum in these years. From my perspective, to invest our time and effort in the preparation for environmental education that is a part of the Period of Integrated Learning can lead to a lack of time to get the other subjects done. If the implementation of environmental education could trigger negative consequences for the smooth practice of the other traditional subjects, we cannot spend a lot of time on environmental education in reality. I certainly consider that it is crucial to conduct environmental education today; yet, I think that we are obliged to teach Japanese and arithmetic as a matter of priority at an elementary school. (My Field note, November 21)

Ohnuki-sensei’s words are seemingly incongruous with the official view of the current environmental education in Japan. The MOE as well as the advocates of school environmental education have been arguing that environmental education, which used to be conducted within science and social studies, has been enhanced by the increase of environment-related contents and the establishment of the Period of Integrated Learning (e.g., Ministry of Education 2004; Barrett et al. 2000; Ecosystem Conservation Society-Japan 2001; Kato & Uozumi 1999). It is true that the environment-related contents have been increasing. As far as I observed, in teaching the following units of textbooks, teachers were either consciously or unconsciously talking about environment-related topics: “Aki to Tomodachi” (Be a Good Friend of Autumn) (first grade, Life Environment Studies); “Yamato River” (fourth grade, social studies); “Living matters and Seasons” (fourth grade, science); “Yama no Okurimono” (gift from/of mountains) (fifth grade, Japanese). According to Ishihara (2005), “Gongitsune,” a traditionally popular reading material, reflects an official view of a desirable relationship between people and the natural environment. However, according to my observation, it is over-optimistic and hasty to conclude that increasing environment-related content in textbooks has provoked teachers’ enthusiasm for environmental education. As argued by many teachers, there is a large gap and discrepancy between what they need to achieve and what they can actually achieve. Some teachers were consciously engaged in environmental education during teaching such environment-related contents included in textbooks of traditional subjects, but it was very rare. Only in the Period of Integrated Learning were they clearly aware of the fact that they were involved in environmental education as reflected in these teacher’s words: “At KES, environmental education has been implemented only within the fourth-grade Integrated Learning;” “Because I’m not currently teaching fourth grade, I hardly talk about things related to the environmental in front of my class;” and “The fourth grade is required to conduct environmental education in the Period of Integrated Learning. In contrast,
we are required to teach other topics. So, we cannot do environmental education with our students.”

6.3 The obstacles for the implementation of environmental education

In reference to the implementation of environmental education at elementary school, the school principal, Kawabuchi-sensei, mentioned the following in my interview.

All teachers are doing their very best everyday. Most teachers will agree to what Hagiwara-sensei mentioned a few days ago, ‘Teacher must give 200% of their energy to call for 100% effort from the children today.’ From the teacher’s perspective, incorporating environmental education into the conventional school curriculum seems to make their ordinary lives busier. In order to conduct environmental education at a public elementary school like KES, support from residents, especially those who are familiar with the eco-friendly lifestyle and who knows about environmental issues, are strongly required. We might need to establish a certain system to do environmental education in effective ways. They almost cannot afford to invest their time and energy to make complete preparations for the environmental educational activities. Supervisory people like us might be required to take the leadership.
(My Field note, October 27)

As the principal pointed out, how much each teacher at school puts his/her time and efforts into the implementation of environmental education is not just a personal problem, but also, and more importantly, a social and cultural problem. If they regard the calls for environmental education in elementary school as somewhat idealistic and even unrealistic, it should be clarified what make them think so in order to identify what kinds of social circumstances would provide the proper context for environmental education to take place from the teacher’s perspective. It also seems crucial to investigate what makes teachers feel powerless to conduct environmental education, and what kinds of obstacles for environmental education exist in the eyes of teachers. The KES teachers pointed out three kinds of obstacles for the implementation of environmental education (1) the lack of resources and time, (2) the complexity of environmental problems, and (3) the fact that the contents of environmental education can be a criticism of the children’s lifestyle, living environment, and the parents’ cultural beliefs.

6.3.1 The lack of resources and time

As already noted in chapter four, there are no government-designated textbooks for the environmental education conducted as a part of the Period of Integrated Learning. Individual schools and teachers have to decide what to teach and how to teach it based on what the children
are currently interested in and depending on the community and school’s characteristics and its cultural and social background. Because they are expected to let the children study about the subject through experiential and hands-on learning activities rather than the conventional teaching strategies such as the lecture method (Amano 2002), teachers need to invest more time and effort to prepare for environmental education than they ordinarily do for other traditional subjects.

According to the KES teachers, effective environmental education has not been conducted due to the lack of resources. In order to realize ideals and objectives, reasonable time and a certain amount of resources should be ensured. However, from the insider’s perspective, such requisites are not entirely assured.

In the following statement, Asano-sensei concretely lays out the examples of resources lacking for environmental education. I have underlined key points.

What discouraged me from conducting environmental education is the structure of this classroom. This classroom is not appropriate for the children to do some research on a certain topic that they are interested in and put all findings into a large poster-sized paper (mozôshi) to present what they learned to the classmates. There is no sufficient space in the classroom to keep the children’s works and large books used for their study. For example, the children of my class were going to grow radish sprouts last year, but there was not enough space for that. Some of the plant pots on the floor got hit by a ball and were broken. Also, we could hardly get clean water for them. When I tried to let them make a presentation about what they learned, they could not freely unroll the large paper because of the lack of open space in the classroom. Thus, the children unrolled the paper on the floor in the hallway in front of the classroom and limited spaces in the classroom after removing their own desks and chairs, and they themselves were also lying down.

Due to the lack of the literature and study materials to research in the classroom, I wanted to take them to the school library located in another building, but it was really time-consuming. It was taking a lot of time to keep them in line to head to the library, and also used time to let them be quiet in the library. I’d love to leave them to what each likes at his/her own pace. Yet, in practice, I could not do so because it prevented me from always getting a grip on what happened out of my sight.

Also, I would like to point out the lack of personnel because I per se don’t have enough knowledge to teach the children about environmental issues. In practicing environmental education, I strongly want the public institutions, including the public libraries and the city hall, to more aggressively take the lead in introducing useful teaching materials and valuable assets like ‘guest teachers.’ We don’t have enough time to look for effective, helpful guest-teachers as well as teaching equipment. I had become totally exhausted by the end of the environmental educational activities. (My Field note, November 8)

Asano-sensei pointed out that the lack of learning environment appropriate for environmental education, the lack of literature and study materials, the lack of personnel, and the
lack of time as obstacles for conducting environmental education based on her experiences. Similar opinions were shared by other KES teachers. For example, Akiyama-sensei argued that the construction of a school building does not appropriate for environmental education as below.

We cannot let the children keep their own work in progress because there is not enough space to store them. We want to store them out of the reach and sight of the children because those things tend to prevent the children from paying attention to what the teacher is talking about in other classes. Some children are always bothering themselves about their own work. I don’t mean to totally deny the significance of the Period of Integrated Learning because I know many children who like the subject; however, it is certain that this new subject has brought about not only merits, but also essential problems. (My Field note, November 16)

As a part of environmental educational activities conducted in the Period of Integrated Learning, children often engaged in some special activities and produced a lot of artistic works; such as, environmental maps, a poster of environmental protection activities, toys made of straw and fallen nuts like acorns and pinecones picked up in the park in the school community (see, chapter seven). Some products were smaller and easier to keep in the classroom, but some were too large to do so. All students have their own lockers and desks in their own classroom; however, they are asked to put their backpacks in the former and textbooks in the latter. Thus, not only Asano-sensei, but also virtually all KES teachers were making the best use of spaces, such as the open spaces in the children’s locker and in the shoes box located outside of the classroom in order to keep the children’s work. Study equipment used in the Period of Integrated Learning was left in the hallway in front of the classroom. Albeit they could have smaller projects within reach, such as in the classroom or in the hallway, it is not possible to keep large work created by the children. Finally, every teacher was forced to struggle to find unused space where s/he could keep the children’s work as their activities were drawing near the end. Indeed, teachers often asked each other whether they know some open spaces or unused classroom to keep the children’s work for a while during the teacher’s morning assembly.

As Akiyama-sensei mentioned, the children were always thinking about and distracted by their own work if it was at hand or in sight while a teacher was talking. A classroom where the children were taking classes was, at the same time, a showroom of their own work, the place to keep their work in progress. The children’s pictures and handicrafts, which were not only made in the Period of Integrated Learning, but also in Art and Calligraphy class were always displayed in the classroom. They also played in the classroom with their friends, and stored play equipment
like balls. They also prepared and ate lunch in the same classroom. Not surprisingly, the children sometimes happened to break their own or other friend’s work.

Ito-sensei was one of the teachers who view the lack of literature and study materials as an obstacle for the implementation of environmental education.

In order to talk about environmental problems in the classroom, I have sometimes read through some books and visited some websites, but the information I could get from those sources were too difficult to use in the classroom. Those materials were full of difficult kanji (Chinese characters), and the children could not even read them. To use such materials, we ourselves have to completely assimilate the contents at first in order to translate them into the language understandable for the children. It was really a time-consuming and onerous task to do, and it is impossible to invest time and energy into it every time when I refer to some topics relating to some environmental issues. (My Field note, November 29)

Although there is a booklet, entitled Watashitachi to kankyo (People and the Environment) (2001), which was recently distributed by the city government, the KES teachers are actually spending their time and energy to prepare some extra study materials. In order to provide hands-on learning opportunities and experiential activities for students, they are required to make the materials that are useful and appropriate for the activities. Elementary school children have not learned enough kanji (Chinese characters) to read the environmental educational books and arithmetical concepts such as fractions that are crucial to acknowledge the severity of the problems. Thus, those materials are usually made by simplifying the general environmental readings that are too difficult for the children and to have contact with some environmental specialists who are willing to talk about environment-related topics in front of the children. The lack of literature and study materials as well as the lack of personnel was also pointed out in the following quote by Matsumoto-sensei:

Because the children cannot keep their concentration on the same topic for a long period of time, there are breaks between classes, which last for 45 minutes, and we attempt to teach different subjects in each class hour. Thus, to accomplish goals set for each class hour, we struggle to conduct classes while paying attention to whether the children could clearly understand what we talked about. We have little leeway to research the useful study materials only for the Integrated Learning. I try to go to a public library or the city hall to figure out what kind of study materials and guest-teachers are available, but we really need more useful study materials and information regarding

23 I myself experienced the fact that these preparations are really time-consuming for the teachers when I was asked to make a presentation regarding environmental problems to the fourth graders.
helpful guest-teachers within our grasps. It is time-consuming to gather such basic information every time when I want to talk about environmental issues. (My Field note, November 24)

The perspective that the teachers have little leeway to research and prepare good study material to conduct environmental education, which was seen in both Ito-sensei’s and Matsumoto-sensei’s words, were shared by most KES teachers. In his statement, Matsumoto-sensei clearly related the lack of literature and study materials and the lack of personnel to the lack of time. According to him, despite the tendency that the lack of study materials, literature, and personnel at hand itself prevents the smooth implementation of environmental education, it is the lack of time that ultimately spurs the tendency.

The teacher’s perception of the lack of time emerged in their answers to my question about their experience of getting involved in certain study sessions occurring in the city hall or some NGOs in order to promote environmental educational activities at schools. Doubtlessly, they have information that the city hall and environmental NGOs have such sessions on a periodic basis and they can acquire some advice regarding the implementation of environmental education there because the vice-principal announces it in the morning meeting. However, through the interviews with the teachers, it became clear that most teachers had rarely participated in such study sessions. In order to conduct environmental education, teachers consult library books, teacher’s guidebooks, and TV programs, but it is virtually all they can do. They do not have enough time for the study sessions. Among the teachers who do accept the significance of conducting environmental education at a public elementary school, Kanazawa-sensei explained why it was difficult for her to join such study sessions.

Such study sessions mostly take place on weekdays. This is the main reason why we cannot get involved those sessions. If there is someone who is taking care of the children of my class, I would like to join such sessions, but it is not possible in reality. I think that most teachers have a desire to study whenever the occasion arises, but we cannot leave the children because of the concerns about them. Thus, we can take part in only the most fascinating sessions. (My Field note, November 29)

Asano-sensei also had tried to participate in a study session regarding environmental activities seemingly useful for the children sponsored by the city board of education, but she could not make it because it was held on a weekday. She mentioned,

Although I, as well as some other teachers, scurried through our work after having the children leave the school and headed to the study session as
rapidly as possible, but we could not make it. There were only a few trains and buses for the place we were going to, and when we reached the site, there were people who were participating the session and going back home. While looking at them, I knew that it is difficult for us to join such sessions. (My Field note, November 8)

It seemed to me that teachers had already given up taking part in these study sessions. While listening to the teacher’s opinions, I have come to realize that today’s teachers perceive their lives as too busy to try something new, especially if they do not regard it as a matter of the highest urgency. Also, according to both Kanawaza-sensei and Asano-sensei, the teachers were also discouraged from participating in such study sessions due to the fact that they were not able to find a substitute teacher who would keep a close eye on their students while they were out. In other words, it is the sense of lack of assistance that strengthens the teacher’s sense of lack of time, and prevents them from actively venturing into other fields that are not directly related to the issues at hand.

Today, there is an argument that the teachers should have more time than before since almost 30% of the contents of the elementary school curriculum has been cut out, and the full five-day school week has been introduced. However, most teachers do not agree with such an oversimplified perspective. In the following conversation, Ito-sensei and Kanazawa-sensei were trying to tell me about the reason for their busy lives.

Ito-sensei: I don’t know why, but it is certain that I have become busier than before. Do you think that it is because of the establishment of the Period of Integrated Learning? Because there is no textbook and specific goals to achieve, we have to have meetings together with the teachers of the same grade in order to prepare only for that subject.

Kanazawa-sensei: Yet, though they were not meetings for the Integrated Learning, we also had similar meetings before. Well… What do you think about the introduction of the five-day school week? We had three classes every Saturday, but those were completely cut out. Thus, we have lost a total of 12 class hours, and now we are always forced to conduct highly concentrated classes… Wait… It’s wrong. The contents to teach were also shrunk and those 12 hours were allocated to other weekdays.

Ito-sensei: Yes, you’re right.

Kanazawa-sensei: I see. It might be because we lost the time to share the information of the children with other teachers taking charge of the boys and girls of the same grade. During such a meeting, we could exchange information of our own class, and if a young teacher has trouble in managing her class, we could consider the problem together to overcome it. It might be crucial to smoothly managing the children.
Ito-sensei: Couldn’t we have many children stay after school almost every day?

Kanazawa-sensei: Yes, right, right. We could utilize the free time after school to take care of the children who were having problems either academic or non-academic. We did care for the children’s hearts. When finding someone in the classroom having a problem, we asked him not to go back home after school and to help us. And, we naturally asked him what he had in his mind while working on the same task together in cooperation. Before they left the classroom after completing the work, those boys and girls who could open their mind were mostly able to go back home in a good mood.

However, we have not been able to have such time these days. Because of the allocation of the class hours of Saturday to other weekdays, we have had many things to do on weekdays. It is hard for the children to keep their concentration for a long period of time, so when we finish the last class after noon, they are already exhausted. Because of the lack of energy and concentration, they often play little tricks on each other, and it ends up in a struggle. During scolding them, the time has quickly passed and we have to let the children leave the school. Especially these days, because of the increasing crimes targeted at small children, we are never able to make them stay in the classroom after school.

No matter how busy we are, they require us to be always sensitive to their mood. If we miss the signs of emotional change in them, the problems accumulate in their mind and finally cause problems. In such a situation, we are forced to give priority to taking care of the problems over what was originally planned; then, we become busy and exhausted, or at least, we come to feel we are very busy. Thus, one of big reasons for our busy lives is the decrease of time to have conversations with the children that is a foundation of the teacher-children relationship, or a basis of virtually every aspect of their school lives. (My Field note, November 29)

From this conversation, it is possible to fathom a part of the status quo of today’s elementary school. In order to shift school education from cramming and competition to creativity and a more relaxed approach, the regular five-day week was introduced and the curtailment of the contents of the course of study was implemented. However, since the public has become worried about a decline in students’ academic ability, even people who have aggressively promoted the recent educational reform aimed at liberating children from time constraints and mental pressures have easily reversed their previous stance and assented to the revision of today’s school system. For instance, one of the leading figures promoting the educational reform, Mr. Arima (a former education minister and former chairman of Central Education Council) uncovered his honest opinion that the educational reform was not successful because people, especially parents and teachers could not fully read between the lines of the reform (Kariya 2002, Saito 2004).

It should not be disregarded that every single educational reform introduced to the school curriculum has influenced public schools to greater or lesser extent, and such influences have
been gradually accumulated up to date. For example, the implementation of the regular five-day week and the curtailment of the contents of the course of study seem to rob the teachers of time to provide psychological support to the students and to establish, maintain, and strengthen the relationship of trust with the students in the eyes of the teachers.

Doubtlessly, it is important to investigate the reasons why the implementation of such reforms does not work well if they have negative unexpected influences on the schools. However, it should take more than placing the blame for the failure of the educational reforms at the feet of the teachers and parents. The teachers have witnessed the dramatic changes that have occurred in the life of students and teachers, but had few measures and little time to uncover the causes of the failure. While murmuring grumpily and uneasily about their busy life, the teachers have gradually come to feel trapped in their current situation. On the other hand, people promoting the successive educational reforms have been trying to draw up new reform plans including the amendment to the Fundamental Law of Education outside of the school site without thorough investigation of the primary cause of the failure of the educational reform implemented up to today. It seems plausible to speculate that if the implementation of such new plans brings about unexpected results on the ground again, the blame for it will be placed at the feet of someone working on the ground, and more plans will be put forth to solve the failure.

From the teacher’s perspective, the accumulation of such educational reform that is ill-suited to the current situation of the schools have resulted in a pressured work situation. However, drawing on my observation of teacher’s lives, I consider that the more important effect of the successive reforms is a deep-seated doubt and disbelief of the reform plans that come from outside. Teachers have developed a dislike for the fact that the school, or the environment for the students’ development, is always swayed by the pressure of fickle policy. It seems that such a doubt and distrust in the teachers’ minds are functioning like a homeostatic mechanism of the elementary school system, and protecting the children’s life from being destabilized by rapid social changes occurring outside school. Thus, as long as outsiders are trying to force the implementation of environmental education without understanding what is going on at today’s school, environmental education can be regarded as something similar to other plans from outside; consequently, it will be unwelcome on the ground.

In reality, culture never rests and society changes all the time. Then, what is strengthening the sense of doubt and disbelief in teacher’s mind? An answer I got from the conversations with teachers was their sense of loneliness and isolation. The following conversation between Yamazaki-sensei and Akiyama-sensei makes this point clear.
Yamazaki-sensei: Don’t you feel that schools have come to earn the bitter contempt of the public these days?

Akiyama-sensei: When negative and critical views of public elementary schools were not broadcasted everyday and residents took an open-minded attitude toward teachers, we were allowed to do more various things for the children. However, today, we are forced to be sensitive about public eye and parents’ opinions even if we want to launch upon a new and somewhat unique challenge in the classroom.

Yamazaki-sensei: There are no clear ‘goal lines’ for our job. Not only at schools, but also at home, we are always thinking of the students. We have many things to do at home including scoring and grading the children’s tests because we cannot finish it within our working time even though we are working in the teacher’s office after six or later. Also, sometimes when a parent calls the school for some emergent problem, we are called out at night. Our job is different from a nine-to-five kind of occupation since we are educating ‘living’ people. Thus, we feel that we are bound hand and foot if our job is evaluated based on the same criteria used to judge other kinds of occupations.

Akiyama-sensei: I agree with you. We don’t have a break between when we arrive at school and when we leave school everyday. There is no one who has a rest between classes and during lunch hours in the teacher’s office. We are expected to always keep an eye on the children. When a child of our class gets injured in a recess, we can’t say, ‘I am now having a break, so can you come back later?’ Even between classes, a child runs a fever…

Yamazaki-sensei: Right. Because lunch and cleaning are seen as essential components of the official curriculum in Japan, we are taking care of the children—what the children doing between classes, during lunch, and after lunch. Also, on the day of the Sports Day or school excursion, we are asked to come to school earlier.

Akiyama-sensei: As Sugai-sensei also observed, no one said no to the principal’s words, ‘Can you come to school early in the morning?’ And, all teachers are in the teacher’s office before eight.

Yamazaki-sensei: I heard that one-day when a teacher left school earlier than everyday, a resident living nearby the school called the teacher’s office and complained, ‘Why did she go back home so early?’ I haven’t heard such a story at this school, but I know that schools and teachers are not so trusted in society.

Akiyama-sensei: She might have a lot of work to do at home such as preparation for classes on the next day. Who appreciates our everyday efforts?

Yamazaki-sensei: We’ll never get such appreciation, and we shouldn’t expect it.

Akiyama-sensei: I strongly think that we should be liberated from time constraints and mental pressure to establish a good relationship with the children. Don’t’ you think so?
Yamazaki-sensei: I totally agree with you. When we are too busy and too exhausted, we, as people, tend to overlook the subtleties of the children’s emotions. (My Field note, November 16)

Basically, teachers are managing their busy lifestyles because they have a desire to help the individual children be able to stand on their feet and because they have a sense of responsibility for providing education for them. However, such efforts are rarely spotlighted, and not appreciated. People know about today’s elementary school through a wide variety of TV news and special programs, but the information and messages selected by the media and transmitted to the public tend to create a critical image of the schools in society. It is partly because those media select the information in order to stimulate the viewer’s interest, rather than to accurately describe the status quo of the schools (Hirota 2005). It is not today or yesterday that criticism of education appeared, in fact, it started when the modern pedagogy began (Imai 2004). However, particularly today, the image of “the crisis of education” is pervasive, and there is a strong call for revision of schooling throughout the country. The sense that while being the target of the criticism, teachers should not expect people to appreciate them was clearly described in the Yamazaki-sensei’s words, “We’ll never get such appreciation, and we shouldn’t expect it.

The teachers’ sense that the continuing introduction of the educational reform plans is one of causes of their busy life impels their dislike for the radical policy changes disturbing the atmosphere of the school, or the environment for the children’s development. If they can feel that they were educating the students in cooperation with the community, and that the whole society is trying to ensure a stable environment for the children’s development, those teachers can comfortably concentrate on teaching the students. However, as far as I observed, although I never directly heard explicit complaints about the school community from the teachers, I did not sense that they had such a comfortable feeling. There is no doubt about the fact that teachers have to have a mental toughness as the above-cited conversation between Yamazaki-sensei and Akiyama-sensei showed. However, individual teachers are not merely a gear in a wheel running the school system; but they are social beings with their own emotions. Their perspective of education, their attitudes toward their business, their language and behavior in front of the students, and how much they can bend their ear and their whole mind to the students are determined under the influence of the social and cultural context.

Because teachers’ lives lacked latitude, mentally and in relation to time, the pressures steadily influenced the teacher’s behavior. Doubtlessly, the busier they become, the more likely they were to fail to give suitable and timely responses to the children’s words and actions. For example, one day, some boys were enthusiastically looking at a migratory locust producing eggs
in a small insect cage in front of the classroom. I described the children’s language and behavior in my Field note as follows.

12:28, [children] enthusiastically saying, “Miyata-kun, something yellow was coming out from the backside of your locust!” Yamane-kun asked Miyata-kun to come around the insect cage in front of the classroom. Miyata-kun and other six or seven boys did not initially figure out what’s going on, but approached the insect cage of a migratory locust, which was producing light yellow eggs on the thin layer of dirt in the cage, and put some fine bubbles on the eggs.

Toda-kun: Wow! That’s eggs of the locust!
Kubo-kun: Yea, it is producing eggs on the dirt because there is not enough dirt in the cage.
Toda-kun: Oh…, do you mean that this locust wants to produce the eggs underground?
Kubo-kun: Right. Otherwise, those eggs should be eaten later. But, you cannot put the dirt in the cage now because those eggs will be crushed.
Amano-kun: But, the babies of the locust can hatch from the eggs, can’t they?
Miyata-kun: Let’s try to put some dirt on the eggs! Yamane-kun, can you keep my locust in your insect cage while I will keep the eggs in my cage?

One of the boys hastily went into the classroom to tell what was going on to his teacher. However, the teacher looking over the notebooks submitted by all students was too busy to show his interest in the locust. He just shortly answered, “OK. That’s nice. But, you have to prepare for lunch now.” There were few girls who were interested in the locust and its eggs.
The excited conversation between the boys was still continuing.
Kubo-kun: Miyata-kun, you should have put soil in the cage before the locust produced those eggs…
Fujita-kun: You should put your locust in another cage right away.
Kubo-kun: How many eggs has it produced? It’s over 100, isn’t it?
Uchida-kun came out from the classroom, and approached the group of boys.
Uchida-kun: Wow, what is that? Are they eggs of the locust? I’ve never seen that in my life!
Fujita-kun: Yeah, me too. We are facing a precious moment! Do you have a camera, Sugai-sensei?
Sugai: Sorry, I don’t have it today.
Fujita-kun looked disappointed.
Kubo-kun: You know what? All babies of this locust can survive because they will feed on one another. I have read a picture book of insects. I guess that among the baby locust that can hatch out of these eggs, almost only ten will be able to develop to the adult stage.
Listening to the Kubo-kun’s words, Uchida-kun admiringly said, “Then, this migratory locust is one of those ten survivors, isn’t it?”

The teacher’s voice, “Who has not prepared for the lunch yet? Hurry up!” was heard from inside of the classroom. (My Field note, September 22)

For some teachers, the moment of the egg-laying behavior of the migratory locust was seen as a good educational material to conduct environmental education. Indeed, when I talked about the interactions between the boys in reference to the migratory locust and its eggs to Kirishima-sensei, she responded,

You might want to tell that to the classroom teacher. But, young teachers today may not know how to improve such occasions. To take advantage of such an ongoing case in classes, we need to be ready for that. However, the teachers do not have enough time and energy to invest in teaching what are not in textbooks in general.

While observing the children’s lives, you might find things that are seemingly useful for environmental education; however, from the teacher’s perspective, we have little leeway to refer to them in class if they are not in textbooks. When I was still young, we used such ‘living educational materials,’ or what’s going on in everyday life, in classes, such as science classes. Yet, it has become difficult, if not impossible, to do so. It is partly because of the lack of time. We hardly have sufficient time to prepare extra teaching materials today.

Also, this tendency is reinforced by the kind of test we generally have the children take. In the past, we made tests for the children by ourselves; thus, we could appropriate the contents of tests to what the children had already learned. However, we prefer to use the commercially-produced, eye-pleasing tests. The parents today are taking those tests for granted, and want us to use them because other schools are also letting the children take those kind of test. Thus, we need to more or less appropriate what the children are learning to the contents of the tests.

The today’s young teachers do not have experiences to make use of what’s actually going on in ordinary lives as a teaching material. They cannot even see the experienced teachers doing it today. Frankly speaking, I, as an experienced teacher, would like to tell the young teachers about how to extract teaching material from everyday lives, but it’s very time-consuming. I myself have a number of things to do before doing such extra work. It is certain that we can talk about such a topic in preparation for the Period of Integrated Learning, but what we can do is still very restricted in reality because at first, we have to reach consensus with the other teachers on what to teach the children in the same grade. Thus, at the moment when the young teacher wants to know how to utilize what’s going on in front of her, she cannot learn it. I believe that such activities, or learning what’s actually going on in our daily lives, are really interesting not only for the children, but also for us; however, we cannot let the children have an experience of it at school today. Today’s child can have such experiences during summer vacation if the mother wants the child to do so. (My Field note, November 10)
Kirishima-sensei points out two effects derived from the fact that today’s teachers have little leeway in terms of time and mind. First, because of the lack of time, the teachers cannot refer to what is not written in textbooks, such as the migratory locust and its eggs, in front of the children. According to Kirishima-sensei, the contents of the tests have an influence on what teachers are talking about in classes. Instead of using the old-style handmade tests that are printed on coarse papers with black ink, the teachers were using commercially-produced tests that are colorfully printed on the B4 white high-quality papers with many pictures and photos. This does not mean only the fact that the public school students can take nice-looking tests because of the development of the society. Because using the commercial tests is almost a socially accepted custom today, and parents tend to expect the schools to use them, teachers are using such beautiful tests. Actually, using such tests frees the teachers from the pressure to ponder over the contents of the tests. However, according to Kirishima-sensei, using the commercial test either directly or indirectly shape what the students can learn from the teachers.

When the teachers had to make the tests, they selected the questions of the tests based on what they had taught. Since teachers must follow the national course of study, what they had to teach was determined by the government; however, the teachers still had room to emphasize what they were willing to teach. In contrast, the contents of such commercial tests were completely defined by the test companies based on the national course of study. Those who are selecting the questions of the tests do not know who are taking the tests, the students’ level of understanding, what they learned, and what is going on the classroom at all. The place they are making the tests is temporally and geographically far removed from where the students are taking the tests. Thus, as many teachers told me, the contents of the tests are not necessarily appropriate to the level of the students. Nonetheless, because the teachers cannot let the students take tests until they teach the students about everything relating to the questions in the tests, the teachers are often required to concentrate on the contents of the tests. In other words, the contents of the tests are providing a framework for the classes. Indeed, I observed that the more busy the teachers became, the more they were feeling pressure to teach all of the contents of the tests.

There are widespread arguments that Japanese teachers are not paying attention to the individual students. Thus, the MOE have emphasized the importance of “child-centered education” (jidô-chûshin shugi no kyoiku), and have proceeded the educational reform with the slogan of the realization of education with latitude (yutori kyoiku). However, if there is such a tendency in school today, it is partly derived from the socially accepted custom of giving priority to the commercial nice-looking tests over the old-type handmade tests. In the interviews and
casual conversations, a number of teachers told me that they hope to talk about environmental problems or the importance of nature if needed and if possible. However, compared to the number of those who wanted to talk about the environment, the number of the teachers who were actually able to do it was overwhelmingly small. According to them, they were already busy teaching about what they had to teach and dealing with the problems occurring in the classroom, and, thus, did not have time to refer to things that are not in textbooks or do not relate to the contents of the tests. Here, I see the covert but crucial relationship between the tests used in the conventional subjects and environmental education (see also chapter eight).24

Secondly, the lack of time has come to prevent the transmission of cultural knowledge regarding the way to conduct classes and manage a class from the experienced teachers to the young. In reference to this point, Sasaki-sensei, an experienced male teacher, put it as follows.

Sasaki-sensei: As the expansion of the Integrated Learning shows, the view of classes has dramatically changed these days. Thus, the teachers are now required to study a lot. There are only a few forty-something teachers today. Maybe less than 30 teachers are between 40 and 50 years old. There are a larger number of twenty-something teachers, but it’s still not a sufficient number of personnel. Then, in five or six years, all teachers of my age will retire because of the age limit. Instead, a huge number of people will become teachers. It may require a new kind of school system, and cause a lot of problems at schools, including the end of the dissemination of the school culture from experienced teachers to younger teachers.

Sugai: Could you describe a little bit more about the dissemination of the school culture for me?

Sasaki-sensei: OK. At school, young teachers have traditionally learned many important things from experienced teachers; such as, how to manage a classroom and a school, the way to observe and interpret the students’ status quo, and the way to conduct effective classes. I have scarcely seen the situation of young teachers learning from the elder teachers recently. However, it is difficult for the young to learn such required cultural knowledge and techniques from books or contemplation. Thus, it is no use saying to the young teachers, ‘Do your best!’ They have to learn those things from their own struggled experience. From my perspective, it is the successive interactions between the experienced and the young teachers that provide some insights for the young. It may be the last about ten years that I felt that such chances have decreased. Seemingly, the generation shift has not functioned well. It is partly because of the lack of teachers in the thirties or forties whereas there are teachers in the fifties and twenties. From the standpoint of the generation shift, I consider that we want more teachers.

24 Since I saw the covert, but important relationship between the tests used in the conventional classes and environmental education, I am skeptical about the educational philosophy that regards environmental education and the Period of Integrated as a subject completely different from the conventional subjects.
between our age, or fifties, and today's young teachers. As a teacher who is close to mandatory retirement age, I would like to transmit my knowledge and experiences to the younger generation, but … (My Field note, December 19)

While not directly referring to environmental education, Sasaki-sensei showed a part of teacher’s perspective on today’s schools (that have been expected to conduct environmental education in general). From the teacher’s perspective, public elementary schools are currently in a time of dramatic change, and they have been struggling to perform daily assigned task under a variety of strong pressures. According to Sasaki-sensei, specialized knowledge, techniques, and strategies to manage their own classroom and to construct effective classes based on the analysis and understanding of the present state of the children are passed down from older to younger teachers within a school. There is a pervading belief that teachers cannot learn actually useful techniques and skills that make a significant contribution as the need arise, but from trials and tribulations that they encounter. In other words, individual teachers can become skillful through a process of consulting with other teachers. Thus, some experienced teachers, including Kirishima-sensei, told me how much they appreciated the experienced teachers who helped them when they were young and having troubles while lamenting that they cannot spare enough time and energy to assist the younger teachers today.

Based on Sakai-sensei and Kawakami-sensei’s words, it is clear that teachers’ busyness has deprived the teachers of opportunities to make a concerted effort to deal with the students. On the ground, a young teacher can mature as a skilled, veteran teacher through the learning by watching and listening to the experienced teachers. That is, the process of development of the teachers is like an apprenticeship system. Experienced teachers are not necessarily conducting classes as an individual; instead, they have constructed the community to manage their own classes and school and deal with the students. In the process of participating in the community, a young teacher can become a skilled individual teacher. By being received into the community, they become able to deal with the students and manage their own classrooms and the school as a team. Such a process of being a part of the teacher’s community is not necessarily taking place deliberately. As far as I observed, experienced teachers are not consciously teaching how to become a part of the community to younger teachers step by step. However, it is true that by having conversations with the experience teachers and doing the school events in cooperation with other teachers, young teachers unintentionally and unconsciously learn the way to work as a teacher at school. In other words, such apprenticeship-like processes let the teachers not only become aware of their responsibilities as a teacher, but also take pride in being a teacher.
It is not always pointed out, but the opposite is also true. Young teachers also have an influence on the behavior and language of experienced teachers. In Japan, young teachers may feel some hesitation in giving elder teachers their comments. However, as an individual getting engaged in education of the students, the younger teachers are in the same boat with the experienced teachers, and have many opportunities to share their thoughts. Indeed, they often express their opinions in front of the older teachers as far as I observed. Moreover, for the elder teachers, giving the younger teachers their advice based on their experiences might contribute to ensuring their identity. The time constraints can result in the fact that both younger and experienced teachers lack the opportunities to become aware of their responsibility as teachers and to ensure their identity as teachers.

Although these teachers’ perspectives were not necessarily uncovered in conversations about environmental education, they were extremely relevant to the practice of environmental education. Their words make it clear that teachers who are expected to conduct environmental education today are feeling isolation and loneliness, and recognizing that they have too many things to do regardless of the fact that they do not have enough time to take pride in their work and to ensure their identity as a teacher. From my perspective, situation of teachers has a big influence on the implementation of environmental education in elementary schools.

The teachers also pointed out the lack of financial resources as an obstacle for the implementation of environmental education at a modern public school. A woman teacher mentioned.

In order to start something new, we certainly need some amount of money to prepare educational equipment. However, I think that we do not received sufficient economic support, and thus, we often have to buy what are required for classes by ourselves. It makes a gap between teachers who are eager to get involved in the new program and those who are not so enthusiastic about it. (My Field note, November 8)

As already noted, in the conventional subjects that are assigned clear goals and have government approved textbooks, the teachers have gradually learned a technique to conduct classes appropriate to the children and the way to analyze the children’s status quo, often from the elder teachers. However, in terms of the Period of Integrated Learning (and environmental education), not only young teachers, but also experienced teachers are fumbling to develop distinctive education and conduct interdisciplinary and comprehensive teaching activities. It can be fair to say that the overall results are influenced by the availability of valuable personnel and educational equipment to realize their goals, the economic support that enable them to obtain
such good educational materials, and the existence of latitude, mentally and in relation to time, to pay attention to every part of the children’s activities and behavior. Thus, while teachers see its value, debate continues as to its contents, its demands on teachers, and the inequalities that develop between schools. According to Matsumoto-sensei and Kikuchi-sensei, regardless of their realization of the importance and value of the Period of Integrated Learning, they have not been able to maximize its possibilities.

Matsumoto-sensei: I think that the Period of Integrated Learning is more or less important. I haven’t made best use of it yet, but the establishment of the period has certainly changed my perspective of the school education. It is totally different from the conventional subjects because we teachers have to decide not only how to teach, but also what to teach. However, generally speaking, it is not clear how much we need to do within the Period of Integrated Learning, what and how much we should expect from the children at elementary school.

Kikuchi-sensei: I agree with you. I appreciate the significance of the Period of Integrated Learning though it has brought on active debates over its pros and cons. I’m wondering about the big gap between the schools that are emphasizing the Integrated Learning and those that are putting less stress on it. When I had a new transfer student in my class a few years ago, I was surprised at the quality and contents of the Integrated Learning that she took at her old school. She told me that she did not know what the Integrated Learning was and what she was doing within that period. While hearing what she said, I wondered how to view this gap between the children. (My Field note, November 14)

Japanese schools are famous for the fact that they have provided basically the same curriculum and high quality of instruction to all students from first to sixth grade across the country (c.f., Cummings 1980; Fukuzawa & LeTendre 2001). In Japan, national standards embodied in the course of study are translated into guidelines at local governmental levels and ultimately into the instructional programs in individual schools. Consequently, the national guidelines, which regulate a good part of teaching practices among elementary school teachers, homogenize children’s school experiences to a great extent. Thus, the introduction of the Period of Integrated Learning doubtlessly requires a somewhat radical change in the traditional view of compulsory education held by teachers.

When setting a high goal and articulating a dream, and stimulating the teachers to make efforts to achieve them, the MOE should ensure the necessary time and resources to the teachers. Although there is widely accepted criticism that today’s parents are not fully taking care of their own child and today’s teachers are not providing specialized and tailored guidance to individual
students, both childcare and education require a stable resource base. As I discussed in the previous chapter, while being expected to engage in childcare, a mother was struggling to keep a good balance between motherhood and a career. How much this mother can get involved in childcare is determined by, at least partly, whether she is supported by her family and whether she has enough financial capability. Drawing on my own observation of the school, I could not but agree with a teacher’s opinion found in a magazine: while putting little required manpower into schools, and making the teachers be completely exhausted by increased office work and time-consuming chores, the MOE has claimed that individual teachers and schools have to exercise their originality and ingenuity in developing a school curriculum. Such a claim is completely ignoring the status quo of today’s schools (Akada 2005, see also Akada 2002, 2003, 2006; Okazaki 2002, 2005, 2006).

6.3.2 The complexity of the environmental problems

From the teacher’s perspective, the second major obstacle for the implementation of school environmental education is derived from the complexity of the environmental problems. It is no doubt that environmental problems are complex, and there is no simple way to resolve them (e.g., Sakura 1992). When I was talking with my university professor Dr. Yamamoto about environmental problems, he often attributed the difficulty of getting serious about developing strategies for environmental problems to the fact that people do not witness the natural environment being damaged and destroyed in front of them nor do they see victims of pollution in their ordinary life (personal communication, see Yamamoto 2002). It is true that people are required to take various and comprehensive approaches toward such complicated problems today. Not only enhancement of environmental education, but also technological development and economic reforms that neglect the value of the natural environment, are crucial as a response to these problems.

Kawakami-sensei and Ohnuki-sensei clearly pointed out that environmental problems seem to be too complicated and complex to teach at elementary school. In my interview, Kawakami-sensei described his perspective that the teacher’s efforts to try to simply explain environmental problems to the students strengthen their tendency to find satisfaction in the superficial understanding of complicated problems.

The children currently under my charge learned about environmental problems last year. According to them, they took tests on the problems related to soil, atmosphere, garbage, and acid rain. Among these topics, they are most interested in the garbage-related problems because they learned it through hands-on learning activities. In their mind, the word ‘environment’ is almost
equivalent to ‘the garbage-related problems.’ However, since knowing it just from their experience, they don’t clearly see the relationship between the problems and the garbage, or how the garbage has caused problems. They also remember the words like ‘global warming’ because those words often appear on TV programs today. Although being familiar with this vocabulary, they seem to consider those problems are caused far off in the distance so that they don’t really matter to their lives. … There are many teachers who like to talk about environmental problems in front of the children. While discussing topics regarding the environment or environmental problems, people might be able to feel good. If some children positively responded to the teacher’s speech, and mentioned what we expect them to say, the teacher can easily feel a sense of accomplishment. I don’t mean to deny the significance of environmental education, but it is not that easy to have the children understand about such complicated issues. Basically, the children cannot realize the importance of abstract, ‘invisible’ things. Because we try to simplify the complicated problems as much as possible, the children easily come to see environmental problems as simplistic. Once believing that they have already learned the issues, children tend to begin to talk about them as people who are familiar with them. In addition, when required to grade the children, we also feel difficulties in teaching environmental problems at school partly because we cannot easily judge whether one really understands what he learned. Since environmental education is incorporated into the contents of the Period of Integrated Learning, we rarely use a paper-based test to identify the children’s understanding. As a result, one who apparently shows that he knows what he learned and expresses in words what we expect him to say could accomplish good results. (My Field note, December 8)

Since the children have little knowledge and few experiences that can serve as a basis of understanding complex environmental problems, the teachers need to prepare easy-to-understand learning materials, to increase the experiential learning activities, and to explain them as simple as possible; however, just because of those teacher’s efforts, the children tend to consider that they can fully understand the difficult problems. Moreover, according to Kawakami-sensei, before confirming the validity and credibility of what they learned, they label the environmental problems as things they have already studied. Kawakami-sensei was worried about that those children would miss opportunities to learn further about such complicated problems in the future because of their belief that they had comprehended those issues.

Moreover, according to Kawakami-sensei, the attractive words used in the discourse of environmental problems also contribute to promoting the student’s tendency to oversimplify the problems. For example, one day in summer, a fourth grade boy enthusiastically and proudly explained what he knew about the photochemical smog. He told me that he learned about it from his teacher and in some TV programs. From his words, it was clear that he knew about the existence of the photochemical smog and its impacts on human health. His contented smile when he was talking about the pollution could be interpreted as a reflection of the fact that he did not
understand the pollution as a problem for himself in Kawakami-sensei’s perspective. Drawing on Kawakami-sensei’s analysis, it is possible to say that because he is exposed to the information and vocabulary regarding environmental problems through media, he had knowledge of such problems. However, since the children do not have enough knowledge based on experiences to fully understand those complicated problems, they tended to regard those problems as having nothing to do with them.

It was Ohnuki-sensei who was pointing out the difficulty of teaching students about what teachers themselves do not generally experience. In the following statement, he explains the difficulty associated with implementing environmental education in comparison to the difficulty that he feels when he tells the story of the war to the students.

I need to make extra efforts when talking about the environmental problems that are not familiar to the children. For example, in teaching about a garbage-related problem, the garbage is collected by the garbage truck twice or three times every week from the children’s perspective, thus, they can’t clearly imagine the picture of a huge mountain of garbage disturbing people’s living. In order to understand the status quo of the garbage in the community, we take them to the disposal facilities, but there are diverse problems related to the garbage in the world, including those that we don’t usually experience. It’s challenging for us to tell the children about the severity of such ‘invisible’ problems. Imagine when you talk about war in front of the children. It is easy to just say, ‘The war is beyond pathetic,’ but it doesn’t mean that the children could understand the miseries of war. We ourselves don’t directly see the war and the miseries caused by it. It is not that simple to convey to the children the horrors of war. In addition, in terms of environmental problems, there is not only one correct answer in the most cases. Depending on where s/he stands, one makes different claims over the same problem. This is always applicable to any sorts of social issues. People’s opinions differ from person to person, culture to culture, and age to age. The four major environmental pollution-related diseases in the 1960’s exemplify it.²⁵ Thus, I consider that we need a clear explanation regarding the goal, or how in depth we have to teach the children about the contents in the Period of Integrated Learning. Whether we need to let the children have a sense that they must not litter in society, or whether we should teach the garbage-related issues caused around the world. Personally, I do not like to restrict the contents to teach systematically, but if we are really expected to teach the children about environmental education, some clear goals to achieve this should be required.

(My Field note, November 21)

Both Kawakami-sensei’s and Ohnuki-sensei’s voices reflected the fact that the teachers at school were struggling how in depth they had to teach about the complicated environmental

²⁵ The four major pollution-related diseases are Minamata disease, Itai-itai disease, Niigata Minamata disease, and Yokkaichi Asthma. See, chapter four of this thesis.
problems. As already noted, in the discourse of today’s public elementary schools, the importance of “child-centered education” has been spotlighted, and individual teachers and schools are encouraged to determine what to teach and how to teach it in the Period of Integrated Learning. Actually, the MOE does not define what teachers have to teach and how to teach it in the Period of Integrated Learning, and just encourages teachers to make effective use of the subject to create hands-on learning opportunities for the students. At first glance, it seems that the ambiguous boundaries enable individual teachers to define the contents of the Period of Integrated Learning. However, the ambiguity of the boundaries does not have such a positive effect. Indeed, the fact that the MOE does not concretely define the contents of the Period of Integrated Learning actually provides an impetus for the teachers to become sensitive about what other teachers are teaching in the Period of Integrated Learning. Teachers generally have a sense that they have to teach their students what the students of the other classes are learning. The teachers cannot avoid such pressure because the parents also want their children to learn what their friends in other classes are learning, and if their children do not receive satisfactory education, they will criticize the teachers. As a result, the child-centered education and the ambiguous definition of the contents of classes have made the teachers develop sensitivity to the other teacher’s practices and to parents’ eyes. It is fair to argue that the teachers are far from enjoying the freedom to define the contents of the Period of Integrated Learning.

Also, according to Ohnuki-sensei, the fact that there are diverse perspectives of environmental problems makes it more difficult to conduct environmental education. In contrast, they are not familiar with teaching what they are not sure about. This is because elementary school teachers are traditionally accustomed to teaching the students about socially and culturally authorized knowledge based on their own knowledge and experiences. Not only in science and arithmetic classes, but also even in social studies class, teachers teach their students based on the implicit belief that they are teaching socially and culturally acknowledged truth. Whether or not they are conscious of it, teachers accept the contents of textbooks as truth; thus, they are able to take it upon themselves to teach the students. They do not necessarily actively believe the contents of textbooks. Some may doubt the credibility of them. However, even though they doubt them, they do not have enough time to work out their uncertainties. Thus, it is possible to say that teachers are either explicitly or implicitly believing textbooks, and the belief provides a platform for their classes.

Teachers’ belief in textbooks has an influence on the structure of classes because it enables a teacher to behave and talk as one who knows what the students do not yet know. Those teachers are accustomed to and good at conducting classes by making a clear distinction between the
teachers who know what the students should learn and the students who have to learn from the teachers. Thus, they unconsciously try to make or maintain the similar distinction between teachers and students, but it does not work well. Partly because teachers do not have enough time to study about environmental problems, and partly because they prioritize other conventional subjects over environmental education, teachers tend to talk about environmental problems based on their knowledge and interpretations of the problems, or within the bounds of common sense. Therefore, in environmental education classes, the students tend to get a simplified picture of complicated environmental problems.

There is a claim that those teachers should study environmental problems with the students in class (e.g., Kitamura 2000). However, it seems to be in fact difficult to carry out. I do not intend to deny the importance of teachers’ positive attitudes toward learning. It is noteworthy that in order to put it into practice, the teachers require the atmosphere in which they can teach the students without developing the relationship between the teacher who teaches and the students who have to learn from the teacher. On the ground, they construct such a relationship with the students not only to conduct classes as smoothly as possible, but also to oversee the students’ school life. To construct the strong relationship between one who teaches and one who learns, one who is older and one who is younger is a part of education at elementary school, at least from the teacher’s perspective. Nevertheless, as long as it is incorporated into the school curriculum and it is socially expected, teachers have a responsibility, or even sense of obligation, to practice environmental education today. Therefore, while acknowledging the importance and needs of environmental education on the one hand, they are wondering about its effects on the other hand. Teachers are currently conducting environmental education with a mixed feeling toward environmental education.

A background reason for such opinions is the fact that the teachers today are encouraged to employ the Period of Integrated Learning to implement environmental education. Ito-sensei said,

Despite the fact that the importance of environmental education has been widely recognized and a large number of schools have already begun to implement it, we individual teachers are required to get involved in the full preparation, ranging from researching teaching materials to defining the goals insofar as it is regarded as a part of the Period of Integrated Learning. In terms of other subjects, when we face a problem in teaching the children, we can learn how to deal with it from other experienced teachers. And it is easy to get useful teaching materials from some sorts of study sessions or other teachers. However, in terms of the Period of Integrated Learning, because each school and the teachers taking charge of the same grade level are expected to decide what to teach within this subject every school year, it is difficult to exchange useful information with other teachers or other schools.
Even if we emphasize environmental education at our school within the Period of Integrated Learning, another school may attempt to put emphasis on the IT education, and still another school can value the significance of the education for international understanding. It may make us have ambiguous feeling about investing much energy and time to practice environmental education. (My Field note, November 29)

Almost all teachers who stressed the difficulties of doing environmental education at a public elementary school also expressed similar opinions on the Period of Integrated Learning. Individual schools are encouraged by the MOE to provide hands-on learning activities to teach about the importance of the environment instead of depending on conventional teaching strategies, or the lecture style of teaching. Many advocates for the Period of Integrated Learning (e.g., Shimano 2002, Kato & Uozumi 1999) have tended to emphasize the flexibility of the Integrated Learning in comparison to other traditional subjects, and proudly regarded the characteristics as “freedom” assigned to individual schools. However, as the teachers’ words regarding the lack of time and resources clearly show, the individual schools and teachers do not have sufficient means to exercise freedom, and are frequently engaged exclusively in what can be practiced in the community with limited resources. Therefore, it seems that public elementary schools like KES gets stuck between the “responsibility” to conduct environmental education, the significance of which has been widely acknowledged in society, and the dubious freedom of the Period of Integrated Learning.

Teachers showed both positive and negative views of the experiential learning activities that consist an integral part of the Period of Integrated Learning. As quoted in the early part of this chapter, Kirishima-sensei clearly emphasized the significance of the Period of Integrated Learning and the environmental educational activities within it, and Kikuchi-sensei appreciated the importance of the Period of Integrated Learning while understanding that it has raised a new kind of problem. In contrast, some teachers complained, “Regardless of time- and energy-consuming preparation for the Integrated Learning, the learning activities tend to be just interesting events and the children can hardly learn anything from.” A man teacher told me about his experience.

Reflecting the criticism that schooling has put too much emphasis on the transmission of knowledge, we are now giving priority to the experiential learning today. But, I do not think that it is enough if we attempt to let the children engage in interesting experiential learning activities everyday. What we should do, or a goal of such activities, is to cultivate the ability to think for oneself. This perspective should not be disregarded, I believe. Yet, it is not completely denied that there is a tendency to just argue the importance of
experiential learning while the objectives of the activities are still ambiguous. I cannot fall into line with such a way of thinking. I do not believe in such ‘event-ish activities.’ … For instance, though this is not directly related to environmental education, I am critical of the activity, titled ‘Let’s understand the handicapped people.’ In the activity, to understand the blind people, one with eye mask walks hand in hand with his/her friend without eye mask; to know about a person in wheelchairs, they experience using a wheelchair to get around. However, do you think that they can really understand what the handicapped people are feeling? I don’t think so. It is completely different between ‘I can actually walk’ and ‘I cannot walk at all.’ The most important thing is not to make the children have such experiences, but to enable them to have a tendency to consider other people’s, handicapped people’s, feeling. (My Field note, November 21)

While the needs and significance of environmental education has become widely recognized today, the responsibilities to make decisions regarding the implementation of environmental education are totally given to individual schools and teachers. By being encouraged to utilize the Period of Integrated Learning to practice environmental educational activities, the teachers seem to feel that they are required to conduct environmental education that is different from the traditional education about environmental pollution conducted since the 1960’s (see, chapter three). For instance, they feel that they are required to provide a variety of hands-on learning opportunities instead of teaching complicated background stories and the history of environmental problems in the form of lectures. Thus, the call for the enhancement of experiential learning indirectly, but undoubtedly, deprives the teachers of the opportunities to talk about environmental problems in depth in front of the students. Kawakami-sensei said in our interview:

I think that it is very difficult to deny the significance of environmental education today. There is a traditional argument regarding whether the schools should prioritize the transmission of knowledge to the children over the education with latitude, or vice versa. Here, we have to find a good balance between the emphasis on the knowledge and emphasis on the latitude. However, in terms of environmental education, I cannot see what is located in the opposite direction of ‘the emphasis on the significance of environmental education.’ I think that this is why no one can proudly say, ‘Environmental education is totally worthless.’ Environmental education is decorated by ear-pleasing words, and people consider it as an important tool to solve environmental problems. However, whether it is important is completely different from whether it is possible to implement at school. Until the establishment of the Period of Integrated Learning, environmental education was considered as a part of social studies. Teachers were teaching about things, such as, four major pollution related disease in the 1960’s and the Ashio copper mine mineral pollution incident occurred in Meiji-era. The MOE’s call for the implementation of environmental education within the Period of Integrated Learning seems to me that MOE has expected us to alter
the way to teach environmental education; that is to say, we should not prioritize to transmit the knowledge of environmental problems to the children over letting the children have experiences of the natural environment. I myself give priority to the Period of Integrated Learning because if we can fully utilize this period, it might be possible to let the children enjoy learning. However, due to the expectation for the Integrated Learning, I feel that I have to put efforts in conducting other conventional classes otherwise I will receive complaints like: ‘Because you give priority to the Integrated Learning, the academic level of the children of your class is falling.’ (My Field note, December 8)

Kawakami-sensei showed that when attempting to invest time and energy into the Period of Integrated Learning, he was thinking of not only that period, but also other traditional subjects. In today’s society where the public is concerned about a decline in academic standards, the teacher cannot just give priority to the Period of Integrated Learning and its crucial part, or experiential learning activities, because it might influence the contents of other classes. This means that the teacher’s concerns about other subjects have an influence on what to teach and how to teach within the Period of Integrated Learning.

6.3.3 Contents of environmental education and the children’s lifestyle, living environment, and the parents’ cultural beliefs

There is a close relationship between environmental problems and the modern lifestyle that is wasteful and generates a lot of garbage. Thus, it is often pointed out that environmental problems call for a change of lifestyle especially in affluent societies. The last obstacle that arose from the interviews with teachers is relevant to this very point. The teachers were afraid of the possibility that the children would regard the contents of environmental education as a criticism on their lifestyle and family background. It was Ohnuki-sensei’s words that opened my eyes to this crucial point in studying environmental education in elementary schools.

Almost ten years ago, in a social studies class, I was talking to the children about the relationship between power plants and nuclear power, between nuclear power plants and plutonium, the danger and cruelty of plutonium, and how most countries had pulled the plug on that cruel chemical substance. While I was speaking, a boy got deathly pale. I didn’t notice that his father was working at Kansai Denryoku [= The Kansai electric power co.]. I immediately added, ‘However, in reality, our lives are blessed with the electricity made by the nuclear power plants. In the near future, one of you will discover another source of electrics that is not harmful to the earth and your health.’ Hearing the last words, the boy was satisfied. Because our words have big impacts on the children’s development both physically and mentally, if they consider that we are criticizing their parents or other family
members that is foundation of their development, they lose confidence in themselves. (My Field note, November 21)

What Ohnuki-sensei points out in this utterance is that those who are required to learn about environmental problems, or the children, are not just static epiphenomenon of a whole structure, called a school, but active “agents” (Bourdieu 1991 [1987]) who have their own way of thinking and sense of values that are culturally, socially, and historically constructed. Their lives consist of the accumulation of various experiences, including observing their parents working for them until late at night, being praised by the mother because of their good behavior, being scolded by the father due to their bad attitudes. Ten-year-old boys and girls have ten years of life history, in which they have formed a sense of values. They have been Establishing their own “system of acquired dispositions functioning on the practical level as categories of perception and assessment or as classificatory principles as well as being the organizing principles of action” (Bourdieu 1990 [1979]:13). Because they are actively living their lives as individuals, social and cultural beings, it is not justified to view children as merely lifeless and emotionless parts of a social system, or a school.

Traditionally, perhaps partly rooted in the Confucian philosophy that emphasizes the value of the teacher-student relationship, teachers have been highly admired by people in Japan (e.g., Uchimura 1995 [1908]). Although how much people appreciate the value of teachers has varied from age to age (Hirota 1999, 2001), elementary school children have basically learned to accept what the teacher says to them. Despite the fact that schools have recently been singled out for criticism (Imai 2004:135), children are hardly accustomed to critically considering teacher’s behavior and words. Thus, the teacher’s words have a great power over the children’s physical and mental development, and, consequently, their future lives. If they feel that such powerful teachers are saying something bad about their family, they lose confidence in their background, which is, as argued by a number of psychologists, a foundation of their development. Kikuchi-sensei also said.

In the Period of Integrated Learning, I talked about environmental problems and asked the children to tell their parents about what they learned. Then, on the next day, a girl quietly approached me and said, ‘My mom said, ‘we cannot do what I learned at school…’’ When she knew that her family was not interested in what she learned at school regarding environmental issues, and could not share this with her family like other children, that girl became really disappointed. I have sometimes observed such a case every time when I conducted environmental education. (My Field note, November 24)
The teachers are basically attempting to let the children learn how to be humble and grateful and express their appreciation for the parents, rather than let them cast a critical eye on their parents’ way of thinking, behavior, and attitudes. It should be partly due to the fact that desire for indulgence or passive love (amae, 甘え) has been traditionally viewed as a foundation of human development in Japan. There is a fundamental belief that after initial unconscious acceptance of indulgence, the child becomes aware of its lack, and in turn demands it. By recognizing the separation, one becomes aware of self (jibun 自分) (Rosenberger 1992). That is to say, people consider that whether a child successfully establish a close relationship with his/her parents, especially with mother, can result in whether s/he will be able to stand on his/her own feet in the future (Doi 1977; Doi & Saito 2004).

Nevertheless, the contents of environmental education sometimes involve a message that there might be a close relationship between what your father and mother have been taking for granted and environmental problems. This means that conducting environmental education may produce a clash of values between respect of parents and environmental issues. Thus, while teaching about environmental issues, or the impacts of modern lifestyle on nature, on the one hand, teachers have to consider how to maintain and reinforce the value of parents on the other hand. The school principal, Kawabuchi-sensei said to me:

There is a close relationship between environmental problems and our lifestyle, or people’s desire for convenience. For example, it is exemplified in the case of garbage-related problems. We teach the children the importance of recycling; however, if the parents said, ‘We are not going to be engaged in recycling because of the lack of leeway’ or ‘We are not interested in garbage-related problems,’ a school cannot do anything for them. A change in awareness of the parents is strongly required. What should be accomplished is to have the parents with different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds acknowledge the importance of caring for the environment. When the school asks all households to get involved in the recycling activities, most of the parents who are actively engaged have more or less leeway in their lives. Within this school district, there are many households getting involved in such activities. It may be partly because there are a large number of the households where three generations are living together. Albeit the parents are too busy to take care about the garbage every morning, the grand parents can do it. The children growing up in such an environment are establishing their

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26 The Japanese word for self is jibun, which literally means my share of the shared space between us. This word combines the meanings of “a unique being” and “part of the whole.” It emphasizes the idea that each person is an individual member of the totality of the society. As Shwelder points out, and as I discuss further in this thesis, Japanese parents and teachers tend to encourage children from infancy onward to seek out other people and to modify their behavior according to social roles and expectations. It is justified to say that the importance of adjusting to social feedback is expressed in the word, jibun.
view of values while looking at what the parents are doing and the grand
parents are doing. In contrast, the parents have little leeway in their lives in
terms of time and mental state tend to say, ‘I know the importance of
recycling, but I don’t have time to think of garbage every morning.’ (My
Field note, November 4)

The view that the family and the community are the basis of the children’s lives, and that
stability of those living environment provides a basis of the children’s development can be found
in the Ohnuki-sensei’s, Kikuchi-sensei’s, and Kawabuchi-sensei’s voices quoted above. In the
same interview, Kawabuchi-sensei mentioned, “When there is a clear division between the
parent’s and the child’s views of values, the relationship between the child and the parent tends to
be an individual versus another individual. So, the child cannot feel close to his/her parent. Thus,
at KES, we try to listen to not only the school children, but also, other generations like parents or
grand parents, and we attempt to help them to establish a good relationship between the children
and the parents/grand parents.” From the perspective of teachers, the parent-child relationship
holds higher value. They even think that unless a close parent-children relationship is successfully
established, children cannot develop well. Although these teachers did not necessarily use the
word, *amaeru* or *amae* in our conversations, they recognized and emphasized the merit of the
mental dependence of children on their parents. Based on this sense of values, Kawabuchi-sensei
highly valued the environmental educational activities that seemed to contribute to strengthening
the children-parent relationship.

6.4 Conclusion of chapter six

What is clarified in this chapter is the significance of viewing the interactions between the
teachers and children within environmental educational activities as a part of their lives. Virtually
all teachers expressed their sense of values that might, either directly or indirectly, influence their
practice of environmental education even while they were not talking about environmental
education. In order to comprehend the status quo of school environmental education and the
child’s and teacher’s perspectives of the environment and environmental problems, it is crucial to
spotlight not only environmental educational practices, but also, the cultural and social contexts
that bring about such educational activities.

The need of environmental education is widely recognized at KES, but virtually all teachers
who I talked with either in general conversations or in interviews were prioritizing the traditional
subjects over environmental education conducted within the Period of Integrated Learning.
However, it was true that every teacher acknowledged the importance of conducing
environmental education because it is crucial for all people to learn about the significance of nature and today’s environmental problems in order to find a solution for these global problems.

Based on my analysis, I uncovered the fact that there are various images of environmental education in the teachers’ minds, and identified three kinds of images in this chapter: (1) environmental education to transmit the knowledge regarding the environment and environmental problems to the children; (2) environmental education to let the children have a relationship with the surrounding (natural) environment and arouse the children’s interest in the natural environment and environmental problems; and (3) environmental education to foster people who can logically make decisions on their behavior. What is important is the fact that each teacher constructs the image of environmental education based on his/her experiences, sense of values, perspectives of education, and understanding of the status quo of today’s children. Teacher’s practices performed at school are governed by the logic that outsiders cannot easily see and understand: environmental education practices are governed by their own “structure or structuring” (habitus) and the given situation (see, Bourdieu 2001 [1980]). Teachers are not just relying on the sophisticated concept of environmental education discussed outside of the school to conduct environmental education; instead, they are always and extemporaneously establishing their own view of environmental education.

According to my interactions with the teachers, it became obvious that while having a will to conduct environmental education, a large number of teachers are currently facing the gap between what they can achieve and what they want to achieve. In order to identify the kinds of atmosphere that is required to conduct environmental education at elementary school, it is crucial to investigate the existing obstacles for the implementation of environmental education from the teacher’s viewpoint. In this chapter, I pointed out three obstacles based on my observation and interviews: (1) the lack of resources, (2) the complexity of the environmental problems, and (3) the fact that the contents of environmental education can be a criticism of the children’s lifestyle and the parents’ ways of thinking, which serve as a foundation of the children’s development. All these points clearly reveal the fact that teachers’ business is not just a transmission of a certain set of culturally acceptable knowledge to students; rather, it is either explicitly or implicitly, directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally influenced by a variety of factors. Today’s global environmental problems are not easily solved. An inventive, holistic approach is required. Education is one such approach to environmental problems, and schools are urged to teach about environmental problems and the importance of the environment to children. However, from teachers’ perspectives, environmental problems are too complicated and complex for elementary school students to understand. In other words, the students do not have enough experiences and
knowledge base to understand environmental problems. Thus, the teachers are necessarily trying to simplify when they teach about the problems. Yet, some teachers told me that the simplification of the complicated problems seemed to ironically make the students understand the issues as simple and easy-to-understand problems.

Moreover, the fact that knowledge and information regarding environmental problems are not value free makes the teachers wonder and struggle with the way to conduct environmental education. Not only students, but also teachers themselves are not conscious about environmental problems and the importance of natural environment in everyday life. Some teachers hesitantly expressed their opinions that it is difficult for the teachers to let the students realize the severity and magnitude of environmental problems and the value of nature at school. Additionally, teachers are afraid of the possibility that the students regard the contents of environmental education as a criticism of their lifestyle and family background. Desire for indulgence or passive love has been traditionally viewed as a basis of children’s development. In other words, it is believed that whether one can establish a relationship of trust in his/her childhood has a strong impact on his/her development. At least partly due to this perspective, teachers are generally encouraging the students to learn to appreciate their parents rather than criticize them. However, the contents of environmental education can involve a message that what one’s parents have been taking for granted have a negative impact on the natural environment. Considering this point, teachers are worried that environmental education may produce a clash of values between respect of parents and environmental issues.

In addition to these important points, I emphasized that teachers feel that they are lacking time and resources to conduct effective environmental education at elementary school. The Ministry of Education (MOE) has widely pronounced what has been done to promote school environmental education, and argued that environmental education is being conducted in the Period of Integrated Learning at elementary schools nationwide. The MOE and the advocates for the Period of Integrated Learning have tended to argue that the introduction of the Period of Integrated Learning enables individual schools and teachers to define the contents to teach, and in turn expand the capability to teach students about the importance of the environment in the discourse of environmental education. In contrast, I was constantly encountering teachers who were having a hard time conducting classes that are interesting and understandable for as many students as possible with insufficient time and scarce resources. While observing those teachers, the voice of Noam Chomsky often came up to my mind: “Freedom without opportunity is a devil's gift, and the refusal to provide such opportunities is criminal” (1997). In order to pursue and attain any ideals and to realize any objectives, appropriate time and resources are ultimately
important. Without those foundations, the KES teachers are seemingly suffering from gaps between ideal and reality; while acknowledging the need of environmental education, teacher were struggling to put it into practice. The lack of resources and time has to be kept in mind because this has strengthened the sense of loneliness and isolation in today’s teachers’ minds. Without strong supports from parents and society as a whole, teachers should feel that they are given too much responsibility for raising and shaping the children. Environmental education seems like one of a large pile of tasks assigned to the busy teachers. Thus, it is hard for them to positively evaluate what they are currently conducting as environmental education in the Period of Integrated Learning despite much trial and error. Because this is one of the biggest arguments of my thesis, I will further discuss this point through the descriptions of the fourth graders’ environmental activities in the next chapter.
Chapter 7. Environmental Education Practice at KES

The Ministry of Education (MOE) has declared that the environment-related contents are enhanced in the traditional subjects such as science and social studies. However, teachers did not make a conscious effort to talk about environment or environmental problems in classes. Partly because the word “environmental education” is not used to point to those contents, teachers tend to imagine environmental educational practices as a part of the Period of Integrated Learning. This tendency is exemplified by the common expressions heard from the teachers; such as, “At KES, environmental education has been implemented only within fourth-grade Period of Integrated Learning,” “Because I’m not currently teaching the fourth grade, I hardly talk about things related to the environment in front of the class,” “Just as the fourth grade is required to conduct environmental education in the Period of Integrated Learning, we are required to teach other topics. Thus, we do not teach environmental education to our students.” A woman teacher expressed her honest feeling as follows.

Because many people are now infatuated with the environmental movement, we can find environment-related contents in this Japanese textbook though the children ought to learn Japanese language in the period of Japanese class. I did not expect that the so-called “environmental boom” would have affected even the contents of the textbooks… (My Field note, November 8)

The purpose of this chapter is to concretely report what teachers and students were actually doing in the Period of Integrated Learning, and to clarify the teachers’ frustrations of conducting environmental education. The fourth grade’s environmental education implemented within the Period of Integrated Learning was titled, “Hito ni yasashii shizen ni yasashii machi zukuri” (To realize a ‘people-friendly, nature-friendly community), and was aimed at having the children observe their own living community and consider the way it is. This title and aim were made by the fourth grade teachers in the beginning of the school year.27

After briefly illustrating what the children had studied during the first term (between April and July) based on the teachers’ explanations, I will describe the teacher-children interactions in the environmental educational activities that I directly observed. The fourth grade’s environmental educational activities consisted of two major activities. First, the students created a

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27 Japanese word “machii” is usually translated as “city” or “town,” but I prefer to use “community” in this chapter because it seems more appropriate to what teachers attempted to express.
digital environmental map. The students added notes of what they wanted to tell the viewers of
the map to the outline map handed out by the teachers. To emphasize that the fourth graders made
the map by using PCs, the teachers and the students called this map a “digital” environmental
map.

Second, the fourth graders also participated in the “Chûkan (or, Chūō-Kanjō-sen, literally
means, the central belt highway) clean-up event.” This event is organized by Osaka prefecture,
and has taken place every year, and the participants of this event were not only the KES students
but also the children from other elementary schools and the residents of the community. Because
the fourth graders participated in the event last year and two years ago, the fourth grade teachers
decided to let the students of this year get involved in this event as has happened in the past.

7.1 The creation of the digital environmental map

7.1.1 The Period Integrated Learning practice in the first term

In April, the fourth grader’s activities started with “the study of the environment-related
vocabulary,” the goal of which was to let the children have an interest in the concept of the
“environment” and lead them to be able to proactively learn about environmental problems. Mori-
sensei mentioned in retrospect, “They will encounter many difficult, unfamiliar vocabulary like
‘global warming.’ In such a case, while attempting to explain the meaning of those words in a
concise manner as a teacher, I did not put emphasis on whether they could precisely understand
them. Rather, I was trying to raise their interests in environmental problems.”

In May, the children were working on “the observation of the school district environment.”
All fourth graders (every class was divided into seven small groups, or han, consisting of five or
six boys and girls) were directed by the teachers to walk around the school altogether. Each group
was given a throwaway camera, and its members were expected to collaboratively take notes and
take photos of what they were interested in, or more precisely “what seems ‘yasashii’ (friendly)
and ‘yasashikunai’ (unfriendly) from their perspective.” Notwithstanding the teachers’ hope of
letting the children use digital cameras because it would certainly make the whole process of
creating the digital map smoother, there were not a sufficient number. Thus, they could not help
but let the children use throwaway cameras. When I began my observation, those photos were
already scanned into the school computers and stored so that they were easily accessible to the
children. Tanaka-sensei reflected on that time, and said with a smile, “Although the environment
around the school should be familiar to the children, this close observation let them view the
familiar landscape from different perspectives. Children came to me and told me enthusiastically
about what they encountered, including Braille on a grab handle of slopes, textured paving blocks
on the street, signals for the sight-impaired, and illegal and nuisance parking of automobiles and bicycles. One had an expression of grief on her face because she found a textured paving block being crushed."

7.1.2 The Period of Integrated Learning practice in the second term

PCs were located in a computer room on the third floor of the east building, which was a different building from where the fourth graders’ classrooms were located. Thus, in order to use the PCs, the children had to grab their own pen case and A4-size notebook when they heard the starting bell, and walk to the computer room. It took almost ten minutes of every Period of Integrated Learning class. Teachers surely expected the students to be in the computer room by the class started, but some students were always late for the class because they were intently playing until the very last minute of the recess time. Moreover, in order to draw the students’ attention and begin to speak to them, at least a few minutes are required at the beginning of every class.

Almost 40 PCs were arranged in the computer room. According to one male experienced teacher, “it was almost in 1995, computers were introduced into the elementary schools in Sakai city. … And, at KES, every individual has become able to use a PC since only last year.” It is not unusual that a public elementary school is equipped with PCs for the students today. Indeed, a young woman teacher told me, “At the elementary school where I was almost four years ago, every student had already been able to use a laptop in PC education class.” Ohnuki-sensei, who was acquainted with the modern history of the Information education in Sakai city, clearly expressed his perspective of computer education as follows.

It’s no longer a matter of whether the PC should or should not be practiced at an elementary school today. There is no other choice but to do it. Though only the rich were required to utilize a PC to go up the promotion ladder in earlier times, virtually all people are required to acquire a basic skill of PC today in this society. (My Field note, November 11)

The atmosphere of the computer room was completely different from that of a general classroom in which teachers and children were going about their ordinary school life. Due to the special care for the PCs, the computer room was equipped with an air conditioner in contrast to the general classroom where it was usually almost 35 degrees Celsius in September. In the KES building, it is only in the principal’s office, the teacher’s lounge, and the computer room where it is possible to control the temperature in summer. The children were required to get their indoor shoes off and put them in a shoes box, before entering the carpeted computer room although they
were always wearing those same shoes at almost every place in the school building including the teacher’s lounge and the classroom. Once putting those shoes in the shoes box, the children raced to go into the room because they knew that they could run the air conditioner. When the room was not air-conditioned enough, they often begged for a teacher (or, even me) to turn it on.  

A woman teacher complaint in a quiet voice, “there are no air-conditioners for the students at school, but for the computers.”

From the viewpoint of environmental education, there seems to be a hidden message to the children behind the fact that only the rooms where the children could not enter without the teacher’s permission were equipped with air-conditioning structure of the school building. I do not intend to argue that teachers are enjoying comfortable air-conditioned rooms while the children are suffering from the heat. Indeed, all teachers were out of the teachers’ office and bearing up under the sweltering hot summer weather all the day just like the children. Although a few teachers visit the office between classes, they usually left the room as soon as they grabbed something required for the next class. They were in the teachers’ office only for ten or twenty seconds. Except for that, teachers never came back to the air-conditioned office between 9am and the end of school. Nevertheless, the children feel that they were not allowed to get into such an air-conditioned room although the teachers were able to enjoy it. Indeed, when I was soaking with sweat on a hot summer day, a girl kindly said to me; “Why don’t you go to some air-conditioned room, Sugai-sensei? (My Field note, September 13) You can enter the room because you are an adult, can’t you?” It might be an overinterpretation, but it appeared to me that this difference between the adults and children exposed the fact that the teachers possess more power than the students do.

In such a computer room, the children were struggling to create a digital environmental map in cooperation with the members of their small group (han) based on the data (notes and photos) that they gathered in the first term. Given the way they fiddled with the mouse and the keyboard, the children were apparently not familiar with it. Thus, although a teacher carefully explained how to utilize the computers to make the digital environmental map, those explanations were often not clear enough for the children; thus, they repeatedly raised their hands and asked very basic questions that did not have direct connection with the map. For example, in the Tanaka-

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28 It seemed ironical to me because the children were usually enduring the summer heat without air-conditioner in their classroom, but only when getting involved in the environmental educational activities, they could study in an air-conditioned room.

29 Indeed, out of the 31 Asano-sensei’s class children, seven had a PC at home, but only a few said that they were usually using it. In most cases, they had a PC at home, but it was belonging to their parents and they hardly used it in their ordinary lives.
sensei’s Period of Integrated Learning classes, the children were always asking the following questions when they were in front of the computer, “How can I type a Japanese character?” “Can you tell me how to convert hiragana into kanji?” “Sensei, would you tell me how to enter katakana characters into a keyboard?” “How can I save the data?” “Could you show me how to open the file?” Because each child hardly paid attention to the interactions between Tanaka-sensei and the classmates while concentrating on his/her own task, Tanaka-sensei had to answer the same kind of question again and again. Facing a barrage of basic questions regarding the usage of the computer, Tanaka-sensei loudly mentioned, “When you encounter a problem, ask your group’s members at first because I cannot respond to all your questions.” However, the barrage of the questions was unrelenting until the last moment.30

In the early phase of their activities, the children committed time to carefully select the photos to be used in their map, and to enter what they thought and felt when they saw the sites appeared in the photos and what they wanted to tell the viewers by means of the keyboard. If one of their group members did not clearly understand what s/he was required to do or had a trouble keeping up with others, the children were expected to put in a word to help him/her (tasukebune wo dasu), and perform their tasks in close cooperation with all group members. It seemed to me that Asano-sensei hardly cared about the quality of their maps and, in more concrete terms, she did not pay attention to the contents of their comments attached to each photo. She kept looking at the children who were applying themselves to their tasks in a small group with the expectation that the students completed the map with their friends with no help from her regardless of the quality of the map. While often vocalizing her expectations of the children to do their best to finish their own maps, Asano-sensei rarely explicitly impelled them to be sensitive about the quality. She placed a higher priority on the process to create the maps over the quality of the completed product.

Also, the situation that Asano-sensei herself was too busy to look over and to make a comment on each map let her disregard the quality of the map. It was partly due to the successive questions about PC usage raised from the children, and her fundamental recognition that, in her own words, “while struggling to learn how to use a PC, the children cannot be sensitive to the contents of their writing.” Accordingly, the more the children intently went about their tasks, the more Asano-sensei unavoidably became busy because of the basic questions raised by the students.

30 Although there was an air conditioner, the scene in which Tanaka-sensei was exposed to a barrage of questions from more than thirty students at once was overwhelming. I observed the same things happened in other fourth grade classes. Since Tanaka-sensei asked me to respond to the basic questions raised by the children, I decided to do so in order to investigate what kind of things they were considering as difficult.
children. In addition, as they were creating the maps in September, the students had to concentrate their energy on the preparation for the Sports Day. Due to the preparation for the Sports Day, the pre-established study plan was frequently altered, and some of the Period of Integrated Learning were cut out in September. In addition, they were not paying attention to the classes, and hardly understood what the teacher was talking about because the practices of the dance and group event under the scorching sun robbed the children of vitality and impaired their concentration. Consequently, the quality of the map and the contents of the children’s comments on the each photo tended to be left on the back burner.

Only within a Period of Integrated Learning in the first week after the Sports Day, the Asano-sensei’s class children discussed the quality of the map and the contents of the interpretations that they had attached to the each picture. In the class, Asano-sensei attempted to “measure how much the children’s activities had been progressing” and “let the children comprehend their progressiveness and what they immediately had to work on.” In the beginning of the class, having the children take their seat, Asano-sensei clearly and considerately mentioned:

You have been grappling with the creation of the environmental digital map so far in cooperation with your group members. Eventually, each group will complete only one neat and organized map. For that reason, I would like you to discuss the concept of your map today with the group members. Without sharing the basic concept of the map, your map will lose consistency and uniformity. Such a map cannot be regarded as a map made under combined efforts. … Discuss, such as, whether you are going to involve both favorable and unfavorable features of the community’s environment in your environmental map, whether you will introduce only the beauty of the environment, whether you want to gather information regarding the natural environment in our community and introduce it to your classmates through your map, or whether you are going to focus on things making your life convenient and fun, and define a fundamental concept of your map, or what you will emphasize in your map, and tell it to me by the end of this class. You will finish the map within this month, OK? (My Field note, November 4)

Knowing that they need to speed up to finish the digital environmental map, the children had an active discussion with the members of the same group regarding what they have written, what kind of information they need to add, and what they want to emphasize throughout the whole map, or the contents of their own maps. A girl complained, “Sensei, the boys of my group never participate in the discussion!” This reflected that they were actually restarting their activities as Asano-sensei expected; thus, Asano-sensei was looking at these active conversations that virtually every small group had with a smile.
It is not so straightforward for the teachers to concretely access how much the students understand what the teachers are talking about in process of conducting classes. Particularly, in terms of the Period of Integrated Learning, it is widely said that the tests, which are generally used to assay the student’s understanding of the class, are not an appropriate way to comprehend what the students learned. Thus, the teachers are trying to analyze the students’ understanding according to the students’ words, behavior, and attitudes towards the activities, and putting their efforts to smoothly conduct the class based on the analysis.

In the middle phase of the children’s activities, the fourth grade teachers began to recognize that the children had been overusing the terms, “yasashii” (friendly) and “yasashikunai” (unfriendly), in their maps with little regard for the meaning of those terms. For example, the children put a brief comment, “unclean water is unfriendly to fish and other pond animals,” by a picture of floating trash in a small pond; “This white line is drawn for the prevention of the traffic accidents, thus I think that it is friendly to the environment” by a picture of a luminescent white line on a street; “Because someone did graffiti on the wall, it is not friendly” by a photo of graffiti on a wall; and “This is an environment-friendly vending machine because a coin slot is located at a lower position” by a picture of a canned beverage dispenser.

Ohnuki-sensei explained his interpretation of the tendency that the children overused these words:

Because we [teachers] used the words “nature-friendly (shizen ni yasashii)” and “people-friendly (hito ni yasashii)” without particular regard to its effect in front of the children, such as, on the blackboard and in the handouts, the children have easily used these words. It’s possible to find a large number of phrases including the words “yasashii” in their maps. Initially, I had expected the children to describe what they considered more in detail; for example, I wanted them to explain about how they are friendly to people and why those are seemingly unfriendly to the environment. I often told the children not to conclude their comments by the sentences like “It is friendly to the animals” or “It seems unfriendly to nature” because it must be very easy for them to do so. They don’t even need to consider what they want to describe when they use such well-known, convenient words. We can often encounter the word like “eco-friendly” and “earth-friendly” almost everyday, everywhere such as on TV, in magazines, and on the street because those words are so popular today. It was the most difficult to lead them to describe what they thought in more concrete terms. (My Field note November 15)

Indeed, the fourth grade teachers frequently used the terms “yasashii” (friendly) or “yasashikunai” (unfriendly), and even incorporated them in the title of this year’s Period of Integrated Learning: “To realize a ‘people-friendly, nature-friendly community.’” One of its goals
was defined as “to direct the children to consider what they are able to do now to realize a ‘people-friendly, nature-friendly community,’ and boost the children’s awareness that they have to acquire abilities to get things done and let them recognize the importance of living as a member of a community.” Also, when having the children observe the school district environment in the first term, the teachers provided thorough instruction to classify what the children were interested in according to whether they were “friendly” or “unfriendly.”

According to the guidance plan for the Period of Integrated Learning made by the fourth grade teachers, the concept of “yasashisa” (friendliness) of community defined as “an environment in which people can live a convenient, safe, comfortable, and vibrant life, and in which the human rights are fully guaranteed to all those people.” Ohnuki-sensei, one of the composers of this plan, mentioned:

In essence, environmental education should be equivalent to human rights education. Don’t you think so? There might be discussions regarding whether environmental education is a part of human rights education or the latter is a part of the former. However, when taking a serious look at the core of this problem, I consider that protecting the environment is identical with protecting human rights. In the era when the Four Major Pollution Related Disease received considerable publicity, it was common that people were neglected in the society.³¹ In the case of Minamata disease, for instance, the problem was that people suffering from the disease were widely ignored in the process of the modernization, wasn’t it? If human rights were thoroughly respected, such pollution-related diseases could be prevented, right? Thus, to ensure the environment or nature can ultimately lead to ensure human rights, and to protect human rights will lead to the protection of the environment or nature. In that sense, I consider that it is crucial to teach the children about the importance of “protecting their own rights and health” in environmental education. I can see the significance of implementing environmental education at school to the extent that it could be regarded as equivalent to human rights education. (My Field note, November 21)

After referring to the environmental pollution in the 1960’s, Ohnuki-sensei was expressing his perspective that “to protect the environment (nature)” should be identified with “to protect human rights (or, people).” Also, the KES school principal mentioned in his comment on the fourth grade Period of Integrated Learning.

Fourth grade teachers named this year’s Period of Integrated Learning “To realize a ‘people-friendly, nature-friendly community.’” In general, “people-friendly community” and “nature-friendly community” are considered to be

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³¹ Yondai Kôgai-byô, or Minamata disease, Itai-itai disease, Niigata Minamata disease, and Yokkaichi asthma (see, chapter four of this thesis).
opposed to each other. However, in terms of this unit, these two concepts are expanded and regarded as the essential parts of a “friendliness of a community.” In this sense, it can be fair to say that the fourth grade teachers view the “people-friendly, nature-friendly community” as the community in which people and nature are able to live together. And, in such a community, both handicapped and non-handicapped people may also be able live together with no discrimination. (My Field note November 15)

According to the fourth grade teachers, essential features of such a “people-friendly, nature-friendly community” are convenience, safeness, comfort, vibrancy, and respect for the human rights of all people. Their perspective of a desirable community was clearly reflected in the children’s environmental digital maps.

What the children categorized as “friendly” were, such things as, “clean pond water,” “a street with well managed roadside trees,” “a playground for older people and children,” “a big tree,” “a luminescent white line on a street,” “a payphone booth,” “a coin slot located at a lower position of a canned beverage dispenser,” “traffic signs,” and “a signal device for the sight-impaired people.” Even a police station was regarded as “friendly.” A boy considered “a big tree” as friendly because “it is providing a comfortable habitat to birds,” and a girl regarded “traffic signs” as friendly since “it ensures the people’s safe lives.” Another boy saw the police officers as friendly because “they protect people’s comfortable and safe lives,” and another girl told me that she thought of “a payphone booth” as friendly because it is convenient when she needs to make a phone call. There was also a girl who said, “I heard that green foliage is good for people’s eyes from my grandma, so I think that the trees lining the street are very people-friendly.”

On the other hand, what the children categorized as “unfriendly” included “unclean pond water due to floating trash,” “graffiti on the wall,” “garbage on street corner,” “broken Braille blocks,” “weeds by the ditch,” and “pest insects.” A girl who viewed “graffiti on the wall” as unfriendly told me that “this is unfriendly because people who see the graffiti must feel uncomfortable,” and a boy told me, “I think that unclean pond water is unfriendly because it interferes with the frogs’ and fishes’ comfortable life.” According to him, because he liked small animals like frog and fish, he would become uncomfortable when their habitats were messed up. Another boy who put “pest insects” in the category of unfriendly told me, “I think of that pest insects are certainly unfriendly because they are harmful. Thus, a pigeon is friendly since it can get rid of those pest insects. However, the pigeons should not be increasing too much because to clean up their droppings is a painful task.”

In October, the children presented the completed map to their classmates and the children in the other classes in order to exchange opinions on other groups’ maps. Once receiving an opinion,
the children discussed how to refine the original map based on the opinion. From the teachers’
perspectives, this would be a good opportunity for the children to develop the quality of the map,
which in turn would lead to enhancing their understanding of what they had learned or awareness
of the environmental issues in the community. (For instance, they expected that it would be
possible for the children to objectify the meaning of the abstract expressions, “friendly” and
“unfriendly”). Nevertheless, in contrast to the teacher’s expectations, the majority was entirely
focused on pointing out typographical errors and omissions within other groups’ maps. One of the
teachers made a comment.

Well… By any means, the children tended to focus only on trapping others
in their wording. Only a few were referring to the contents of the other
groups’ maps. I consequently thought that we could not let the children fully
boil down the discussion about the quality of their interpretations of each
picture that is an essential part of this unit. We need to figure out how to have
the children improve the quality of their interpretations of each picture or that
of their own maps by themselves. Because of the lack of enough vocabulary
and abilities to express what they were thinking and feeling through their
writing, students’ written expressions seemed too childish and immature. It
hampered improvement in the quality of their maps. When reading others’
interpretations of each picture, which are a pivotal part of the maps, they
cannot recognize errors and mistakes in those writings. In order to let them
improve the quality of their maps, we needed to teach from how to express
their thoughts in writing. (My Field note, November 15)

Consequently, in the completed digital environmental maps, there remained abstract
expressions—the words “yasashii” (friendly) and “yasashikunai” (unfriendly). As the fourth
grade teachers realized, this was not surprising as that was where the teacher started. The teachers
actually accepted the fact that they should not use the words like “yasashii” and “yasashikunai”
in the environmental education classes while taking a long look at the completed work.

In the last stage of the activities, or when they completed their own maps, the teachers let the
students write an essay about what they were feeling and thinking in the process of making the
digital map. In their essay, the students described things, such as “It was difficult to enter what I
want to write by means of keyboard.” “Because my group members helped me a lot, it’s taking
time, but I could finally fulfill my role.” “The process of making the map was complicated at the
first glance, but I could finish it in cooperation with my friends.” Among the students, there were
also many students who wrote that they would like to be engaged in the similar activities because
it was fun. Virtually all students described their positive opinions in their essays. On the contrary,
only a few, if any, students, referred to what they thought about their community or how they felt
about environmental problems.
Moreover, their essays reveal the fact that the students are very sensitive and carefully watching what their friends are doing in the classroom. In the process of making the map, the students were interested in not only the activities, but also in what their classmates were doing as well as analyzing how much they were absorbed in the activities. When they found a friend who was giving himself/herself over to the activities, they had a sense that they “want to be able to concentrate on what should be done until the end in cooperation with friends.” Based on the observation of the classmates’ attitudes toward the activities, each is reviewing his/her own attitudes toward the same activities.

Although the children are not describing what they learned in the series of activities, how they thought about environmental problems, and what they knew about the environment of their community, it is too hasty to conclude that they were not learning at all about their environment and environmental problems. Their completed maps were full of the students’ feelings about the environment. For example, one wrote that he had a sense of loneliness when he found a dirty pond that is surrounded by the trash, and another describe that she wants adults to keep her a small park with safe equipment and a few big trees. It would be too hasty to argue that today’s children have a love of nature and that they understand the importance of the environment and the severity of environmental problems. However, I feel that we should avoid underestimating those students’ comments on their map. At least, through their activities, their interests were successfully directed to the natural environment in their community. Vygotsky (2005 [1926]) strongly emphasizes the significance of directing the children’s spontaneous interests to the right and acceptable directions in the process of education. He regards the control of the children’s interests as the establishment of the foundation for their future learning, and argues that the process of the control of the children’s interests is tantamount to the cultivation of the field before sowing seeds. Drawing on his analogy, it is possible to say that the fourth grade teachers were actually cultivating the field (children’s interests). Whether the seeds will come into bloom is dependent on whether a favorable climate for the seeds will be maintained or not. That is, whether what the students learned in the Period of Integrated Learning will bloom in their future is dependent on the condition of life of each student in the future. It would be fair to say that the in terms of the Period of Integrated Learning, what teachers can evaluate is only a part of what students learned about nature. Thus, from the teacher’s perspective, it is easy to develop the activities to conduct in the Period of Integrated Learning, but it is difficult to attain satisfaction from the activities. This seems also applicable to the fourth grader’s activity, or “Chûkan (the central belt highway) clean-up event.”
7.2 The out-of-school activity: “Chūkan wo kireinisuru hi”

September 20, and it was over 30 degrees Celsius like any other day. The fourth graders participated in an out-of-school activity, which was a clean-up event around “Chūkan,” or the biggest belt highway nearby KES. KES fourth graders have traditionally participated in this clean-up event every year as a part of environmental education practice. When I entered the teacher’s lounge around eight in the morning, the fourth grade teachers were checking the operation of their own digital cameras at their desk. Responding to the Tanaka-sensei’s word, “We are lucky because it is cloudy today, aren’t we?” the other teachers chorused with smiles, “Yes, that’s right” while watching at the cameras.

Around 8:45, after the teacher’s morning meeting, Asano-sensei headed to her classroom where the children had been waiting for her in a bustling environment. A few school backpacks on the children’s desks, which were supposed to be in their lockers, showed that the children were hardly concentrating on the study during the morning study period. Asano-sensei said to the children in a loud voice as soon as entering the classroom, “What have you been doing, everybody? You have to pay more attention to your morning study!” Then, she made the usual greetings and began daily morning meeting with the children without referring to the clean-up event at all.

Almost ten minutes after Asano-sensei started the first class of the day, she stopped talking about the contents of the arithmetic, and asked a leader and a sub-leader to come around her desk in order to hand out white T-shirts and white caps, which were mementoes of the event, to all the children. As soon as receiving those mementoes, the children changed into the brand-new T-shirt. Since the T-shirt and cap were adult small size, it was too large for some children like Sakaguchi-kun and Kawakami-kun. In the large T-shirt, they showed how absurd they looked to their friends and laughed at each other.

Looking at the children enjoying wearing the new T-shirts, Asano-sensei asked, “You can have this T-shirt because you will strenuously participate in the clean-up activity around the Chūkan today. What are you going to do about the plastic bag, which the T-shirt was in?” While some children were not paying attention to her words, a few responded to her, “I will put my old T-shirt in it,” and “I am going to put it in my backpack in the locker.” Since some were still not

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Osaka prefecture has annually organized this event, called “Chūkan (Central belt highway) wo kireinisuru-hi” (Chūkan beautification campaign), for almost twenty years. This event consists of two kinds of activities: clean-up activity of the area along the highway and educational activity including appealing to people to quit littering and to clean up the communities. Participants of this event involve not only the KES students, but also children from other elementary schools and the volunteer residents of the community.
giving their mind to the conversation going on in the classroom, Asano-sensei said in a loud voice, “Listen!” Then, the atmosphere of the classroom at last quieted down, and the following teacher-students conversation continued.

Asano-sensei: You can put the plastic bag in the trashcan, but do not do littering. If you are going to throw it on the floor, there is no point to get involved in the clean-up event at all. You know that, right? Think carefully about why you are wearing the T-shirt and what you are going to do around the Chûkan. Tell me what you will do today.

Sakaguchi-kun: Pick up trash on the street.

Katori-kun: We are going to clean up Chûkan.

Asano-sensei: Right. You are going to clean up the Chûkan together. So, you are not going to throw your trash on the street, but pick that up. Though I told you before, what kind of trash will you pick up today?

Kinoshita-san: Cigarette butts.

Suzuki-san: Maybe empty bottles and cans.

Katori-san: Weren’t you saying that there might be fallen leaves there?

Asano-sensei: Yes. I told you that. … So, you are going to pick up those things today. Thus, you cannot leave rubbish on the street, can you? … Ok. Then, grab only your water bottle and go in front of the gym.

(My Field note, September 20)

When the children of the Asano-sensei’s class arrived in front of the gym, or around 9:20, other fourth graders had already begun to line up. Other than the Asano-sensei’s class’s children, all participants of the clean-up events—Asano-sensei, the other children, the other fourth grade teachers—were wearing the new white T-shirts and caps. Even the school principal Kawabuchi-sensei, Akiyama-sensei, and Kinashi-sensei were getting ready to go along with the fourth graders. Almost five minutes later, after confirming that everyone was sitting down on the ground and paying attention to him, Ohnuki-sensei began talking in front of the children.

Today, you will have to sometimes gather together and line up as you are doing right now. When that happens, class representatives take the initiative in lining up and counting the number of classmates. And after ascertaining that everyone has gotten together, quietly sit down on the ground and wait for the next instruction from the teachers. Do you understand? … Then, from now, we are going to head to Chûkan to clean up and pick up garbage in the street. As you well know, there are a number of high-speed automobiles along Chûkan while you will be picking up garbage. If only thinking about garbage in the street, you may not notice the automobiles approaching. Thus, please always be cautious about the automobiles on Chûkan, and if you see someone who does not care about them, tell him to watch out for traffic. Today,
Kwabuchi-school-principal, Kinashi-sensei, Sugai-sensei, and Akiyama-sensei are going to go along with us. (My Field note, September 20)

9:35, all fourth graders in the same white T-shirts stood up at once and walked through the school gate following the teachers. On the way to Chūkan, the children frequently murmured while looking at cars passing through the street, “Why are we walking along this busy street?” The teachers were always concerned about the children’s safety. The school principal was moving backward and forward and frequently encouraged some children who looked tired, “Gambatte!” Only five minutes after they left school, Imoto-kun began to complain, “I am exhausted! My body feels really heavy” and Miyagi-san said with a frown, “Oh, my foot hurt. I cannot walk anymore.”

The children often introduced me to what they knew about the school district; for instance, where their houses were, where the police box was, where their cram schools were, etc. Tamada-kun approached me with a smile and said, “Sugai-sensei, can you look at that tall chimney beyond the shrine? That is a municipal garbage incineration plant called “S Clean Center” (pseudonym). Around that plant, there is big rice pad, and many insects and water animals live.” There was the children’s favorite old camphor tree in the shrine. When we were passing by the tree, Mitsuya-kun asked me, “Why don’t you take a picture of this tree?” While I was pointing the camera at the old tree as he said, Tamada-kun and Kawakami-kun said to me, “This tree is also a good habitat for some insects and birds!” The children, especially boys, like insects, and whenever they see a big tree or clods of dir on the ground, they enthusiastically say, “Look at that! Don’t you think that there might be some insects?” Listening to their utterance, I had come to consider that I should not assert that today’s children are completely removed from nature compared to the old days.

While enjoying conversations, the children found two young men walking in front of them. Those young men who wore casual T-shirts, denim pants, and thick cotton gloves seemed to be going to participate in the clean-up event together with the KES boys and girls. Several children around me were keeping their eyes on those two men’s attitudes. What they were interested in was the cigarettes that the two men were just smoking. They would often flick a cigarette ash and, eventually, discarded their cigarette butts on the street. The children were following the movement of the ash attentively. A girl said in a quiet voice to her friend with a dubious look on her face, “Why are they doing that? Are they going to pick up the garbage on the street with us?” These two girls as well as other KES children were relentlessly told by the teachers not to throw their garbage on the street in the morning.
A few days later, when I explained about the interaction between the two men and the several children looking carefully at them in the conversation with some KES teachers, a woman teacher expressed her feeling, “I have sometimes seen such a scene too. Then, I have come to feel that people who need environmental education most should be adults rather than school children. I do not mean that it is meaningless to conduct environmental education at elementary school, but it is, the adults around the children, who really need it because the children are learning by looking at the adults’ attitudes.” Moreover, even though I did not mention anything about the interaction between the two men and the children at all, Miura-san, a mother of a fourth grade girl, said to me,

I have continuously told my daughters not to litter. When we go to a mountain and look at garbage in a river, I show it to them and say, ‘Look at that garbage. Even though everybody knows that they should not throw garbage in the river, individuals’ garbage has accumulated little by little, and now the increased garbage is polluting the river water.’ While talking (to my daughters), I feel embarrassed and guilty as an adult and as a parent. When I see someone litter while walking with my daughter, I feel uncomfortable; but, at the same time, I am forced to wonder what I can say to her and how I can explain this behavior to her. If I see her litter, I reprehend her for the bad behavior; however, if she does the same thing to an adult she sees littering, she is scolded. She should be thinking, ‘Why should I be scolded while adults are not scolded for the same bad behavior?’ I myself feel indignation with the contradiction. As a parent, I have to tell my children what is right and wrong, and ought to scold their misbehavior and immorality, but, on the other hand, I know that they might be aware of the contradictions. (My Field note, December 15)

By the rice paddy nearby the S. Clean Center, Katori-kun enjoyed a conversation with his friends. Katori-kun somewhat proudly said, “I know these red flowers. My mom told me that it is called cluster-amaryllis.” Others were listening to him. There were certainly several cluster-amaryllis, each of which were almost 40 centimeters high, and had several vivid red flowers. Yagami-san asked, “What is that white bird over there?” Nobody knew it. Yagami-san turned her head to look at the school principal looking at the conversation with a smile on his face. She asked, “Do you know that white bird in the rice paddy, Kôchô-sensei [the school principal]?” He responded, “Wait… Let me see. Oh, that white bird is an egret.”

When they arrived at the Harumi Park, which was a gathering spot on Chûkan about fifteen minutes after they left KES, a number of people, without distinction of age and sex, were already assembling.33 People were busily moving around the park following the announcement from the

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33 Almost 270 elementary school students and over 700 local people got involved in the Chûkan
speakers. While murmuring, “I’m exhausted” “Oh, it’s too hot,” and wiping the sweat off their face, the KES children were monitoring people’s movements and waiting for the teacher’s instructions. Many were asking Asano-sensei to allow them drinking water or tea in the water bottle, but she did not allow it. She said “You cannot drink it until you reach the place where you are able to line up and sit down.”

When the children of Asano-sensei’s class got to the designated area, other classes had already finished lining up. As soon as it was confirmed that everyone had gotten together, Ohnuki-sensei began talking.

Ok. Look, and listen to me. You can drink tea in your own water bottle, but don’t drink too much because you will need to go to a restroom during the clean-up activities. Then, from now, we are going to begin to clean up Chûkan. Because it is too broad and there are too many people, I would like to divide you into two groups, or group A and B. … Also, today you need to water the roadside flowers and plants as well as pick up the garbage in the street. So, can each class decide five people who will help to water the flowers and plants? (My Field note, September 20)

During Ohnuki-sensei’s talking, Mitsuya-kun, who were sitting down at the end of the line, complained in a quiet voice, “Because of this announcement and the clean-up event participants’ voices, I cannot hear Ohnuki-sensei’s speech at all.” Thus, later, he went to Asano-sensei and directly asked her whether he could drink water from his water bottle.

It was around 10:15, soon after the opening ceremony finished, that the KES children got started in the clean-up activities. The teachers distributed cotton work gloves and big garbage bags, which were roughly 80 centimeters by 60 centimeters, to every child. Although they also gave out fire tongs, which were used to pick up trash, to the children, there was not sufficient number of them for all children. As originally expected, a number of high-speed automobiles, and even large trucks, were constantly driving along Chûkan. Despite that the teachers were so nervous about the children’s safety albeit the children themselves hardly noticed it, boys were just murmuring, “Why couldn’t I receive the fire tongs even though I wanted them?”

The first thing the children wondered about was to distinguish between what they should and should not pick up. Every time when wondering, for example, whether they should pick up fallen leaves and whether they can pull out the roadside weeds, they looked around and learned what they ought to do from other clean-up event participants. Some old people carefully explained to the children what they should pick up. Once figuring out that they could clean out those leaves clean-up event this year.
and weeds, the children began to concentrate on their activity. They always compared their own garbage bag and their friends’, competitively collecting the garbage from the street as much as they could, saying, “I have gotten more garbage than him!” “She has a lot more garbage than I have…” Sporadically gaining information that someone picked out something strange and interesting, some children were gathering in a ring around each other and looking over each other’s shoulders at the garbage bag.

While looking for the garbage in the street, Toguchi-san and Hirota-san found me and scurried towards me, saying “Sugai-sensei, let’s look for garbage together.” In talking about garbage, their conversation moved spontaneously to their experiences of littering. Responding to Hirota-san’s words, “I have rarely littered before,” Toguchi-san mentioned with an impish grin, “Well… To tell the truth, I have done it sometimes. I’m telling you, when I go back home after the cram school, I often find garbage like empty cans and wastepaper in the basket of my bicycle. When that happens, I am so disgusted and, so, I throw them on the street after looking around and making sure that nobody is watching me.” With a serene look on her face, Hirota-san put, “Oh, I have had a similar experience. I was so disgusted too.” Toguchi-san quietly explained to me, “I do that because that garbage is not mine.” I asked her, “If Asano-sensei asked you, ‘Do you litter?’ how do you respond her?” She responded, “Well, perhaps… I don’t tell her that I litter because I know that I should not do that.”

A small group of children was struggling to weed by hand. A few boys holding the weeds were surprised at the stubborn root systems that are difficult to pull out of the ground, and said in unison, “Wow, that is too strong…” One of them attempted to show me his hands turned green because of the weeds, saying, “Look at these hands, Sugai-sensei. It’s stinky.” Toguchi-san mirthfully responded to him, “Don’t do that. I feel bad about Sugai-sensei.” When I said, “What are you saying? I like this smell,” the children turn their head to stare at me with their eyes wide open. About ten minutes later, there was another children’s group who were enjoying hunting small insects, such as praying mantis, locusts, and crickets. Picking up fallen leaves and pulling out weeds, they found such insects moving around and became interested in them rather than cleaning up the street. While a boy put a locust in his pocket, another boy was looking for small plastic bags for crickets. Because he does not like insects at all, Imoto-kun was looking at them from a distance, and sometimes raised his voice because an insect was approaching him. Tazawa-kun gathered his friends around him and let them watch a praying mantis just eating other small

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34 When I heard their utterance, I ensured that the children had already learned to naturally change their behavior and opinions depending on the context; for example, whether somebody looking at their behavior or who actually listens to their words.
insects. Toguchi-san was slowly got near to me, and deliberately unclenched his hand in front of my face to show me a locust.

In the meantime, the children were coming back to the Y Green Park, where they started the clean-up activities. As soon as they saw the park, Toguchi-san and Hirota-san mischievously said to me, “Sugai-sensei, treat me to sushi at the sushi-restaurant and have a ‘good-job party’ (Uchiage Party)” In front of the entrance of the park, the staffs handing out a can of juice, a white towel, and a small souvenir in exchange for the garbage bags full of garbage, weeds, and fallen leaves from the participants. As soon as they received the juice, the children sat down on the ground and gulped it down just as adult people gulp down beer after work. About 11:15, the teachers began gathering all fourth graders in front of the entrance. However, the children did not stop talking to each other. In spite of her struggle to count the number of the children, Asano-sensei could not easily do so because soon after she began counting the children, some boys and girls successively stood up and dropped out of line because some lost their small souvenirs and some noticed that they had not received the souvenirs yet. Asano-sensei was gradually getting angry, and finally said, “Calm down, and sit down there quietly!” The same thing was happening in the other classes. Therefore, Ohnuki-sensei finally blew a whistle in order to gather the children’s attention, and mentioned, “As I said to you this morning, the class representatives have to ascertain the number of your classmates right now, and tell your class teacher whether everyone has gathered or not.”

Fifteen minutes after the teachers began gathering the children, Ohnuki-sensei received word that all children were together and in line, and began talking to the children, although it seemed difficult for them to pay attention to his words because of the noise of other people all over the park.

Ohnuki-sensei: Well… You did a fine job today. I think that thanks to your efforts, Chūkan has become cleaned up. Will you throw the brochure and the plastic bag of the towel that you received as a souvenir on the street while walking back to KES?
Many children: (in union) No, we won’t.
A girl: I think that it will be a part of the environmental problems.
Ohnuki-sensei: Right. You can’t do so. If you will throw your garbage on the street, it will render all of your efforts meaningless. Why have you picked up the garbage in Chūkan today?
A boy: To clean up Chūkan.
Ohnuki-sensei: Yes. In order to clean up the community, you got involved in the Chūkan clean-up activity today. Thus, don’t throw your garbage on the street. Do you understand what I have just said? Ok. Then, pack up your
belongs, and let’s go back to the school. Please watch out for the traffic on the street. (My Field note, September 20)

After Ohnuki-sensei finished talking, the troop of KES children left the Y Green Park led by the teachers. Despite that there were a number of high-speed cars just as Ohnuki-sensei had said, many children had already lost their energy and concentration, and some were fully distracted by the small insects in their hands, pockets, or small plastic bags. Regardless of the teachers’ frequent words of caution, Imoto-kun found a brochure that someone would drop on the ground. As soon as receiving that brochure from Imoto-kun, Asano-sensei stopped all the children, and asked them to keep the line neat; the children could hardly keep in line.

When the fourth graders arrived at the school around 11:48, the teachers directly headed to the air-conditioned teacher’s lounge, and immediately gulped a cup of cold tea at their own desk. Because they soon had to go to the classroom, they quickly discussed what they were going to do in the classroom. A few minutes after the fourth grade teachers entered the lounge, the school principal came in and participated in their conversation. He mentioned, “It was a nice speech, Ohnuki-sensei. That one… You told the children not to throw their belongings on the street, and said, ‘If you do, it will render all of your efforts meaningless.’” Ohnuki-sensei responded, “I heard from Akiyama-sensei that I should mention it because there were some children dropping their belongings on the street after the clean-up activities in past years.” It was only five minutes or so that the teachers were taking a breather, and then went to their own classrooms. Ohnuki-sensei mentioned, “Ok, let the children write a short report about what they did today in an hour.”

Nodding to him, other teachers also left the lounge.

Soon after getting into the classroom, Asano-sensei let the children talk about what they had just done around Chûkan in order to have them smoothly write a report after that. Because Asano-sensei’s uttered, “Did Nakayama-kun pick up an empty bottle of Oronamin C? Do you know that a boy of the Ohnuki-sensei’s class found a tube of a bicycle’s tire?” The conversation heated up.

Katori-kun: Wait. I didn’t know that I could pick up that kind of thing. I also saw the tire, but a strange man told me to leave it untouched.

Asano-sensei: I told you to pick up a lot of interesting things before we left the classroom in this morning. Did anybody find something useful?

Katori-kun: I found a cigarette lighter.

Later, I asked a garbage collector about the quantity of the garbage gathered by the event. According to him, over 400 plastic bags (approx. 80cm×60cm) were collected by the participants in a day. He added, “Comparatively speaking, it was not surprisingly a lot, I think.” (My Field note, September 20)
Sakaguchi-kun: I got an unopened packet of cigarettes.
Asano-sensei: Really? What a waste!
Nakajima-kun: What? Do you smoke, Sensei?
Asano-sensei: No, I don’t at all. But, it costs almost 240 yen, doesn’t it?
Katori-kun: No, that’s wrong! A box of Seven Star costs just 280 yen.
(My Field note, September 20)

When a main topic of their conversation became that “it is a waste to throw serviceable things away,” Asano-sensei broke into the conversation and mentioned, “Ok, from now, I want you to write a short report about today because I cannot let everyone talk about what you did individually.” While the children chorused, “Ohhhhh…” Asano-sensei kept talking in a louder voice, “You have to explain what you put all of your effort into. If you cannot express it in your report, I may let you go to clean up the Chûkan again because you did not put your effort into it.”
Some boys responded to her with smiles on their faces, “Ok, let me go, and I will get another can of juice.”

As soon as starting to write a report, they began to be puzzled about the writing style and raised a number of questions; for example, “What kind of title can we put to the report?” “Should we write vertically or horizontally,” “Where should we write a title in the paper?” “Do we need to use kanji (or, Chinese characters)?” “How many pages do we need to write?” etc. Responding to their questions, Asano-sensei said,

You have to begin the report with the title. So, you write the title of your report in the first line. You write down your name in the next line, and begin the contents from the third line. It is September 20 today. So, you may begin with a sentence like, ‘September 20, I participated in the clean-up event of Chûkan.’ If you write as I have just said, you have already finished four lines. … You don’t have to use difficult kanji, but write your name in kanji even though some difficult kanji are involved because you are fourth graders. In addition, everyone has to write at least one page, or more specifically, at least until the last line of the paper you have on your desk now. (My Field note, September 20)

Review of the fourth-grade environmental educational practice from the teacher’s perspective

I have described the teacher-children interactions seen in the fourth-grade’s environmental education conducted within the Period of Integrated Learning. At the end of this chapter, I will discuss how the teachers, including both fourth grade teachers and others, viewed the practice as a whole. Teachers’ words quoted below include the teachers’ responses to my interviews and
their opinions that I heard during a teachers’ discussion regarding the fourth grade’s Period of Integrated Learning, or the environmental education activities.36

Asano-sensei explained to me that the fourth grade teachers decided the contents of the Period of Integrated Learning at the beginning of the school year as follows.

In April, we established the program of the Period of Integrated Learning for the year in reference to the traditional practices, particularly what was done in the last year. Each teacher talked of their own experiences, such as, what he did when he took charge of the fourth graders before and what she conducted under the name of environmental education. The needs of the fourth graders of this year are completely different from those of the fourth graders of the last year because the characteristics of the fourth graders differ from year to year. Certainly, we make a list of the new students of our own classroom and look through general information of each child, but what we can know from those official works is only a part of their characteristics. Those cannot and should not be regarded as the basis of the program. We need some weeks to acknowledge their traits, or their drawbacks and advantages that are required to establish a good relationship with them and decide to what to teach them. (My Field note, November 8)

In the beginning of the school year, the teachers themselves lack the information about the children in their own class. While obtaining some information from the teachers who were taking charge of the same children last year, those are never enough to comprehend the children’s traits partly because the children are growing up and they change their behavior and attitudes depending on the circumstances. So, even though they attempt to establish the program of the Period of Integrated Learning that is appropriate to the children currently under their charge as the MOE declares, it is not easy to put it into practice. Moreover, what the teachers have to do is make a plan of the Integrated Learning in the beginning of the school year, which is one of the busiest seasons of year. Therefore, in reality, the teachers define the contents, goals, and the specific schedule of the Period of Integrated Learning drawing on things such as, the contents of other subjects and traditional practices. In addition, teacher’s sense of values and their taste also affect the contents of the Period of Integrated Learning. Kirishima-sensei’s words clearly referred to this point in a casual conversation.

36 At KES, teachers conduct debates over the way to develop classes every year. At the beginning of the year, teachers of each grade choose a teacher who conducts an open class. On the day of the open class, virtually all teachers visit the class, and discuss it after school. In the year of my observation, it was decided that each grade had to show a class of the Period of Integrated Learning. It was Ohnuki-sensei who conducted an open class as a representative of the fourth grade. Thus, virtually all class teachers, the school principal, the vice principal, and a few supervisors of the school education visited his class, and discussed it. The meeting lasted for almost two hours on November 15th.
At KES, it’s all but decided that to let the third graders experience the interactions with the elderly local residents and the fourth graders get involved in the clean-up activities of the Chûkan. It is possible for teachers to say, ‘We are not going to have the students participate in the clean-up activities this year,’ but virtually no teacher argues, ‘We won’t do it.’ So, as a result, the fourth grade teachers make plans for the Period of Integrated Learning centered on the clean-up activities every year. Yet, the teachers still need to decide the approach and procedures to teach environmental education. Because Ohnuki-sensei is good at using computers, the fourth graders of this year can study about the environment utilizing PCs. However, I usually invite as many guest teachers as possible to conduct environmental education. Thus, the fourth graders learn about the environment and environmental problems almost every year, but the ways they learn differ from year to year. (My Field note, November 5)

There are both teachers like Kirishima-sensei who prefer to invite a “guest teacher,” or a specialist of a certain topic regarding environmental issues to conduct environmental education and those like Ohnuki-sensei who attempt to implement environmental education by utilizing the PCs based on his belief that the children today have to be equipped with basic skills to use a computer. It was a first try for the KES teachers to utilize the PCs in the environmental educational practices. In this manner, the way to conduct environmental education (or Period of Integrated Learning) is decided dependent on various factors.

However, even if the teachers once decide the way to conduct environmental education, it is not necessarily appropriate to the children because the decision was made without sufficient information of the children, as Asano-sensei explained. Indeed, teachers often said, such things as, “I conducted a similar kind of class, but the students’ reactions are completely different from last year” and “The way to conduct Period of Integrated Learning this year is appropriate for the children.” In the Period of Integrated Learning of the fourth graders, the inexperience of the children to utilize the PCs, the low ability to express their thoughts in writing, and even their lack of energy to focus on what they are learning because of the preparations for the Sports Day in the hot weather affect not only the overall process of class, but also, the evaluation criteria in the teacher’s mind. Mori-sensei explained to me.

While exchanging their opinions, the children could not discuss the contents of the interpretations of each picture to improve the quality of the maps, and instead they were entirely picking out errors in wording. However, I evaluated that they could nicely talk and listen to each other, and sometimes encourage other group members to complete the map. By receiving complaints on the map that they had struggled to complete together with their own group members, they could build up their self-confidence and savor the
joy of learning with friends. I hope that the children will take root in the community, and deepen the discussion about how they can contribute to make the community more friendly to people. And, I wish that they would become attached to their own nice community. (My Field note, November 15)

Also, Asano-sensei recalled the children’s efforts to create the digital environmental map, and stated as below.

It is a little bit harder to utilize the PCs to conduct environmental education than what I expected in April because of the children’s lack of basic skills to use a PC. Thus, I asked them to write a report to express what they were feeling in the process of making the map. Since I told them to describe everything, from what they tried hardest in to what they felt most difficult, the children were writing many pages. I consider that they were doing their best to create the map. Most of them became able to use the mouse and keyboard smoothly. (My Field note, October 27)

As Mori-sensei and Asano-sensei showed, the fourth grade teachers had come to evaluate “children’s efforts to make a map in cooperation with their own group members” (or, kyôryoku shite gambaru) in the process of conducting environmental education. They were ultimately attempting to teach the children about the importance of “the spirit of never giving up until the very end” (saigomade akiramenai).

Various opinions on the environmental educational activities were heard from the teachers of the different grades. For example, a woman teacher mentioned.

I could learn many things from the environmental educational practices of the fourth graders this year because it was first time for me to observe the way to utilize PCs in environmental education. I heard from a professor of some university that it is important to involve not only the students, but also, parents in the Period of Integrated Learning. According to the fourth grade teachers, they are going to make some of the completed maps public on the Internet, and provide the Internet address to the parents. Thus, I consider that the overall activities of the fourth grade environmental education are valuable. (My Field note, November 16)

In contrast to such positive views of the activities, some teachers presented a critical perspective; such as, “The environmental educational activities of this year could be put in practice because of Ohnuki-sensei, but it might be difficult for conducting similar classes without him,” “The children’s experience of the Chûkan clean-up activities should be incorporated into the digital map,” and “The fourth-grade Period of Integrated Learning of this year seemed to me a sort of computer education rather than environmental education.” In response to a question from a
teacher having a critical perspective of the environmental educational practices of this year, “Are you going to make a relationship between the children’s experience of the Chûkan clean-up activities and the digital environmental map?” Ohnuki-sensei answered on behalf of the fourth grade teachers as follows.

We are not taking particular note of the clean-up activities this year. It was just a part of the Period of Integrated Learning, or “To realize a ‘people-friendly, nature-friendly community.’” In order to make the map, they had already observed the school district and their own community in May. We let them get involved in the clean-up activities following the traditional practices, but it was just to have them feel that they could actually have an experience of taking part in the clean-up events of the community. (My Field note, November 15)

In fact, after the Chûkan clean-up events, Mori-sensei put, “I consider that it is not enough for the children to experience the clean-up activities because it can be just an interesting experience for them. What they learned from the experience is very abstract, so it is important to make the significance of this experience clear.”

The teachers who were not satisfied with such an experience still mentioned, “The activities might become better if we led the children to use pictures of the garbage like empty cans and bottles and pictures of the children picking up that garbage in their maps because it will make the relationship between the activities to create the digital map and environmental education clearer. Nevertheless, the fourth grade teachers were sticking to their position, in which they hardly attached high priority on the Chûkan clean-up activities. Ohnuki-sensei said, “We are not going to put too much emphasis on the clean-up activities, and hope only that the children will feel something like ‘I am going to quit littering’ and ‘I will pick up the garbage on the street to keep the community clean.’”

Akiyama-sensei provided an insight into the interpretation of the difference of the opinions between the two.

I think that the metaphor of department store is useful to understanding elementary school teachers. Every teacher sees the class under her charge as her own, and manages the children in the classroom based on her own way of thinking. Then, each grade can be seen as affiliated stores. A classroom teacher tends to confer on what she is wondering about with the teachers taking charge of the children of the same grade and often makes concessions to their opinions and ideas. They are trying to set off in the same direction, but the atmosphere in each classroom is different in concrete terms. Teachers of the different grades are viewed as people working at different kind of stores. Thus, while listening to the opinion coming from other grade teachers,
a teacher does not always change his/her own way in compliance with them. While regarding those opinions from the teachers valid and right, it is each teacher that has to make the final decision because s/he comprehends the children’s status quo the most. (My Field note, November 16)

She does not intend to emphasize the point that the teachers hardly alter their own ways. As I will further discuss in chapter eight, the teachers are not regarding a class as a period to merely transmit a certain set of knowledge to the children, but as a “construction” made up of the successive interactions between a teacher and children. Such a view of classes, in which the teachers stress the significance of “child-centered” education, is epitomized in the Period of Integrated Learning. The MOE expects the teachers to encourage the children to learn on their own and think for themselves and to teach the children about how to learn rather than to transmit a certain set of knowledge. In order to accomplish these purposes, every school has been encouraged to design and implement environmental education independently (as well as other contents, such as, information, international understanding, and welfare and health) based on the children’s interests, their level of comprehension of what the teachers are speaking about, and the community and school’s characteristics.

As these teachers’ discussions show, today’s teachers are struggling to conduct environmental education in the Period of Integrated Learning. Nonetheless, those teachers are not necessarily feeling satisfaction with the environmental education they conducted after much trial and error. At the beginning, when encountering the fact that they have to conduct environmental education, they get the impression that it is not straightforward to put it into practice. Then, they are bewildered by the fact that they ought to make a plan to provide hands-on activities that are appropriate for their students despite the fact that they have many things to do in addition to the preparation of environmental education. Consequently, they are forced to begin to conduct environmental education without a clear vision of what to teach students. Between their will to make what the students were actually learning in the Period of Integrated Learning and the situation that they have to reveal the outcome of the classes by means other than tests that are generally used in the conventional subjects, the teacher’s confidence and satisfaction in the ongoing classes are drastically weakened. In such a situation, they question themselves about what they actually can do for the students through environmental education practices. Because the MOE clearly states that the Period of Integrated Learning is not aimed at transmitting a certain set of knowledge to the children, teachers were trying to make the class schedule involving as many hands-on learning activities as possible. However, on the other hands, the teachers are critically
calling “the classes incorporating hand-on activities that are enjoyable for the children, but hardly instructive to them” or “event-ish activities.”

The seemingly trenchant argument that individual teachers should assume the responsibility to define the contents of the Period of Integrated Learning because they are the most familiar with their own students has actually and implicitly lessened the possibility that other teachers make concrete and strong comments on the ongoing practice. From the perspective of the other grade teachers, it is not easy to evaluate the ongoing class and give advice to the teachers who are in charge of the students in their own class. For the teachers who are currently conducting the Period of Integrated Learning, the other teachers’ advice and comments can sound somewhat irrelevant because they have less knowledge and information about the students who are actually taking the class. Nonetheless, those teachers who are conducting the Period of Integrated Learning (or, environmental education) are also struggling to make classes enjoyable and meaningful for the students. The process of conducting the Period of Integrated Learning (environmental education) is a continuing process of trial and error, from the insider’s perspective. In addition, they do not have a clear measure to access what the students learned in the Period of Integrated Learning in reality. For these reasons, it is understandable that the teachers hardly have confidence in their own practice. I believe that the ambiguity of the contents of the Period of Integrated Learning more or less prevents the teachers from having a sense of confidence and accomplishment with the classes they are conducting, and it has strong impacts on the practice of environmental education.

With limited resources and time, diverse and abstract images of the environmental education, and a few experiences of teaching students about environmental problems, the teachers are investing considerable time and energy to plan and conduct environmental education in the Period of Integrated Learning. Considering the present state of the public elementary school teachers, the argument that the establishment of the Period of Integrated Learning enable teachers to conduct environmental education in elementary schools seems to contribute in diffusing an oversimplified view of the school environmental education. Although the advocates of the Period of Integrated Learning have argued that this subject allows “freedom” of making decisions on the selection of what to do and what to teach, it is not that simple for the teachers to exercise this given freedom. The fact that there is no clearly-stated goal set out for the Period of Integrated Learning forces the teachers to feel, “As a matter of fact, we do not clearly see how to practice environmental education that is different from what had been done before and how far we have to teach about environment and environmental problems.”
As noted above, in evaluating and grading the students, the teachers come to give priority to whether or not the children were devoting themselves to the activities and how much they could grow up through the Period of Integrated Learning rather than to what extent they could accomplish the specific goals that the teachers set in April. This seems to be equivalent to what the children are learning in other traditional subjects and non-academic activities like the Sports Day. That is, the tendency to prioritize the process (how much they devoted themselves to the work at hand, and whether they did their best to complete a given task in cooperation with others) over the results. In this sense, there is little difference between the purpose of environmental education and other school activities in the eyes of teachers. From my perspective, this has contributed in diluting the teachers’ confidence in the ongoing environmental educational activities. Therefore, when asked whether they were actually able to teach children about the environment or environmental problems, teachers have reservations about answering "yes."

7.3 Conclusion of chapter seven

In this chapter, I described the fourth graders’ environmental educational activities: the creation of the digital environmental map and the participation in the Chûkan clean-up event. As the description of these activities showed, the teachers were conducting environmental education based on their own sense of values, understanding of the status quo of the students, and what they could do with the students. Because Ohnuki-sensei was familiar with computer, and based on the teachers’ perspective that it is crucial for today’s children to learn how to use computer, they decided to use computers in environmental educational activities.

There were certainly differences in the students’ skills to utilize computers, but the students were able to complete their own digital environmental map in cooperation with their friends. Since most students were not familiar with using it, teachers were always facing a barrage of questions regarding the way to use a computer in classes. Also, within September, when beginning to use the computer in the computer room that was far away from their own classroom, students and teachers were investing much time and energy into the practice for the Sports Day. While aware of the fact that students were struggling to use a keyboard and mouse and that many lacked energy and concentration for the Period of Integrated Learning, the teachers had come to allow the students who did rarely care about the quality of the map and the contents of their comments that were attached to their own maps.

What the teachers considered as a problem was the fact that the students were overusing the words, “yasashii” (friendly) and “yasashikunai” (unfriendly), in their maps. Those words had been used by the teachers themselves since the beginning of this year in the Period of Integrated
Learning without clarifying their meaning. Since these words are also used by commentators and journalists who are talking about environmental problems on TV, the children are exposed to these words not only in school, but also in a wide variety of types of places, including in front of TV at home. The problem from the fourth grade teacher’s perspective was the fact that because of their overuse of these abstract terms, teachers could not comprehend how much the students learned about environmental problems and how they were feeling about the natural environment in their community. Consequently, the teachers had come to evaluate the students’ activities based on whether they were able to engage in the activities, whether they could do their best to make their own maps in cooperation with their group members from scratch to finish, and whether they could clearly explain about the concepts of their maps in front of other classmates. Certainly the teachers look through all the completed maps; however, many criteria for evaluation of the students’ activities were similar to those used in other educational activities conducted in the Period of Integrated Learning.

In the Chûkan clean-up event, the students rediscovered the fact that the street, which they were usually looking at and using, was in a big mess due to a large amount of garbage including drink cans and bottles. While observing the whole process of the students’ trash-picking and street scavenging, I have come to notice the fact that what the students learned from the experience could not be completely governed and predicted by the teachers. Teachers can make a plan of the activities for the students. However, what the students learn in the activities is more than what teachers expect the students to learn. On the way to the park, some students observed two young men who were taking part in the event discarded their cigarette butts on the street. There were no adults looking at those young men, but the students were following the movement of the ash attentively. A girl said in a quiet voice to her friend, “Why are they doing that? Are they going to pick up the garbage on the street with us?” As a mother of the fourth grade girl expressed, children learned not only about the importance of keeping their own environment clean, but also about the existence of those people who are messing up the environment through the observation of the adults around them. Some girls had already habituated themselves to changing their words according to the situation, and learned not to tell teachers and adults about the fact that they actually littered on the streets sometimes. They knew what they were allowed to do and what they should not to do; however, what they say in front of teachers are not completely congruent with what they are actually doing everyday.

The teachers know the fact that the children can act as if they learned and understand the importance of the natural environment and protecting it in the classroom, and the students can easily change their behavior and language according to the situation and cultural context. Thus, it
is hard for the teachers to access what the students learned through environmental educational activities in the Period of Integrated Learning. If a teacher can feel that they successfully taught what they had to teach based on the assessment of how much the students learned, it can be no exaggeration that the difficulty in the assessment of the students’ understanding can prevent the teachers from having confidence in the ongoing practice.

According to my observation, the ambiguous definition of the contents of the Period of Integrated Learning was also one of those factors discouraging the teachers from placing a high value on the environmental educational activities as a part of the Period of Integrated Learning. Advocates of the Period of Integrated Learning and the Ministry of Education have argued that the establishment of this new subject enables the individual schools to define what to teach and conduct the inventive classes according to the ecological situation, social circumstances, and cultural context. However, from the teacher’s perspective, they can hardly enjoy the “freedom” to define the contents of the Period of Integrated Learning. Instead, they tend to feel that they cannot conduct classes that are enjoyable and meaningful for all students because they do not have sufficient time, resources, and knowledge of environmental education. Because the teachers know some model classes that are actually conducted at some elementary schools, they tend to believe that whether or not they can conduct enjoyable and meaningful classes is dependent on their abilities. Indeed, while observing the teachers, I often felt that teachers were attributing those issues to the lack of their abilities although some difficulties are seemingly derived from the nature of the Period of Integrated Learning.

The students who were enjoying the activities in the Period of Integrated Learning could be viewed as just playing with their friends in class hours. In the Period of Integrated Learning, they were actually having a relationship with insects, flowers, and trees and re-recognized the fact that the environment of their community is not so clean. However, many, if not all, students already knew about the insects, flowers, trees, and the messy street with a lot of garbage. As revealed in the previous chapter, some teachers regard environmental education as an opportunity to let the children have a relationship with the natural environment in the community, but some have a different perspective. Because the image of environmental education varies from teacher to teacher, they tend to use whether the students were aggressively engaged in the activities as a criterion for the evaluation of the students’ activities. Yet, by using such a generalized criterion, which is normally used in other subject, to evaluate the students, the teachers are forced to question whether the activities were valuable and meaningful for the students from the viewpoint of environmental education.
Doubtlessly, teachers are teaching environmental education through the lens of their own values more than through the lens of the environmentalists or officials outside of school. Note that while wondering about the value and meaning of those activities conducted in the Period of Integrated Learning, the teachers were actually investing much time and effort to make plans for the activities. In the process of making the plans, they were facing the fact that they did not have sufficient time and resources to conduct inventive classes that are enjoyable and valuable for as many students as possible. While being given too much responsibility for the education of the students, the foundation required to carry out the responsibility were hardly assured and maintained. This can make the teachers have a sense of loneliness and isolation, which, in turn, can have a strong impact not only on the contents of environmental education, but also on teachers’ routine work, or the interactions with students.
Chapter 8. Class as a “Construction”

In this chapter and the following chapter, I describe a part of what the children learn in their everyday school life, including both academic and non-academic activities. The KES teachers do not usually recognize these activities as environmental education practice. Certainly I cannot reveal all messages that the teachers are trying to pass on to the children everyday. However, I believe that it is still essential to pay attention to the teacher-children interactions in the ordinary context in this thesis, which aims at looking at the environmental educational practices in a broader picture.

Teachers are constantly and steadily communicating a culturally accepted ways of thinking, an image of an ideal person, and a framework for decision-making in virtually every class. Teachers’ sense of values and educational philosophies are not completely fixed, but have an influence on any teacher-student interactions. They are slipping into every teacher’s voice and behavior whether or not the teachers are aware of it. Doubtlessly, it has an influence on the environmental education. It is often neglected in the discourse of environmental education, but environmental education is merely one of a number of tasks that teachers have to deal with and one of a wide variety of kinds of things that the students need to learn.

Teachers are never purely teaching the contents of textbooks to the children. They are also always teaching a way of being and interacting. Through the interactions with the teachers and other children, an individual child is constantly learning how to interact with others and how to behave in society. According to my observation, students were learning to find the correct answer based on other people’s eyes and behavior. Through this chapter, I consider that the tendency to use other people’s eyes and expectations as a crucial criterion of their behavior will affect the children’s future behavior and attitudes toward the natural environment. This is reason why I am going to focus on teacher-student interactions that are seen in conventional classes, which teachers do not generally consider as environmental education.

8.1 A teacher’s view of classes: class as a “construction”

As far as it is incorporated into the school curriculum, environmental education influenced by the teacher’s perspective of conventional classes. I often heard KES teachers saying, “constructing a class (jugyō wo tsukuru)” instead of saying, “conducting a class (jugyō wo suru).” Particularly when reflecting on their classes, teachers tended to use such an expression. This expression clearly shows a teacher’s view of a class—that is, a class is not just a certain period of
time to teach children about the contents of textbooks following a predetermined class schedule, but is a “construction” that consists of the dynamic interactions between teachers and children. For instance, Ohnuki-sensei’s following statement clearly expressed this sort of perspective of a class:

It is a tough question to answer … well… Children don’t necessarily respond in the same way even though a teacher asks the same question, as you might have noticed. From that perspective, a class is constructed by the interactions between a teacher and children with each passing moment. It is not a static time in which teachers are merely teaching what is written in textbooks in the only direction. Rather, a class is dual-directional activity. Children always respond differently to a strategy we use in class. Even if I could see their active reaction today, they may respond in the same reaction tomorrow. There is no only one correct way to treat children in classroom. It depends on the children. We are always requested to comprehend what each child in classroom is thinking about and whether there is one who does not clearly understand what we’re talking. I am certainly caring about a child based on my own experience as a teacher, but those are often inefficient, if not harmful. Thus, everyday, every year, I am always seeking a better way to implement a class. Only when how I care for a child and how the child reacts are sympathizing with each other, can I feel a satisfaction. (My Field note, November 21)

Ohnuki-sensei laid out his perspective that a class consists of a series of interactions between a teacher and children. Especially, in the modern social context, in which the importance of so-called “jidō-chūshin shugi no kyoiku” (child-centered education) is pervasive throughout the country, teachers are apparently avoiding one-sided instruction of the contents of textbooks.

As Western scholars like Benjamin (1997) point out, it is true that Japanese elementary school classes are textbook centered and using the textbook comprises a large part of customary class, either academic or nonacademic (such as, music and arts). As far as I observed, individual variation was small, and most teachers were investing their time and effort to complete the textbooks from beginning to end within a year. When people outside of schools hear that teachers are making efforts to complete the textbooks, they may imagine that teachers are attempting to put their hearts and souls into teaching the contents of the textbooks in a somewhat unilateral way. In fact, partly based on this kind of perspective, politicians and officials of the Ministry of Education tend to emphasize the importance of the revision of the course of study, which is a basis of all textbooks used in elementary schools. However, the way of using the textbook reflects the fact that the teachers view classes as a “construction” created by the teacher-children interactions.
Regarding the way to use a textbook in class, Mr. Sato, a teacher’s consultant, made a comment on Kawakami-sensei’s Japanese class:

The class might become better if you could clearly distinguish “important points” and “not-so-important points.” The former is the points where you would provide enough time for the children to put on their thinking cap. In contrast, the latter is where you don’t spend a lot of time. You will become able to distinguish them through the interactions with the children. … What the most important to construct a class is to view a class from a children’s point of view. I thought that your preparation for the class was great. You were supposed to spend a lot of time for that, weren’t you? Your handouts were neatly consistent with what you wrote on the blackboard. Because you were eagerly listening to children’s voices during the class, the children were paying full attention to your lecture. … What you will have to keep in mind is that particularly when preparing enough for a class and having high expectations on the children, you may come to miss children’s voice and viewpoint. Later, you may come to notice the importance of paying attention to the children’s perspective when you see children’s puzzled look and clouded brow. It is certainly important to conduct a class in accordance with the teaching guideline and plan; nevertheless, the children’s viewpoint is the most important. Things don’t always turn out as planned. Please look closely and carefully at children’s reactions. … (My Field note, October 27).

Although a teacher doubtlessly has to distinguish them in advance, the important points and the not-so-important points should be flexibly defined based on the children’s conditions in order to construct and conduct a class centered on a child’s viewpoint. Not surprisingly, the way to read and interpret the contents of the textbooks and how deeply they dig into the writer’s and editor’s intention is decided based on the context, including the students’ capacity to understand written materials, the students’ reactions, the teacher’s sense of values, and whether the teachers have already been able to establish a good relationship with the students. From the teachers’ perspective, whether they can make good use of textbooks is ultimately dependent on whether they have organized a good learning environment in the classroom. It is imperative for the teachers to establish the relationship of trust and understanding with the students in order to conduct any kinds of classes. As Ohnuki-sensei also pointed out, the children are always changing, and thus, there is virtually no strategy that is always effective and appropriate. The predetermined class plans frequently become useless as they actually carry on the class.

According to Mr. Sato, in such a case, a teacher has to set the children’s viewpoint above the original plan. In various advices to Kawakami-sensei, which were derived from his own experiences, Mr. Sato consistently emphasizes the importance of constructing a class centered on the children’s viewpoint.
Regarding the same Kawakami-sensei’s class, Kirishima-sensei, a woman experienced teacher, mentioned:

While watching Kawakami-sensei’s class, I felt even more keenly the importance of the teacher’s efforts. The children were responding the Kawakami-sensei’s efforts. I am also using this reading material in my class now, but this text isn’t easy to read. The editors of the textbook should know what the author wants to say, but it is not very clear from the readers’ perspective. The text itself should be written in a more straightforward manner. … (Bitter smile) … That text doesn’t seem appropriate to the students though carping about the national textbook does no good because there is nothing to do about it. … Nevertheless, I felt that Kawakami-sensei could successfully keep the children’s attention to the textbook. The children have noticed his will and efforts. After the class, a boy approached me and said, ‘I’m becoming fond of study.’ From his words, I got an impression that Kawakami-sensei could successfully conduct the class in collaboration with the students. (My Field note, November 27)

Not only Kirishima-sensei but also, many other teachers expressed a discontent about the textbook because they realize, to greater or lesser extent, that textbooks were somewhat inappropriate to the realities of the children. Adherence to the contents of textbooks could lead to the situation in which the children hardly understand what a teacher is talking about to them and fall behind others in the classroom. Akiyama-sensei told me:

I think that it is problematic to conduct a class based on a pre-established detailed plan as we often do for the planned lesson (kenkyû jugyô) and the class observation day (jugyô sankan). I welcome any people, both parents and other teachers, coming to observe my everyday class. In most cases, going ahead with the original class schedule bring about undesirable by-products because we cannot predict when a child will get into trouble. Especially today, the children themselves already have many things to do, and are strained with such tasks. Thus, I think that it is important to conduct a class reflecting the children’s conditions. (My Field note, November 16)

KES teachers are flexibly adjusting a teaching strategy to the children’s status quo every moment. A somewhat pervasive sense of the class as a flexible and dramatic process based on the children’s viewpoint has been firmly reinforced by their own everyday experiences. Teachers are fundamentally thinking, “We are not used by the textbook, but we use it in an effective way” (My Field note October 27). In order to make a class an easy-to-understand and enjoyable for as many children as possible, they define what and how to teach the children based on the comparisons among the children’s status quo, the contents of the textbook, and a pre-established class schedule. This challenges the stereotype of just teaching the textbook or sticking to the textbook in
Japanese education. Because today’s schools are expected to use commercially-produced, eye-pleasing tests rather than teacher’s handmade tests to assess the students’ understanding of what they learned in the classes, teachers are often struggling to teach the contents that the students had to know to take the tests. Due to the school curriculum, they sometimes have to coerce the children to study hard regardless of their view of classes. However, it is only a means of last resort to implement a class. On the ground, the KES teachers consistently viewed the classes as a “construction” and the students as partners in constructing such classes.

There may be educators who regard the tendency to construct and conduct classes centered on a child’s viewpoint as a consequence of the recent educational reform that emphasizes the significance of “child-centered education.” However, while observing the teacher-students interactions in classes, I have realized that teachers are sensitive about the students’ perspective and words not only for a theoretical reason, but also for a practical one. The teachers are taking the student’s viewpoint into account in order to conduct classes that are enjoyable for as many students as possible. It reflects the teacher’s fundamental perspective of education; they are not conducting classes just for the students who are smart and able to do well on a test. They strongly feel the responsibility to make the student a person who has not only information and knowledge, but also an ability to make a moral judgment and social and emotional intelligence. In order to educate such a whole child, unilateral, lecture-style classes are not appropriate. From the teacher’s viewpoint, it is necessary to let the students have a sense that teachers are trying to understand about them, which will, in turn, become a basis for their growth.

8.2 Kashikoi child rather than atamanoyoi child: desirable characteristics of an individual

Teachers reflect goals in the kind of people they are trying to make that also influence the nature of education on the ground. What the teachers talk about in front of the students is ultimately dependent on the kind of subjects that they are going to teach. However, it is true that the kind of people the teachers are trying to make consistently shapes the teacher’s behavior and

37 Although the words, “kashikoi (賢い) child” and “atamanoyoi (頭の良い) child,” are generally used interchangeably, I used them differently in this chapter. Based on the teacher’s perspective that is developed in the conversation in the next page, I use the former to refer to a wise child in terms of both academic skill and behavior. This concept seems similar to a “whole person” (Tsuneyoshi, 1994; Lewis 1988, 1989). In contrast, the latter is used to refer to a child who is smart but lacking in moral and social intelligence. The important thing here is the existence of distinction between these concepts, and the teachers are consistently trying to make a kashikoi ko at school, both in academic and non-academic activities. Professor Nancy Rosenberger told me that there is a similar distinction in the United States too. In addition, Japanese word atama means a head or brain, and yoi means good. Thus, atamanoyoi child means a child who has a “good brain.”
Akiyama-sensei: Don’t you think Shôji-kun has gradually become kashikoi child?
Sasaki-sensei: He has been good at studies since before.
Murakami-sensei: I’m not sure whether or not he is atamanoyoi child, but I often saw his bad and inappropriate behavior before. He couldn’t get through what he was expected to do, which required a little patience. Yet, I think he has gradually come to be able to handle his own problems.
Ohnuki-sensei: Well… From my own experience, I think children who have behavioral and moral problems in spite of their high scores on tests have been increasing recently.
Akiyama-sensei: Yeah. I agree with that.
Mori-sensei: Really?
Ohnuki-sensei: For example, Wada-kun is one of them. Although it was only he who could get a mark of 100 on the latest science test, he cannot establish a relationship with others. He cannot make a friend at all. When facing an even small problem, but he breaks into loud outbursts of tears, and gets out of control. Enomoto-kun certainly has a good deal of knowledge and can read and write all roman letters, but he cannot write a word in the designated place. And, he cannot clean up the area around his desk, so his space is always messy. It is perhaps partly because of the early education, which recently has attracted public attention, I think. I heard that some kindergartens are trying to make children master all prefectures’ names. It’s not very important for that age. Before that, they have to prepare the way for the future work, for example train them to use their hands by applying themselves to making handicrafts. (My Field note, October 14)

Ohnuki-sensei added afterward, “We have to raise a ‘kashikoi child’ rather than an ‘atamanoyoi child.’ It’s not that important whether he is good at studies. That’s just a back-burner kind of thing. Make a child a kashikoi child.” Both “kashikoi child” and “atamanoyoi child” usually refer to a child who are highly educated, and having extensive information or knowledge. In his words, Ohnuki-sensei used the word kashikoi child to refer to a wise child who has not only academic skill, but also moral judgment and social and emotional intelligence. In contrast, the atamanoyoi child is used to refer to a child who has book-smarts, but lacks in moral and social intelligence. As their words reveals, teachers draw a clear distinction between kashikoi child and atamanoyoi child. According to the conversation, the teachers regard the former as one who has few behavioral and moral problems, who is able to clean up his/her own room especially around
his/her own desk, who can establish a friendly relationship with surrounding people, and who is patient and can invest their effort to accomplish what s/he was expected to do. Moreover, KES teachers assume that kashikoi child have many other traits, including punctuality and cooperativeness. In contrast, the latter, atamanoyoi child, is regarded as a child who has a good deal of knowledge and can get high marks on school tests, but are beset with various problems in terms of their practice, behavior, and moral, such as children who are not good at making friends, who cannot clean up around their own desk, and who cannot exert themselves to accomplish what they are expected. Undoubtedly, Japanese elementary school teachers take responsibility for communicating a certain amount of knowledge to the children, but also, and more importantly, for making them kashikoi child.38

Teachers never ignore the children having troubles in their everyday practices, such as, those who cannot take care of their own mess and who do not concentrate on what teachers are talking. If such problematic behaviors and practices remain unchanged, the cooperative needed for school life cannot stand firm any longer, and, more importantly, those children will encounter severe problems after their graduation. For example, Abe-kun, who frequently appeared in the teachers’ conversations, was discussed by his classroom teacher as follows.

Recently, he has been just watching time go by while I’m talking and other friends are studying. I have become anxious when I think of his junior-high and high school life. In addition, these days, his influence may have appeared on a few other children’s behavior and attitudes in my class. My words have lost effect on him these days. (My Field note, October 14)

Indeed, I encountered this teacher chasing Abe-kun when he tried to skip a class because he was in a bad mood. When Tanaka-sensei caught him, Abe-kun began to play a prank on him to get attention. Abe-kun seemed a cute, mischievous boy; however, the teacher had to invest time and effort in educating him. It is not only because the teachers are officially expected to educate a whole child, but also create a good learning environment in which other students can concentrate on what the teachers talking about in classes. To ignore a child who is not good at getting involved in group activities—a major part of school life—can influence other children’s behavior

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38 In her comparative study of Japanese and American elementary schools, Tsuneyoshi emphasizes that Japanese teachers are taken a responsibility for the “whole child,” for both subject matter and the moral and physical development of the child (2001: 69-91). I did not describe in detail in this chapter, but Japanese school and teachers are emphasizing tend to utilize small group activities (han katsudō, 班活動) and student representatives in order to educate the “whole child,” or a well-balanced child in both academic classes and non-academic activities (such as, cleaning, guidance during school lunch, pupil council meeting, club activities, school excursions, and other school events) (Tsuneyoshi, 1994).
and attitudes. For these reasons, whether or not a child is good at studies and how much knowledge s/he has obtained tends to be considered as “a back-burner kinds of things.” Therefore, from the teacher’s perspective, it is not only theoretically, but also practically important to socialize the child who has behavioral and moral problems. Without this, the teachers cannot organize and keep a handle on the children’s school life.

In contrast, the child who hardly has any eye-catching behavioral problems is generally viewed as one who does not need much care or one who can be left alone in the eyes of teachers. It is not always true, but such a child who demonstrates less behavioral and moral problems is one who can get high marks on tests. There are no clear and consistent relationships between the child’s academic skills and his/her manner of acting and speaking. However, I often observed that teachers were forced to direct their attention to the students who did not understand what the teachers were talking about rather than to those who always had a proper understanding of it.

September 20, in an arithmetic class, soon after directing the students to sweep all the textbooks and notebooks off their own desk, Asano-sensei handed out a small quiz for the children. Almost three or four minutes went by, Hata-san murmured once or twice in a low voice, ‘I’ve finished …’ The voice hardly reached the whole classmates, but loud enough to catch attention from Asano-sensei, who was just coming near the her seat in order to overlook the children answering the quiz. However, she was not responding to her; instead, she kept taking care of other children still working on the quiz and giving them advice if needed. Twenty minutes later, Asano-sensei began marking the test. The children who were appointed by Asano-sensei were able to answer questions. Hata-san was almost getting up from her chair to show that she was ready to answer any questions; however, Asano-sensei did not let her answer the questions. Gradually, she became dissatisfied that she could not attract Asano-sensei’s attention, and finally expressed it, ‘Sensei, I might answer without your calling on me, OK?’ Asano-sensei mentioned to the children, ‘I don’t want to call on someone who clearly knows the answer. Instead, I would like people who are hesitant about raising their hands though they have an answer in their mind. I know that many of you have already finished the quiz. You know that everybody makes mistakes. And, a mistake isn’t necessarily a bad thing. You can learn from it.’ (Field note, September 20)

At first glance, the interaction between Asano-sensei and Hata-san seems insensitive. Indeed, based on a similar notion, the parents, who are very nervous about what is going on at school, occasionally visit the school to recount their grievances when hearing about such an interaction between a teacher and their son/daughter. However, from my perspective, it is too hasty to harshly conclude that Asano-sensei is ignoring their child. When looking closely and carefully at the Asano-sensei-Hata-san’s interaction, it is clear that Asano-sensei is certainly transmitting an
important message to Hata-san. That is, having information and knowledge is necessary, but not enough. Individuals have to be sensitive about what other people are expecting them to do in order to live in society. And, one has to learn to be patient and suffer without complaining. It seems to me that the interaction between Asano-sensei and Hata-san provides insights into the restrictions that are placed on what the teachers can do in classes. As clarified in another chapter, Asano-sensei told me that she wanted to teach the students about the importance of informed and logical reasoning of their own behavior and attitudes. However, on the ground, in order to give other students a platform to voice their opinions and to let Hata-san know the significance of patience and tolerance, Asano-sensei consequently chose to encourage the students who were hesitant to open their mouths to talk about their thoughts.

In the following Akiyama-sensei’s words, another reason why the teachers tend to direct their eyes to the students who do not clearly understand what the teachers talking about was explained.

Parents today are so nervous about their children, and soon criticize a teacher or school based on the information heard from their own son or daughter. I think it is because of their love for their children and the awareness of their own rights. We often listen to the parent’s complaint at school and over the phone, such as ‘Why didn’t you respond to my son’s words yesterday?’ and ‘Can you give more attention to my daughter?’ Yet, as you have seen, we are taking the time and the energy to preferentially take care of children who require our help the most. To my regret, it is practically difficult to invest the same amount of time and energy in both one who needs a lot of help and another who is considered as able to get through his/her task by himself/herself. We always need to distinguish who needs help the most from the others, and attempt to back up the former first; however, it doesn’t mean that we neglect the latter. For example, in arithmetic class, there are both children who do not understand what we are talking about and those who have already studied it at a cram school. We are always thinking about how to conduct a class that is very enjoyable for both sorts of children. (Field note, November 16)

The teachers were always struggling to deal with all students in the classroom, in a context of widespread tutoring that increased the differences among children. Nevertheless, there are inevitable limitation of resources in terms of time, money, and manpower so that it is hardly possible for them to respond to all children at once, and to answer all parents’ criticism altogether. Moreover, children’s problems are qualitatively varied, and thus, their needs are also quantitatively and qualitatively diverse. Some children still need training to sit still during a 45-minute class before understanding what teachers are talking about and what textbooks say. The teachers are always pressed to distinguish children seeking help from those do not need it, and
they concentrate the limited resources into the former. They do not speculate that it can be justified to neglect such a child who is good at studies; however, due to the limited resources, when there are both children who can clearly understand a class and those who cannot keep up with their schoolwork and even chatting with their neighbor in class, teachers consider that they need to give the latter preference. Otherwise, the teacher can unintentionally contribute to polarizing the children in the classroom as a consequence; that is, some children are always able to absorb knowledge, but others are always unable to understand what the teacher is talking about, and gradually lose their interest in learning.\footnote{I consider that the problem is far bigger than being merely an educational problem. The children are already polarized not only because of the differences in the academic achievement but also because of different cultural and family background. Teachers are fighting against this tendency everyday.} I consider that the problem is far bigger than being merely an educational problem. The children are already polarized not only because of the differences in the academic achievement but also because of different cultural and family background. Teachers are fighting against this tendency everyday.

Nevertheless, in contrast to the teacher’s efforts, it is a fact that 	extit{atamanoyoi} children, who constantly gets high marks on tests, like Hata-san described above, are often led to feel uncomfortable during a class. When I talked with her, Hata-san was going to a cram school three times every week, which was the highest frequency in the class. While most of her classmates were going to a somewhat small cram school, which is aimed at helping children understand what has already gone on in class, Hata-san’s cram school was aimed at cramming for future entrance exams of a junior-high or high school. During lunchtime and between classes, I sometimes saw that she was looking at a small book, which is popular for junior high and high school students who have to memorize things such as math and chemical formulas by rote. Since there were no other students doing such a thing, she stood out in the classroom. She had many friends, and played with them everyday; however, sometimes she silently took a brief look at her friends chatting and playing in the classroom while flipping a page of the small book.

When I asked her about the reason for going to the cram school, she told me as follows:

\begin{quote}
My mom is always saying, ‘You should go to the \textit{juku} [=cram school] for your future.’ But, I don’t like it very much. My elder brother had a hard time because he didn’t go to a cram school. That’s why she wants me to go. Mom threw almost of all my games away before. (My Field note, September 20)
\end{quote}

\footnote{I am not going to further discuss the difference of family and cultural background of these children partly because of the lack of data. Yet, it should be noteworthy that I could not find a direct relationship between whether or not the children go to a cram school and their test scores, but as we shall see later in this chapter, the children have begun to acknowledge or believe that those who go to a cram school obtain a good mark.}
In another conversation, she also told me, “I don’t have any interest in school work because I already know what I am currently learning at school. So, it’s tiresome.” She added, “Because my Mom is always nagging me to study, I have to sit at a desk more than three hours a day at home. However, I hardly take time to do school homework. Instead, I’m working on the cram-school assignment. I tell you what, I don’t really care about my school record.” Two boys happened to be with me were listening to Hata-san in wide-eyed silence.

One day, Asano-sensei expressed her struggles to conduct classes that are enjoyable for the all students briefly, but honestly, “How can I construct a class that is appropriate for every individual child? Can I really do that?” (My Field note, October 31) Her struggles are at least partly derived from the fact that so many students are taught together regardless of the diversity of their social and cultural backgrounds. In order to meet the individual’s needs, teachers require more time and resources. However, they are not sufficiently allocated to the public elementary schools. By contrast, as people have recently come to fear a general decline in academic standards, all the responsibility for it has tended to be placed on the schools. Furthermore, while I was visiting KES for my study, calls for the need to reduce the salary of public school teachers were increasing dramatically regardless of the fact that the teachers themselves feel that they have become much busier than before (see, Mainichi Shinbun 2005b).

A 34-year veteran female teacher mentioned, “Teachers must give 200% of their energy to call for 100% effort from the children today!” (My Field note, October 27). Especially today, when people emphasize the importance of teaching based on respect for the individuality of each student, teachers are struggling to how to manage a classroom. From such teachers’ perspectives, it is most important to let all the children gain the skill of cooperatively living school life. While regarding that they had to teach students about the contents of textbooks because they will be required to live as members of society, teachers tended to consider that they were not required to refer to something not involved in the textbooks. It is possible to say that teachers are giving preference to making kashikoi child over making atamanoyoi child for both theoretical and practical reasons. This order of preference is unintentional and unconscious, but steadily passed on to the children through everyday interactions between the teachers and the children during the everyday classes, as I will illustrate below.

8.3 The correct answer in everyday classes

As students, the children are supposed to adopt the socially and culturally appropriate ways of thinking and behavioral manners through conventional interactions with teachers. One thing the students are learning in everyday classes is the way to figure out the correct answer. In
general, teachers possess correct answers. From the students’ perspective, the correct answer is equivalent to what they are expected to say and do in a given situation. Thus, by learning the way to find the correct answer, students are naturally accustomed to the culturally accepted way to comprehend what they are expected to do in given sets of circumstances.

As you will see below, the students are taught to find the answer based on others’ expectations, behaviors, attitudes, and words. This is important from the viewpoint of environmental education because the children who successfully habituate themselves to using others as criteria to find the correct answer can become people who use the same criteria for their behavior. This tendency to decide what to do based on others’ seems to have both positive and negative aspects. Teachers want the children to become wise children by being sensitive to the need to understand what others are thinking and feeling. If individual children become able to behave based on the understanding of others, it is easier to organize students and create a comfortable atmosphere. However, according to the history of environmental problems, one of the biggest factors causing severe environmental destruction is that people’s decisions regarding their behavior that is ravaging the natural environment is based on what people in high positions are saying and on what other people are doing.

Japanese people have traditionally believed that the mature person has to prioritize what one is expected to do over what one wants to do, and to choose to actively put one’s efforts into completing the assigned tasks over the efforts to invest time and energy into what one is interested in (see Azuma 1994, Befu 1986, and Morioka 1991). As the old saying goes: “Nagaimono niwa makarero” (If you can’t fight them, join them). As another saying goes: “Yoraba taiju no kage” (When you take shelter, make sure you go under a big tree). By continuously damaging the environment as a group, and turning a blind eye to the environmental degradation caused by corporate activity, Japanese natural environment was diminished and destroyed for vigorous economic growth. Here, I cannot clearly prove a relationship between what the students are learning in the classroom and Japanese people’s environmentally unsound activities. However, it is no exaggeration to argue that, in the larger context, the students who are habituating themselves to rely too much on other people may be overwhelmed by the surrounding circumstances when they come to the crossroad and have to choose to behave either in environmentally sensitive ways or in environmentally-unfriendly ways. Between teachers and students, the teacher teaches not only what s/he attempts to teach, but also a way of being and interacting. This behavioral pattern can be applicable to the way make decisions when they face environmental problems. In the following part, I am going to present the concrete descriptions of
the scenes in which students are learning a way to find the correct answer, or what they are expected to say (do) in conventional classes.

8.3.1 Pass to the correct answer: looking around for the answer

The following conversation is a last part of the Asano-sensei’s science class, in which children were learning about the relationship between air volume and temperature. In this conversation, Asano-sensei is clearly expecting the children to acquire an ability to find the correct answer. This is not a characteristic of the *atamanoyoi* child, but of the *kashikoi* child.

Asano-sensei: Today, we have heated the air in some ways. What did you learn from that experiment, Sasaki-kun?

Sasaki-kun: …

Asano-sensei: Well… Sasaki-kun, did you have something noticed while doing the experiment? When you heated the air in a test tube, what happened?

Sasaki-kun: …

Katori-kun: [The air inside the tube was] Expanded
(Katori-kun answered without raising his hand.)

Asano-sensei: Ok… Then, what happened next?

Katori-kun: The air broke the cover!

Asano-sensei: While you were heating the air, … the cover was expanding … and, finally, broken.

(While speaking, she was writing Katori-kun’s answer on the blackboard.)

Asano-sensei: OK. Why was that cover broken, Toguchi-san? When you heated the air, what did the air do to the cover?

Toguchi-san: …

Asano-sensei: What did the heated air… do… to the cover…?

Toguchi-san: It broke the cover…?

Asano-sensei: Well… it broke the cover … (a relatively long silence) … the cover was broken. So, what the heated air do to the cover?

Sakaguchi-kun: It might push [against the cover].

(Sakaguchi-kun answered without raising his hand)

Asano-sensei: Yeah, right. It pushed against the cover of the test tube. Then, the cover was broken up because it couldn’t hold any longer. When you heated the air in the test tube, the air pushed the cover made from a soap-and-water solution to get out. However, because it was obstructed by the cover, it broke the cover and get out of the tube.

(Asano-sensei wrote Sakaguchi-kun’s answer on the blackboard)

(Field note, November 8)
In a previous class, the children had carried out a scientific experiment, in which they were heating the air in a test-tube with a thin and fragile cover made from a soap-and-water solution with a gas burner, and observing the cover was broken after a while. Thus, Asano-sensei began this class by asking Sasaki-kun about the experiment in order to remind the all children of what they observed and learned before. However, he did not respond to her as she expected. Sasaki-kun was keeping still. As soon as sensing that Sakai-kun would not be able to answer, Katori-kun, seated next to Sasaki-kun, answered without raising his hand with a pleasant smile, “Expanded” and “The air broke the cover!” After summarizing Katori-kun’s answer—“When heated the air in the test-tube with a gas burner, the cover made from a soap-and-water solution expanded and was finally broken”—on the blackboard, Asano-sensei proceeded to ask a next question to Toguchi-san about the reason why the cover was broken. Yet, she was holding her tongue. After Asano-sensei gave her some clues, Toguchi-san finally put in a faint voice, “It broke the cover…” Her answer was not completely wrong, but different from what Asano-sensei expected from her. Sakaguchi-kun put in, “It might push [against the cover]” immediately after apprehending that Asano-sensei was expecting another expression. Asano-sensei turned her head to face Sakaguchi-kun and nodded as if to say, “I was waiting for that answer,” and wrote his answer on the blackboard. In contrast to Sakaguchi-kun’s somewhat self-complacent smile, Toguchi-san did not alter her facial expression at all during looking at the blackboard, on which her answer did not finally appear.

Both sentences that Asano-sensei wrote down on the blackboard were certainly the opinions expressed by the children, but at the same time, they were expressions of Asano-sensei’s expectations. She kept asking questions until she could get the expected responses from the children. Thus, the active, mutual interactions between Asano-sensei and the children, in which Asano-sensei was apparently taking enough time to listen to as many children as possible, was Asano-sensei’s strategy to seek someone who would be able to represent her expectation.

From the children’s point of view, the primary concern was what kind of a reaction they could get from Asano-sensei. If his/her answer were written down on the blackboard, it would be the most valuable compensation for the child because s/he could recognize that his/her answer was accepted. Therefore, while teachers were asking a question to comprehend whether all children were clearly understanding, and writing down students’ opinions on the blackboard to have the children assuredly acquire what they need to know, the children were attempting to approach the right answer based both on the teacher’s countenance and what they had already learned. If somebody’s answer were wrong, others began making up their own replies to the same
question based on the teacher’s facial expressions and interactions between the teacher and their friends. The scene seemed to me that the children as a whole were amusingly participating in a “word association game,” and seriously thinking about the right answer based on the wide variety of types of clues. In other words, a class is, from the children’s perspective, not only a time in which they can learn new knowledge from a teacher, but also, a time in which the students habituate themselves to seek for the clues and what they are expected to do in order to achieve the correct answer, which is already in the teacher’s mind. As a matter of course, if the classroom became too noisy, Asano-sensei made the students stop fussing. However, she was not striving to make the classroom quiet. Rather, she enjoyed the lively, active atmosphere in which the students were talking to each other. Thus, some students were always just relying on others to find the answers.

Drawing on the interactions between Asano-sensei and the students, it would be fair to say that although teachers do not disregard the importance of the individual’s efforts to get the correct answer based on the knowledge in his/her mind, they are trying to make the students acquire social and emotional intelligence in practice. This seems to reflect the teacher’s view of the people whom they are trying to make: to make kashokoi child rather than atamanoyoi child. Such interactions are observed not only in science class, but also in virtually every class, including social studies and Japanese classes. This is of interesting to me because, as already noted, this conflicts with the stereotype that teachers are just teaching the textbooks in the conventional subjects, which has given an impetus to establish the Period of Integrated Learning (used for environmental education). When declaring the establishment of this new subject, the MOE argued that the Period of Integrated Learning was required because today’s children are suffering from cramming and competition. However, public school teachers have already attempted to make people who have social and emotional intelligence not only through the Period of Integrated Learning, but also through other classes based on their belief that it is crucial for today’s children to live in their future. I did not find the KES teachers who were trying to cram the contents of textbooks into the students’ heads in disregard for the students’ wills and opinions.

8.3.2 Pass to the correct answer: find people on your side

Let me take another example to show how the children try to get the correct answer. The following long description is a part of the Asano-sensei’s arithmetic class. In the following interactions between Asano-sensei and the students quoted from my field notes, in which the children were making their first attempt to solve a division of three-digit numbers by two-digit numbers, or 120 divided by 40. Note that Hata-san was the one who goes to the best cram school
and her classmates knew that she was good at studies, including arithmetic. Thus, her answers and opinions had a big influence in the classroom. Indeed, as clearly described below, when Hata-san got a wrong answer, some students also got the wrong answer guided by her. Although trying to get the correct answer by carefully looking at Asano-sensei and their friends, in the following example, such a strategy to find the correct answer lead students to a wrong answer. When being aware of the fact that they got a wrong answer, those who have habituated themselves to rely on the friends who are good at studies or people who have power in the given situations, including teachers and adults to figure out the answers were trying to find next individuals whom they can dependent on. This description will provide insights into a problem embedded in the socially and culturally accepted way to seek out the correct answer according to the social situations and given contexts.

Asano-sensei began the class, “OK. This is our first time to try to solve a division of three-digit numbers by two-digit numbers. Well, well… Let’s solve this problem. Store A wants to sell 120 origami papers total. The shopkeeper says, ‘I want to package these origami papers in beautiful boxes.’ If he puts exact four origami papers in each box, how many boxes does he need?”


After writing down the answer “three” on the blackboard, Asano-sensei turned around and asked to the whole class, “OK. Anything else?” The three boys and other children who thought of that “three” must be the correct answer looked somewhat confused.

Matsuno-kun expressed, “What do you mean, Sensei? Isn’t ‘three’ the correct answer?”

Asano-sensei was smiling, but did not answer to Matsumoto-kun.

After a while, some girl put doubtfully, “Is that thirty boxes?” Her answer “thirty boxes” made Asano-sensei grin delightedly. She said, “I supposed that someone would say ‘thirty.’ Thank you.”

As soon as Hata-san agreed with the answer “thirty,” almost seven or eight other children took a side with Hata-san.

Almost five minutes later, after looking around the class, Asano-sensei said, “OK. Can anybody explain a reason why you consider ‘three’ or ‘thirty’ as the correct answer? Seemingly, a half of you consider ‘three,’ and the other half ‘thirty.’ Tell your friends having opposite opinion about the reason for your answer, and change their mind.”

Imoto-kun proudly put, “Asaoka-sensei, don’t you have a cell phone? Use its calculator function, and tell us the correct answer? That’s the easiest.”

Asano-sensei responded to him, “Do we really need to use it for this problem, Imoto-kun?”

Raising a hand, Ono-kun vigorously said, “I have already learned how to solve a division problem at a cram school. Can I use that computation technique?”
Asano-sensei, “No, you cannot. Other friends haven’t learned it at school yet, right? It’s unfair to use a technique that others haven’t learned at school yet. OK?”

After several minutes of silence, Sakaguchi-kun opened his mouse, “Well… I think, the shopkeeper needs 1,200 origami papers if he wants to make thirty boxes.”

Asano-sensei was nodding to him and said, “Everyone, did you hear what Sakaguchi-kun just said? What do you think about it? I think that’s a good opinion. He said that in order to make thirty boxes, the shopkeeper needs 1,200 origami papers. Any other opinions?”

The class became silent again. Asano-sensei was doggedly waiting for other opinions from the children who are on the side of “thirty.” Some boys and girls looked up into Asano-sensei’s face, but she hardly responded to them. When finding a boy trying to look up the answer in the textbook, Asano-sensei firmly said to him in a soft voice, “Don’t easily look up in the textbook. The textbook might be wrong. Without relying on the textbook, use your own mind.” However, more children had already lost concentration, and were looking around restlessly, and quietly signaling to others to say something. Some of them looked at me observing their interactions, and whispered, “Tell me the answer, please.”

After listening to Asano-sensei’s voice, “Don’t you have any opinions?” Fukunishi-kun opened his mouse, “Well… Thirty multiple four equal 120, right…? So…”

Sakaguchi-kun exaggeratedly said, “Oh, I see.” And, many children in the classroom were also nodding to the Fukunishi-kun’s opinion.

Hata-san, who were initially on the “thirty” side, said, “Yeah, right. Then, thirty multiple forty equal 1,200, so …”

Some children recuperated their vigor and showed an energetic smile on their face, but some were already tired of that problem. Imoto-kun impatiently said, “Asano-sensei… Tell us the right answer, please!”

Asano-sensei opened her mouse, “I think that Fukunishi-kun’s opinion was very good. Is anybody feeling something strange when you see the problem ‘120÷40=3’? Be honest, and raise your hand if you don’t feel comfortable… OK… It’s very important to be honest now. I know some people are still wondering whether the answer is ‘three’ or ‘thirty.’”

Although Asano-sensei was still encouraging all the children to think of the answer in a logical and careful manner, some boys like Katori-kun and Sakaguchi-kun were repeatedly saying in frustration, “OK. OK. The answer should be ‘three,’ I knew that from the very start. I have learned how to solve such a problem at a cram school!” “Let me use the textbook! Why don’t you allow us to look it up in it?”

Since Asano-sensei was so hung up on that problem, an increasing number of children were feeling something weird.

Kawakami-kun put, “Uh, can’t we erase ‘zero’ when we solve the problem, ‘120÷40=3’?”

After seeing that Asano-sensei was nodding her assent to the Kawakami-kun’s idea, Katorikun said, “That’s what I have been saying! All along”

Asano-sensei responded to him immediately, “No, you haven’t said that at all. OK. Based on Kawakami-kun’s idea, let’s solve the problem in an easier way. What about ‘30÷10’? OK, three, two, one…”

Almost all children chorused, “Three!”
Hata-san said, “Oh, he’s right! He was right! Wow!”
Asano-sensei: “Well… Do you people really understand this? Is anybody feeling something strange?”
Katori-kun loudly asked Asano-sensei, “Which side are you on, by the way?”
Mitsuya-kun nodded and said, “Yeah. Are you on the side of ‘thirty’ or ‘three’?”
Asano-sensei answered, “I believed that ‘thirty’ was the right answer when I was a kid like you”
Katori-kun responded to her, “You didn’t go to a cram school, did you?? If so, you couldn’t have been very good at studies, and weren’t been able to get high marks on tests?”
Imoto-kun also asked me the same question, on which side was I.
Sakaguchi-kun suddenly put, “Let’s decide the answer by the majority vote!” But, Fukunishi-kun responded to him right away, “I don’t think that’s a good idea in this case.”
Hata-san finally said, “OK, why don’t we accept Kawakami-kun’s idea, and finish this class?”
Everybody in the classroom was nodding.
(My Field note, October 4)

As soon as the class began, three boys who were going to a cram school (Katori-kun, Suzuki-kun, and Sakaguchi-kun) said the correct answer, “Three,” based on the computation technique that they had learned at their cram school. However, what Asano-sensei expected from the children was not to answer the division problem faster than others, but to carefully reason about their opinions by themselves.

Some students could immediately find the correct answer like the three boys. However, Asano-sensei was consistently asking the students to explain their own opinions with their own words. Whether one could quickly reach the answer was not so important in the class. Thus, even though one could get the answer based on what s/he had learned at a cram school, s/he did not feel satisfaction with it. Asano-sensei did not directly criticize the fact that the children going to a cram school utilized the technique which they had learned. Yet, she seemed uncomfortable if those children acted proud or boasted about it. Asano-sensei intended to teach every student about the importance of struggling to achieve an answer. This seemed reflect Asano-sensei’s fundamental perspective of education. Regardless of whether one is going to a cram school or not, everyone has to learn the significance of gambaru-koto (do one’s best) to achieve a goal. It is consistent for all students.

In the class, the fact that Hata-san’s opinion had a strong impact on all children was clarified when she got a wrong answer. Because Hata-san got involved in the “Thirty” side, nearly half of the children came to consider “Thirty” as the correct answer. Indeed, the children who hardly opened their mouth were always nodding their head when Hata-san expressed her idea. Some
children were not showing their interests in seeking the answer of the unsolved problem at all, but just waiting for Hata-san’s answer. It is because the students had already well known that Hata-san was good at arithmetic because she was going to the best cram school and studying a lot everyday, and thought that she must get the correct answer. Although whether they went to a cram school did not have a big influence on the school test score at elementary-school level because anybody who can pay attention to what the teacher was talking about in class can gain a good mark on tests, the children were obviously viewing the direct relationship between the attendance of a cram school and the possibility of having the correct answer. It was epitomized in Katori-kun’s word, “You [= Asano-sensei] didn’t go to a cram school, did you? If so, you couldn’t have been very good at studies, and weren’t able to get high marks on tests?”

What caught my attention was the fact that when noticing that they could not get the correct answer from their friends, the students began to figure out in which side Asano-sensei (and I) were on. As a matter of fact, since the beginning of the class, every child started his/her own journey to seek someone who had the answer. It could be because each had already believed that it was effective and easier to get the correct answer by finding someone who knew the answer and getting involved in that group. In the children’s eyes, the process of getting the correct answer seems equivalent to the process of participating in the group of people who have already known the correct answer. For this very reason, they shrewdly watched others’ facial expressions and behaviors, and tried to distinguish what they had in their mind.

From the description of the two classes, arithmetic and science, it becomes clear that teachers are encouraging students to get the correct answer through the interactions with their friends and teachers. Teachers did not disrespect the importance of knowledge and information, and indeed encouraged individual students to make the best use of what they had learned to get the correct answer. However, in at least some children’s eyes, the teachers’ tendency to put emphasis on the significance of the cooperative efforts and social intelligence made the message seem to be that they could get the correct answer by relying on other people’s efforts. Through the experiences to successfully achieve the correct answer by using the teacher’s eyes and behavior and the friends’ attitudes as criteria, children gradually have habituated themselves to using the criteria for behavior in the everyday circumstances of their lives.

8.4 The environment-related content in social studies

Through classes, teachers intend to make kashikoi children who have not only book-smarts, but also street-smarts through conventional classes. According to my observation, this influences teachers’ words and acts in teaching environment-related contents in everyday classes. In the
following, I am going to show how the teachers’ sense of values is slipping into the teachers’ words. I heard the following discussion in a social studies class. Asano-sensei thought that contents that she had to teach were too difficult for the students. Thus, she was trying to explain the difficult contents in an easy-to-understand manner. While attempting to simplify the contents for the students, her sense of values and perspective of the children was sneakily and smoothly slipping into the message that Asano-sensei passed on to the students. From the following description, it will become clear that children are always, either consciously or unconsciously, learning a way of thinking and a framework of decision-making regardless of the teacher’s intentions.

Asano-sensei: Is there anybody who wants to read the textbook, page… 68?
Uchida-kun raised his hand, and was asked to read the textbook. He stood up and read slowly almost two pages of the social studies textbook.
Asano-sensei: Thank you, Uchida-kun. … Look at the picture in the textbook. Have you ever seen this before?
(Nobody answered)
Asano-sensei: Do you know where it is?
Katori-kun: Is it Lake Biwa?
Mitsuya-kun: It’s Yamato River, isn’t it?
Asano-sensei: You can find the answer in the textbook where Uchida-kun has just read.
Mitsuya-kun: I got it. It’s Kyoto prefecture.
Asano-sensei: Right. Then, what is this story about?
(Children were riffling through the textbook.)
Asano-sensei: People in Kyoto prefecture had been enduring hardship. What was the problem for them?
Kimura-san: Water.
Murakami-san: Water.
Asano-sensei: Right. They had huge water issues. Itagaki-san appeared in the textbook. Tell me who is she.
Watanabe-kun: Governor.
Asano-sensei: What is governor?
Yoshida-kun: A strange person… (Laughing)
(Yoshida-kun’s answer made some classmates laugh)
Watanabe-kun: It’s the greatest person in Kyoto.
Asano-sensei: Yes. Ms. Fusae Ohta is one in Osaka. What did he do?
Sakaguchi-kun: Construction.
Asano-sensei: What kind of construction did he do?
Totsuka-kun: Water construction.
Asano-sensei: Kyoto people decided to establish the Lake Biwa Canal. They decided for some reasons. First, by constructing a water mill, they wanted to pick up the pace of the development. Second, they wanted to use a ship to transport to and from Osaka. Third, they were intended to solve water problems, such as, lack of agriculture water, fire protection water, and drinking water. Fourth, they considered that water could be utilized for polishing rice. And, fifth, they believed that they could use the water for clearing up the community.
Watanabe-kun: Well… Were there any problems associated with the construction?
Asano-sensei: Yes, there were.
(Asano-sensei wrote “In 1885, construction cost =” on the blackboard, and the children transcribe it on their notebook.)
Asano-sensei: The construction started in 1885. How much did it cost?”
Katori-kun: 500 million yen?40
Asano-sensei: No, no…
Katori-kun: Oh, 1.25 million yen?
Asano-sensei: Right. It cost about 1.25 million yen for the construction. At that time, people could buy 140kg rice by 6.5 yen. So…”
Asano-sensei: Back in those days, people had to carry the ships when they needed to go over a mountain.
Katori-kun: It’s a pain in the neck. Why didn’t they cut a road through a hill?
Asano-sensei: Yeah… I agree with that… It was incredibly painful, so … they finally invented something? What did he make?
Hata-san: It’s a motor, isn’t it?
Asano-sensei: Yes. They made a motor. He made a hydroelectric power. He began to utilize water to carry the ship.
(We heard a chime and the class was over.)
Asano-sensei: Ok, I wanted to continue this conversation a little bit more, but we will stop here today. Remember, the Lake Biwa Canal activated the Kyoto industry. And, people who had left the community were coming back. Kyoto people today are still using the canal.
(My Field note, October 4)

This conversation lasted almost twenty minutes. Within this twenty-minute interaction, at least ten students, or virtually more than one-third of all students, had opportunities to express their opinions. A purpose of this class was to teach the children about the achievements of their

40 $1=approx. 118.368 yen
predecessors, and she successfully explained it to the children in a positive atmosphere of the classroom. Every child had a smile on his/her face, and looked, to a greater or lesser extent, satisfied with the class. As many teachers often pointed out, when the learning about something new, children always became enthusiastic.

Partly because she did not consider this class as a part of environmental education practices, Asano-sensei responded to the Watanabe-kun’s question about construction only from an economic perspective, in spite of the fact that the question could be answered from multiple perspectives, including an ecological perspectives. Another reason for Asano-sensei’s explanation was that the textbook explained the by-products of the construction only from an economic perspective. It was still partly because of her belief that the children could clearly imagine the severity of the problem only if she told them that the construction involved enormous cost.

In order to attract the public attention, people usually explain an efficiency, convenience, and damage from an economic perspective in the culture of capitalism, or consumer society. For instance, when looking at some advertisements, people tend to judge its advantage based on the cost. It is applicable to the children today too. As I described in another chapter in this thesis, they are surrounded by many goods. They very often talk about money from parents, from friends, and in their favorite TV programs from an early age, and had been learning to judge a value of things from an economic perspective. Therefore, it is understandable for Asano-sensei to believe that an explanation based on an economic perspective is easier to understand for the children.

Indeed, the tendency to explain a problem from an economic perspective was shown in other classes. For example, in a Kuraki-sensei’s social studies class, she was talking about the development of the school community to the children. When she mentioned, “in order to develop this community, our predecessors struggled to irrigate water from nearby lakes,” a girl raised a question, “What happened on that water?” Her question showed that she was not interested in the development of the community or value of the irrigation; rather, she wanted to know problems caused by the water irrigation. However, Kuraki-sensei just answered, “It did not cause a big problem because our predecessors paid for that water,” and concluded the class with the words, “Thanks to our predecessors’ efforts, we can now live peacefully here. Thus, we have to be grateful to them.”

To make the complex easy to understand, the teachers tend to simplify the topic of the class based on their sense of value that has been culturally, socially, and historically constructed. In other words, when they construct a discourse on environmental problems based on their knowledge and experience, as well as when they interpret the contents of textbooks, environmental problems described in textbooks are necessarily altered by teacher’s sense of
values, their belief, knowledge and experiences. As far as attempting to explain a complex issue to a whole class involving both comprehensive and not-so-comprehensive children, the teachers cannot help but simplify the topic by selecting some points to be accentuated. This is just what Sato-sensei mentioned to Kawakami-sensei: “The class might become better if you could clearly distinguish ‘important points’ and ‘not-so-important points.’ ... You will become able to distinguish them through the interactions with the children.” It seems that the teachers are carefully selecting the ‘important points’ based on ‘the interactions with the children’ in order to conduct a ‘child-centered’ class. Yet, while positively selecting the important points, the teachers tend to disregard the fact that their selection unintentionally and unconsciously leads to prevent the children from paying attention to the points assumed as “not-so-important.” It was epitomized in the Asano-sensei’s response to Watanabe-kun and Kuraki-sensei’s answer to the girl. Both teachers were explaining the issue under discussion only from the economic perspective. This seems to reflect the fact that people’s free choice is made under the influence of social and cultural norm and values.

From the children’s perspective, teachers are demonstrating how to simplify a complex issue, what aspect they should focus on, and what aspect they can eliminate in order to grasp complex issues. In other words, by following the guidance of the teachers, the students are steadily habituating themselves to spotlighting the economic aspect to evaluate what is going on in society. In the same manner as the teachers, the children gradually become able to simplify a complex issue, and unconsciously regard economic indicators as an important and culturally accepted criterion for evaluation. In classes, teachers did not refer to the fact that they were eliminating some aspects of the issues when they were selecting some “important” points partly because teaching every aspect of the issues can make the students confused. Moreover, another reason for this is the fact that the simplification, or the distinction between what is important and what is not-so-important is practiced spontaneously.

Here, it is essential to closely explore how teachers simplify complex issues in classes. Whether something is realistic or idealistic is one of the criteria that have a decisive influence on people’s behavior. The same applies to the teachers’ words and behavior. Indeed, during my internship, some teachers expressed their perspective of environmental education as follows.

Kikuchi-sensei: I consider that it is ideal for the children to have their own opinions in environmental education, but, in reality, it is difficult to practice at elementary school in Japan.

Matsumoto-sensei: Yes. I agree with her. Certainly, we need to have the children have their own opinions. However, it is not preferred to express their
own personal opinions in Japan, is it? Instead, people prefer to keep the harmony of the situation which they are in.

Kikuchi-sensei: Also, adults tend to regard the docile child as a good boy or girl. Don’t you think so?

(My Field note, November 24)

Moreover, in his comment, which was quoted in chapter six (“If the implementation of environmental education could trigger negative consequences for the smooth practice of the other traditional subjects, we cannot spend a lot of time on environmental education in reality”), Ohnuki-sensei clearly explained the difficulty of the implementation of environmental education by the word, “reality.” Reality has two aspects; that is, reality as “something constructed” and that as “something given” (Maruyama 1964). However, according to political scientist and philosopher Maruyama (1964), Japanese people have a tendency to regard only the former aspect as a reality while disrespects the latter aspect. The word reality is often equated with the word “fait accompli,” or accomplished fact. As reflected in the all-too-common phrase, “Genjitsu dakara shikataganai” (I have no choice because it is the reality), reality is generally regarded as something that already happened, and thus people have to accept it. The tendency to regard reality as something given and something that already happened in past times tends to lead people to easily resign themselves to the status quo (1964:172). The ideal must always give way to or is limited by the real.

From this perspective, as long as people are tagging the efforts to solve environmental problems as idealistic and the struggle to make money for their more affluent life as realistic based on their simplistic understanding of their lifestyle, they may place a high value on the latter over the former. Today, people do not notice the fact that their lifestyle is ultimately supported by the natural environment while believing that it is necessary to maintain economic stability to live in this society. People who disrespect this fact as a result of their simplistic understanding of the complex and complicated reality tend to label a part of the reality that is visibly in front of them as “reality (realistic)” and, at the same time, label the other parts as “ideal (idealistic).” Then, they generally say, “Idealistically, it must be significant to protect the natural environment; nevertheless, the reality is that we do not have enough money and time for that.”

It is no exaggeration that environmental education is ultimately influenced by the cultural construction found in Japanese classrooms that make an important distinction between the ideal and the real. By observing the teacher’s attempts to simplify complex and complicated issues, students are gradually learning to simplify complex reality based on economic indicators and criteria. However, in the process of the simplification of the complex issues, the children tend to
disrespect the fact that by extracting what seems important, they are eliminating things that are assumed as “not important.” As students, ideas are influenced by the distinction between the ideal and the real which is made by the teachers, and the teacher’s tendency to give a preference the latter over the former, and in the larger context, they are influenced to evaluate environmental issues in a similar way.

It is noteworthy that economic indicators and criteria are useful, but are not the only and perfect criterion, and have tended to underestimate the value of nature. While pursuing the permanent expansion of the economy using GNP as the sole measure of wealth and development, people have destroyed nature. When taking this point into consideration, it is possible to argue that learning to evaluate the issues from the economic perspective may have something to do with the destruction of the natural environment. Thus, I think that it is important to view the teacher-students interaction embedded in the conventional classes as a part of environmental education. Although teachers are not particularly trying to teach the importance of nature, they are at least passing on the culturally accepted criteria for evaluation of what is going on and a framework for decision-making that is constructed in their own life.

8.5 Conclusion of chapter eight

In this chapter, I focused on the classes that are not viewed as environmental education from the teacher’s perspective. The teachers regard a class as a “construction” that consists of mutual interactions between a teacher and students. They never consider it as time to transmit a certain set of culturally accepted knowledge to the children in a unilateral way. This point is important to note from the viewpoint of the Period of Integrated Learning, in which teachers are consciously conducting environmental education based on their class schedule. While trying to teach the contents of textbooks, teachers were always conscious of students’ interest and thoughts to construct classes. This seems to contradict with the perspective that today’s schools are paying less attention to individual student’s personality and individuality by adhering to teaching textbooks. Based on this understanding of schools, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has proceeded the successive educational reforms with the slogan of “jidō-chūshin shugi no kyoiku” (child-centered education) and “yutori kyoiku” (education free from pressure), argued the importance of the establishment of the Period of Integrated Learning, and encouraged individual schools to conduct environmental education within this new subject. However, it seems that in demanding teachers to use the Period of Integrated Learning for environmental education, the MOE has implicitly led the teachers not to regard other subjects and nonacademic aspects of school life as a part of environmental education.
The way teachers conduct classes reflects the teachers’ philosophy of school education—or, what kind of people they are trying to create through school education. Teachers are trying to make people who have not only a lot of knowledge and information in their minds, but also have social and emotional intelligence (kashikoi child). On the surface, this image of an individual that the teachers are trying to make seems similar to the concept of people who have an “ikiru chikara” (zest for living) in MOE’s term. However, it is noteworthy that the teachers were attempting to make kashikoi children because the MOE has recently encouraged elementary schools and teachers to make such kind of people. Rather, they try to make wise children with social and emotional intelligence because they know that people who can survive in this society should have both appropriate amounts of intellectual, moral, and social intelligence. Teachers are not intentionally or consciously working as a cog in the machine at school. They are not mechanically trying to make a student into a subject endowed with the property of being a self-conscious agent that is required in capitalist society according to the social expectations. Even though they are eventually contributing to the production of individuals who are required in capitalist society, teachers’ behavior and words are not just an expression of the social expectations toward teachers, but they behave and talk based on their own sense of values, educational philosophies, view of children, and behavioral criteria that have been etched in their mind in their life. Since those values and educational philosophies are ingrained in their mind, they have an influence on their behavior and voice under any circumstances, or not only in the traditional classes but also in environmental education classes. Furthermore, these senses of values and behavioral criteria that are constantly transmitted from teachers to the students can have impacts on the children’s future behavior and attitude toward the natural environment. Note that in contradiction to the teachers’ efforts to make wise children, students often become individuals who rely too much on other people’s eyes, opinions, and expectations to decide their own behavior and opinions. This is important because as the history of environmental problems shows, people have unintentionally and unconsciously contributed to degrade and destroy the natural environment by making decisions about their attitudes and behavior toward the environment based on what other people are doing.

Based on my observation and analysis, it seems fair to argue that every interaction between teacher and students and between students can be viewed as a part of environmental education. To teach about the economic development in social studies class, without reference to the laws of ecology or the damage of the development on the natural environment is to teach a fundamentally important ecological lesson: that ecology has nothing to do with the economy or development (see, Orr 1994; Kitamura 2000). In order to teach complicated topics like environmental problems
to students, teachers tended to simplify the problems by spotlighting a certain aspect of the problem based on their sense of values. The more unconsciously and unintentionally distinguished important points to teach from not-so-important points, the more teachers tend to use the culturally accepted selection criteria that have been developed in their own lives. People who are living in this capitalist society tend to use economic indicators to evaluate value, efficiency, convenience, and damage of things. Because people need to effectively and wisely utilize this kind of criteria to live in the culture of capitalism, I do not completely deny the importance of demonstrating the use of economic criteria to students. However, it has to be kept in mind that such criteria based on economic indicators tend to underestimate the value of nature. It is noteworthy that if teachers cannot demonstrate the way to utilize other criteria like the value of environment at school, there may be only limited opportunities for today’s children to learn the importance other criteria.
Chapter 9. What the Children are Learning through Nonacademic School Event: The case of Sports Day

People outside of school tend to overlook the relationship between nonacademic events and academic activities. However, particularly big events that invite parents and local residents (i.e., the Sports Day) certainly have a big influence on the children’s attitudes toward schoolwork. Indeed, the original class schedule was often altered because teachers and students had to spend a lot of time preparing for events. Particularly when they also had to engage in the preparation of the Period of Integrated Learning, teachers were apparently forced to be very busy. At this time, they strongly feel that they need more support in terms of time and personnel in order to conduct effective classes. Drawing on the understanding that teachers and children are engaged not only in academic activities, but also in nonacademic activities, I argue that there is a strong relationship between nonacademic events and environmental educational activities. However, as I argued in the last chapter, students’ ways of thinking are constructed under the influence of every interaction with teachers and friends.

The more time and energy they spent in the preparation of nonacademic events including the Sports Day, the more likely teachers were forced to feel considerable pressure from the lack of time and personnel that were required to give students a good education. By describing the teacher-student interactions embedded in the preparations for the Sports Day, I am going to reveal the cultural norms and values that teachers explicitly and implicitly pass on to the children and the image of people that the teachers are trying to make.

9.1 What is the Sports Day (Taiiku taikai)

Special activities (tokubetsu katsudō), including classroom activities (including guidance during school lunch), pupil council meetings, club activities, and school events (including, ceremonial events, sports events, school excursions, and cultural festivals), are regarded as an important educational practices. According to the course of study, the goal of this subject is as follows:

Special activities will contribute to helping a student have desirable human relations, to promoting rich hands-on learning activities, and to encouraging a student to acquire basic morals and social rules. They will also emphasize that they help a student to develop a independent and practical mind to build a better life as a group member. (Ministry of Education 1999)
As Tsuneyoshi (1994) points out, special activities are considered as a measure to promote the children’s “desirable” attitudes and behavioral habits in at the Japanese elementary school level. Indeed, there were almost 60 school events (such as, nonacademic activities, festivals, and events). Each of them is, at least theoretically, aimed at enhancing the children’s independent mind and the sense of being a member of a group. Therefore, it is valid to argue that it is crucial to focus on what the children are learning in non-academic contexts at school in order to identify the socially legitimated view of values and perspective for children.

Among various non-academic school activities, I focus on the teacher-students interactions seen in the context of the Sports Day (Taiiku Taikai)\(^4\), which is a traditional annual sports event held at elementary schools nationwide. Doubtlessly, the Sports Day is one of the most significant and popular school events. In fact, almost all students told me that they were looking forward to the event. The reason why I wrote “almost all students” is that I encountered a few children who were saying “I’m not so interested in the Sports Day this year…” because they were not good at sports or their parents could not come to see their active participation in the event. Yet, in most cases, they came to enjoy it by the day of the event, and finally wrote, “I enjoyed the Sports Day very much” in their reports written afterward.

On the Sports Day, a school creates an enthusiastic carnival-like atmosphere. The more the children enjoy its carnival-like air, the more their experience of the Sports Day becomes a “good memory” on the next day, in a calm and cozy atmosphere that is dramatically different from, or completely opposite of, the carnival-like air. Although during the advanced preparation, the children were often scolded much more than in any other situations in their school life, those experiences also finally became a good memory. Certainly, they were not only scolded. Based on the understanding that children’s vitality and concentration are not maintained by closing a class with reprehensive words in a gloomy atmosphere, but with praise in a cheerful atmosphere, teachers attempted to give them high praise. Thus, to achieve the long-term goal of making the Sports Day memorable, and also, to be praised by teachers in the short run, children were getting involved in the preparation for the Sports Day on hot summer days over thirty degrees in Celsius. When scolding and praising children, teachers were frankly expressing their sense of values. Thus, in the preparation for the event, the children were establishing their own sense of values based on the teachers’ words. Through preparations for the event, the children were able to make a

\(^{4}\) School events like Sports Day have been involving the local people deeply until today. According to Hirota (1999), these events assumed a crucial role to ease the conflict between local residents and the government when a number of schools were successively established in the local communities in Meiji period.
distinction between things they were likely to be praised and scolded for. This is the biggest reason why I decide to focus on the Sports Day in this chapter.

Although it is often overlooked by the advocates of school environmental education, students and teachers are engaged not only in academic activities, but also, in nonacademic events, including the Sports Day. Since the children were exhausting their vitality and energy in the preparation for the Sports Day in September, I often found that they hardly concentrated on what the teacher was talking about in class. This length of the practice, or thirty days, corresponds approximately to one-tenth of a school year without long holidays, and to a quarter of the second term. There are no other school events consuming such a long period of time. This implies the significance of the Sports Day from an educational perspective.

9.2 On the Sports Day

KES Sports Day was set for a Sunday with the expectation that many parents would attend. In the morning of the Sports Day, there were only a few light clouds floating in a bright, blue sky. My wife, a first grade teacher, left the house much earlier than usual, at about six, in order to prepare for welcoming the students of her class. According to her, other teachers were also supposed to get to the school early. About an hour after, I left home wearing a T-shirt and training pants rather than a regular suit. I also left home earlier because I had heard from the teachers that many parents would come to school early in order to get a good space to watch their children’s performances. Indeed, even though the event itself starts at nine in the morning, when I arrived at school after seven o’clock, many parents had already formed a line, waiting to get into the school field. Someone in the front of the school gate told me that they had been there since before six o’clock.

Around 8 a.m., the children began to come through the school gate with vivacious eyes and lively smiles. While usually coming to school in casual clothes, most boys and girls were wearing their physical education uniforms (taisoufuku). Not all wore sportswear because if it were strongly recommended, some parents would come to school and seek out the reason for that. It was not only when I heard this, but also through the observation of the teachers who were working hard everyday to make the Sports Day a success, I knew the fact that the teachers tried to make every decision while being sensitive to the eyes of parents and the school district.

When I was standing around the school gate with my own camera, a fourth grade boy approached me to take a picture of his family. He was saying, “Listen to me! My mom and dad have come here around six in this morning. They are securing a spot for watching my dance!” and staring at the lens of my camera. Near the gate, there is a sign board saying, “Heisei 17 nendo
2005] Taiiku Taikai.” When getting through the gate, children found the school ground with special decorations that teachers had made on the previous day, after the children went back home. Such decorations included a running track drawn with white lime, many tents located in the front of the schoolyard in which guests and other people having work to do were staying all day, a big long white sign with a slogan “Kachimake ni kodawarazu minnade kyōryokushi best wo tsukusu taiikutaikai ni shiyō!” (Be a good sport about losing! Do your best on every part of the Sports day in alliance with your friends!), and flags of all nations around the schoolyard. Because they looked severely short-handed, I helped the teachers to decorate the school. Once looking at a completely different view of the schoolyard, children came to feel that it was really Sports Day, and their enthusiasm was enhanced. Under the sun shining in the sky, they were keen to make the hot day hotter.

While the children were arriving at school, the teachers had a meeting in the teacher’s office for almost ten minutes from 8:10. Soon after the meeting, Tanaka-sensei announced to the children running both in the school building and on the schoolyard through the school public address system, “Until receiving instruction, stay in a classroom!” To check the children’s health condition, teachers were heading to the noisy bustling classroom.

By 8:50, the children were getting out on the schoolyard with their own small wood chairs. There were two teams: white and red. Children wearing a white cap were members of the white team, and those wearing a red cap were members of the red team. In general, each grade was separated into two teams. For example, in terms of the fourth grade, Ohnuki-sensei’s and Mori-sensei’s classes were the red team, and Tanaka-sensei’s and Asano-sensei’s classes were the white team. Thus, both red and white teams have almost the same number of children from every grade. The schoolyard was separated into two sides: one side for the red, and the other side for the white. All students stayed in the designated area when they were not participating in any events.

9.2.1 Entrance and the opening ceremonies

Around 8:55, with the sound of fanfare, the children began to march around the schoolyard. First of all, six council members—four girls and two boys—were coming in with a big school flag. Next, the white-team cheerleader followed with a championship flag. Then, two cheerleading members—one from the red team, the other from the white team—came in with a team flag. Following these children, others marched. Because they had practiced how to march again and again, their faces appeared somewhat dignified.

When the march finished, the teachers were standing in front of their own classes. In contrast to the ordinary morning meetings, they were not scolding the children speaking with
their friends; instead, teachers were at a standstill and quietly staring at them. The students were expected to be quiet by themselves. It was the parents, especially those who wore fluorescent colored vests that were actively running around the schoolyard. One of such parents in a vest told me, “This vest is a symbol of the volunteer members.” She also put in, “Because I am wearing this vest, I can run around the schoolyard freely so that I can take photos of my daughter a lot.”

The opening ceremonies started at nine. The opening ceremonies involved singing of the song of Sports Day and raising of the national flag, display of the huge championship flag, speeches of the KES principal, Kawabuchi-sensei, and a head of the PTA, a pledge for fair play by two girls, pronouncement of the Sports Day slogan—“Be a good sport about losing! Do your best on every part of the Sports day in alliance with your friends!”—, and explanation of dos and don’ts. This ceremony was all orchestrated by the KES vice principal who announced each speaker and called the children to stand to attention, bow, and stand at ease. The principal made a speech as follows.

As you wished, it is very beautiful day. Today, I would like you to exert every possible effort to every event to show what you have learned to your parents. It is the last Sports Day for the six graders. Please show what you have learned for almost six years of school life to your parents. You have been putting all your energy into the preparation for today, often in a heavy sweat and mess, in the extreme head of summer. Please do your best and show your effort, and let your parents cry for joy. Gambatte kudasai! … For the first graders, this is the first experience of the Sports Day of KES. You may get more nervous than usual. Yet, you don’t have any problem. I know that you were practicing a dance so hard for today. … Also, you have to clearly distinguish when you can move from when you need to keep still today. … After the opening calisthenics, you won’t walk around. Can you keep still? Ok. Then, I would like to say thank you to all people supporting the students’ school life. Thanks to members of PTA, Kodomo-kai (a children association)43, and crossing guard, a silver club, and other residents often getting involved in anti-crime activities, KES students can be living a safe life. In behalf of KES, I would like to thank you very much. … It is the most

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42 There were contestations regarding who should be a host. There were two opinions. One was that some children should take the role of the host because the Sports Day is a student’s event. The other was that the vice president should do it. The teachers on this side mentioned that to do opening and closing ceremonies in a formal way, the children would need a lot of practice; thus, only in the ceremonies, the vice president can help the children. Clearly, both sides were sharing the idea that the Sports Day is a student’s event and that children should create their own Sports Day. This seems to show the teacher’s belief that the parents and people in the community are expecting to see the children’s active engagement in their own event to make it a success.

43 Kodomo-kai, or a children association, is a group aimed at helping the children to play with others of different age groups in order to let them learn knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are required to live in the society. This is a local group consist of both children and volunteer adults. Thus, based on where he or she is living, virtually every child belongs to the group.
exciting and delightful day today for you. Please give a rousing cheer to your friends, not only your teammates, but also friends in the opposite team. That’s all from me. Let’s enjoy the Sports Day! (My Field note, October 1)

The opening ceremonies ended at 9:15. After declaring the end of the ceremonies, the host was changed from the vice-principal to the students, and the first event began.

9.2.2 Events

The Sports Day consisted of two parts: the ceremonies—opening and closing ceremonies—and events. Everyone participated in at least six events; that is, three whole-school activities, or opening and closing calisthenics and cheers and songs for each team; a team competitive event for each grade; a noncompetitive group dance; and a race. There were also relay races for selected participants.

Team events for each grade included ball in basket (first grade), Omikoshi relay (second grade), pulling ropes (third grade), Taifū no me (fourth grade), mock cavalary battle (kibasen, fifth grade), and pulling poles (sixth grade). Although these events seemed competitive at first glance, no individual child was announced as a winner. Another feature of team events was that all events were equally valued; thus, for example, the winning team of the ball in basket and that of the mock cavalry battle could get similar, or even the same, scores despite the difference in their visual intensiveness. No doubt that some students could perform better than others, and some events were heated and attracted much attention; nonetheless, those whose running was more exciting were not announced to the public in an official manner.

Both boys and girls of each grade perform a group dance together. Every grade invested a great amount of time and energy during September in order to choreograph for the children. The children were first required to remember the choreographed sequence, and then to follow it orderly fashion. Let me take a few examples of the dances. The first graders endearingly performed a dance with red and blue knit gloves to a music of a popular cartoon, “Kaiketsu Zorori,” and the fourth grade boys and girls did a dance to a popular music using a colorful hand-towel. The sixth graders performed a long and moving gymnastics routine of group balancing and pyramid formations, titled “Believe—Hitori hitori no hanawo sakaseyo” (literary means, bloom the flower of each one).” This dance was the last event of the day. The six graders’ countenances showed that they were understanding the performance as a place to show what they had learned for almost six years of school life as the principal mentioned in the opening speech. Watching the six graders struggle to do their best in concert with friends, a fourth grade girl was saying to her friends, “Let’s do a dance like that two years from now!”
Moreover, every child ran at least one race that was scored by team (not by individual). The distance of the race was dependent on the grade. The first graders ran 40 meters, the second graders 50 meters, the third and fourth graders 80 meters, and fifth and sixth graders 100 meters. As soon as they listened to the announcement, the children are lined up in a predetermined manner, then each line is divided into groups of six—three reds and three whites. Following the instruction, the six children lined up at the starting line, and set off by a racing pistol shot, the run to the finish line. No group involved both boys and girls, thus they ran always separately. A teacher shot the racing pistol immediately after the previous cohort of runners finished. There was no runoff or other recognition of individual performances. Races are inevitably competitive; thus, all children, either fast or slow, ran very hard in front of the audience, but virtually no teacher put emphasis on who won or lost.

The relay races caught a great deal of attention from the audience. This was the only event involving selected participants. The red team members wore a red or yellow headband and the white team members wore a white or blue one. Although I could not observe other classes, in Asano-sensei’s class selection of children was hardly dependent on the ability of students; rather, Asano-sensei gave priority to the children’s will. She mentioned to the children of her class, “If you will participate in the relay race, you will be gathered for extra practices. Because the instructor knows well about how to run a relay race fast, you will certainly become a fast runner.” In contrast, from the children’s perspective, the relay race means nothing other than competition. No matter what teachers say, one who can run like a lamplighter earns the respect of his/her friends. Indeed, when those selected runners were practicing for this relay race during lunch break, many other students were gazing respectfully and enviously at them.

9.3 Instructional role of the Sports Day

The children struggling to do their best in front of audience, the teachers watching over the students and their performance, and the parents giving their children an enthusiastic round of applause—these are the essential parts of the KES Sports Day. By that night, I knew how much attention was riveted upon the event in front of thousands of photos of the day.

Teachers invested their energy and time to establish such a moving event. If they intend to explicitly preside over the event, they can more easily organize the Sports Day as a whole. Yet, they understood the event as a place where the children (a “central character” of the event) show their growth through various events, and their role was to support the children. In September, it is sweltering hot everyday in Osaka. Thus, according to Akiyama-sensei, “many children could not reserve their energy and concentration for study, and some children are almost always chatting.
Despite the fact that the teacher is talking in front of them. They fail to bring their belongings, required to bring to class because of the ongoing preparation for the Sports Day all day” (My Field note, November 16). Asano-sensei explained to her students, “Because putting much time and effort to the preparation unavoidably slows the pace of classes, you have to concentrate on what I am talking about in class” (My Field note, September 27). Indeed, many teachers are required to compel the children, who were already using up all their energy, to pay attention to the class. As Akiyama-sensei mentioned, the teachers often pointed out that their ordinary lives became too busy because of the preparation for the Sports Day especially within September.

In the following part of this chapter, two points are going to be identified because they relate to the manner in which environmental education occurs. First, I will clarify the fact that the children learned to prioritize the process to achieve goals and objectives over results. Among the strategies to attain goals and objectives, which are usually designated by teachers, teachers tend to view gambaru-koto (to do one’s best) and kyōryokusuru-koto (to cooperate) with others as the most crucial for the children to learn. Secondly, I will argue that the teachers and parents have expectations for the children to become able to behave in a flexible and impromptu manner according to the situation or context.

9.4 What they need to achieve a goal

In the opening speech, the KES principal, Kawabuchi-sensei, mentioned, “You have been putting all your energy into the practices for today, often in a heavy sweat and mess, in the extreme heat of summer. Please do your best and show your effort, and let your parents cry for joy. Gambatte kudasai!” As many overseas scholars have pointed out, the concept of gambaru (literally, to persist, hang on, or do one’s best) is a keyword to comprehend not only the Japanese schooling but also the whole Japanese society (e.g., Duke 1986; Singleton 1989; McVeigh 2002). In fact, during my fieldwork, I heard the word from a number of teachers everyday as well as words having a similar meaning; such as, doryokusuru (to make an effort), akiramenai (never give up). In various situations, such as, when encouraging a student to get high marks in a test, to get in good with his/her friends, to play a music instrument nicely, and to draw a beautiful painting, teachers emphasized the importance of gambaru-koto, doryokusuru-koto, and akiramenai-koto. In contrast, when a child failed to achieve goals or purposes, it was often

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44 The children learn the significance of “kyōryokusuru-koto” and “gambaru-koto” not only through school events like the Sports Day, but also through every part of their school life, including, lunch time and clean-up time. One crucial strategy to teach the significance of these concepts is using small groups (Tsune yoshi 1994). The children are often required to prepare lunch, eat lunch, clean up the classroom, and deal with study assignments with group members.
attributed to the lack of them. This tendency to teach the importance of gambaru-koto, doryokusuru-koto, and akiramenai-koto as means to achieve goals and purposes is derived from the teacher’s sense of values, in which a process is prioritized over a result. In an extreme case, if one seems to do his/her best, a teacher praised that student regardless of the results.

Everyday, all fourth graders, or about 140 students altogether practiced every event of the Sports Day under the instruction of four fourth grade teachers and a few extra teachers. With the Sports Day less than three days away, the fourth graders were practicing the fourth grader’s team events, or taifû no me. During the practice, as soon as finding a team cheering in an obvious manner because it won the game, Ohnuki-sensei stopped the practice, and gathered all students in front of him. He spoke with an angry tone:

Why did you cheer so obviously after that game? Even though you could win, you should not tear around. Don’t make a lot of noise. Quietly listen to the results of other teams after the game, and after you hear all announcements, a winning team can say, “Banzai!” only once. That’s all. And, even though you could win on the game, please praise other teams for their effort (gambari). Do you understand what I said? Those teams who couldn’t win will give a winning team a warm hand for almost five seconds. OK?! (My Field note, September 27)

Ohnuki-sensei’s powerful voice told the children not to be concerned about winning or losing. He acknowledged that the members of the winning team wanted to cheer for the team’s victory, but he did not allow them to do it in front of the defeated teams. There were certainly some children who did not understand and wondered why they should not cheer for the victory. However, it seemed that they gradually adopted Ohnuki-sensei’s sense of values while looking at the children who did not follow his instruction were scolded again and again. As a consequence, the children had gradually come not to overtly and liberally express their joy of victory even though they defeated the other teams. Ohnuki-sensei’s words clearly reflected his perspective that it is not always about winning or losing; rather, the children need to learn about effort and trying hard (gambaru-koto and doryokusuru-koto). Rather than cheering for the victory when they could get good results in races, the students are expected to be able to recognize the importance of the process, or whether they actually exerted all their strength. Also, at the practice for the race, Ohnuki-sensei mentioned with a loud voice:

Listen. I see some people aren’t prepared to listen to me! I am speaking to you now… So, you need to look at my face, don’t you? OK. First, don’t step on a white start line. If you step on it, you are out. Who are the people making a crouch start? If you do it, you’re also out. Did I tell you to do so? I didn’t,
did I? So, you cannot do it. I see a person who does something that I don’t say as one who doesn’t listen to me. OK? Next, when you heard the racing pistol shot, some of you were looking around, some others were looking to other runners while running. Don’t do that either! Who wins or loses isn’t a big matter. The most important thing for you is to do your best and don’t give up. That’s all. You shouldn’t care about whether you end up in the first or second place, or the fifth or last place. After all, you must follow the teachers’ instruction and *akiramenai de gambaru-koto* (do your best through to the end).

(My Field note, September 27)

According to Ohnuki-sensei, even in a competitive race, the children should not care about the result (whether one ends up in the first or last place). Instead, Ohnuki-sensei expected the children to listen to everything being said, to devote them to just do what they were told, and to act under orders. While seriously talking, he sometimes made a joke and had the children enjoy listening to him. Because other teachers were expressly nodding in agreement at Ohnuki-sensei, and sometimes warned some noisy children to pay attention to him, the overall interaction between teachers and students seemed that teachers were teaching the children to just pay attention to the process to achieve the goals and purposes, which were given by the teachers.

Teachers were not satisfied with looking at each student who individually made desperate efforts to win the games, but also they anticipated that the children to learn to *kyōryokusuru* (cooperate) with their friends to achieve a certain goal or purpose. This was reflected in the thin, small program of the Sports Day distributed to each household. There were the greeting from the school principal and a PTA president to the parents and guests on the front cover; the targets of the Sports Day, a list of events, and some requests from the school to the all comers are inside the program; a map of the school ground, and lyrics of the school song and the Sports Day song are on the back cover. According to the program, there are three targets of the event; “Maintain a healthy and safe life, and keep a well and strong body,” “Keep the rules, and don’t give up from beginning to end,” and “Make the Sports Day pleasurable by working together with friends.”

Taking these targets into consideration, each grade defined the every event’s goal, which was also written in the program. What was notable in those goals was that most competitive events and races involved the words that place a high priority on the process to achieve a goal. There were no words like “go for the victory” or “to the victory” throughout the program; in contrast, the words like *kyōryokusuru*, which prioritize the cooperative effort over the individual eagerness for victory, were used over and over. It reflects that the same as the fourth grade, other grades are thorough about the fact that processes are more important than results. Individual students were not expected not to lift the team to victory as a leader but to be part of the team and pursue the goal in cooperation with the teammates.
Teachers’ notions that they have to teach students about the significance of kyôryokusuru-koto (to cooperate), or cooperative efforts, as crucial strategies to achieve a certain goal or purpose is derived from and reinforced by the perspective of children; that is, today’s children lack social intelligence, or the ability to relate to, understand and interact effectively with others. This is a somewhat common view of today’s children. For instance, Kadowaki is renowned for his continuous arguments that children have not been able to fully develop shakai-ryoku (literally means “social competence”). In his 1999 book, entitled Kodomo Shakai-ryoku, he coined this term, shakai-ryoku, to highlight the importance of developing the person’s ability to get along with others and form a society—the person’s proactive stance in managing a society, the person’s willingness to promote a better society, and the person’s qualities and abilities to envisage a better society and realize it. Based on his understanding that today’s children lack these qualities, Kadowaki have energetically encouraged teachers and schools to take a major role in developing children’s shakai-ryoku (1999, 2002).

Because virtually all teachers had recognized that they had to help students acquire social intelligence based on their experiences, they incorporated the words that clarified the importance of cooperation in the monthly objective of September—“Chikara wo awaseyô ” (Let’s work together)—and the slogan of the Sports Day made by the children—“Be a good sport about losing! Do your best on every part of the Sports day in alliance with your friends!” The notion was also expressed in Asano-sensei’s words. While reprehending the children acting up in the classroom, she mentioned,

If having noticed that you will be able to create something very valuable by gambatte kyôryokusuru (making a cooperative effort), you have blossomed out for a month of the practice for the Sports Day. Do you remember what does the ‘kagayaku egao’ (shining smile) [this word was a part of the target of the fourth grade] mean? It’s not the same as grinning. It’s not the same as laughing at someone’s faults either. Only when you can make up something with your friends, you will be able to have ‘kagayaku egao’ on your face. Your dance was marvelous. At that time, your smile was so shining. You have such potential! (My Field note, October 17)

As expected by the teachers, the children performed the dance that, in turn, moved the parents. And, as a consequence, through the parents’ and teachers’ smiles and warm applause, they had gradually, but steadily, learned the importance of kyôryokusuru (to cooperate) with others to achieve the objectives. The taste of joy acquired through the Sports Day had become a source that would keep giving the children an impetus to cope with problems by making a cooperative effort with people around them.
In the first morning assembly after the Sports Day, the children were listening to the KES principal’s speech with their head held high:

While looking at your efforts, I was so glad. When you were running till the last gun was fired, you were very admirable. I hope that experience will have a good influence on your life from today on. With the memory of the Sports Day in your mind, please do your best in your school life. (My Field note, October 4)

Then, when are the children required to do their best and to work together with their friends? Although this is not the scene directly related to the Sports Day, Ohnuki-sensei mentioned as follows:

When you have a thing you want to do, you can be required to have patience before you actually do it. There can also be many things to do before and after you do it. You have to do all of them by yourself, perhaps in concert with your friends. Only when doing your best to overcome a hardship and discomfort in alliance with your friends, can you really feel happiness and satisfaction. (My Field note, November 1)

According to Ohnuki-sensei, the children are required to do their best and work together in order to overcome discomforts and hardships that prevent them from doing what they hope to do, which, in turn, will provide satisfaction and pleasure to them. His words seemed to be derived from a perspective of today’s children that today’s children easily turn tail when they meet discomfort and hardship. This perspective was indeed somewhat pervasive among the KES teachers. While looking at the children easily giving up on their own works in hand and being unable to carry the unfinished work through to the end, teachers often said in a low voice:

While facing the today’s children everyday, I ultimately consider that we cannot let the children enjoy what they want. They are lacking endurance, and tend to avoid seemingly-boring, unsung tasks. They do not doggedly go about important, but obscure and time-consuming works, such as the study of kanji (Chinese characters) and computation practice. Also the children today are not able to stand still for ten or fifteen minutes during morning assemblies. (My Field note, November 16)

Also, an experienced woman teacher frankly expressed her thought in a conversation as follows:
Don’t you think that the children tend to avoid what they don’t like so easily? Were you a child like them? It was maybe because I was lacking sensibility, but I don’t believe that I could often avoid difficulties, saying, ‘I hate this,’ ‘I don’t wanna do this,’ or ‘That’s a bother!’ like the children today. I wasn’t allowed to do so. Yet, they are everyday saying, ‘I hate this’ and ‘That’s bothering me.’ How do you feel about it? (My Field note, November 8)

These teachers’ voices clarify the fact that teachers’ tendencies to prioritize the process over the results is derived from their observation of the students embedded in everyday school life. While watching the children deciding their behavior and language based on their tastes and dodging or putting off unpleasant things, the teachers are always feeling their responsibility to teach them about the significance of undertaking the tasks that they do not like at all. This kind of perspective of today’s children, which is backed up by their everyday experiences, generates the sense of duty to cultivate the sense of endurance and tolerance in teachers’ minds. Behind such a perspective, there is also the teachers’ understanding that if the children cannot learn the importance of endurance and tolerance and if they are not able to put their efforts into what they do not like, they will certainly have to bear a lot of burden in their future when they will go out into the world. Teachers’ sense of care for their student’s future accelerates their sense of responsibility and obligation to make the students have patience, tolerance, and concentration to go through with trials and tribulations.

The tendency to give preference to process over results reflects the current social situation in regard to education of children. In contradiction to the argument that today’s parents are negligent of discipline and education of their own children, there are many parents who were nervous about their children’s school life (Hirota 1999, 2001). Such parents’ opinions and tastes influenced the teachers’ decision-making to a greater or lesser extent. As I described above, the teachers did not strongly recommend all students to wear their physical education uniforms when they came to school in the morning of the Sports Day partly due to the existence of the parents who a distaste for the school thoroughly regulating their children. Also, the reason for the fact that the vice president emceed the opening and ending ceremonies partly is because today’s schools are compelled to be conscious of the eyes of the parents and the residents of the school community.

Due to such social and cultural contexts of today’s public elementary schools, how the teachers treat the victory and defeat of each event and how the teachers teach the children about it are somewhat delicate problems for the schools. The diversity of students’ cultural and family backgrounds results in the diversity of demands from households to the school. While some parents want the teachers to remove the competitive aspects from the school events on the one
hand, some households may criticize if the school actually makes the Sports Day noncompetitive event. In such a social circumstance, the KES teachers decided to prioritize process over results. Among the teachers, some are tending to teach the students to adhere to the victory or defeat more than others. However, in general, the KES teachers were unconsciously balancing between the thorough elimination of the competitive aspect of the Sports Day and the complete obsession with it. Behind the teacher’s decision, there was a fundamental philosophy that, regardless of his/her family and cultural background, every child equally needs to learn to make a cooperative effort to deal with the tasks at hand.

I have attributed the causes of the tendency to give preference to process over results to the teacher’s concern about the children’s future above. In addition to these ideological reasons, there are also practical reasons for this tendency. If the teachers allow the individual students to act based on their tastes when dealing with many students at once, they cannot handle them to manage the classroom and the school as a whole. By teaching the students about the significance of the process itself, teachers hope that all students concentrate on what they have to do regardless of the differences in their cultural and family background.

However, it is noteworthy that teachers’ expectations and intentions are not always successfully transmitted to the children. No matter how much the teachers make a detailed plan, they are forced to alter such prior planning as soon as the students start up activities. There is generally a conflict between what the teachers originally wanted to teach and what the students actually learn. Although the teachers intend to let the students internalize the tendency to make all-out efforts to tackle the challenges in cooperation with others, whether or not this intention is accomplished is dependent on the individual student’s interpretation of the teacher’s message. There may be no problem if the students just learn the importance of devotion, cooperative efforts, tolerance, and endurance as the teachers expected. However, the students also learn to try to make others believe that they are devoting themselves and cooperating in order to win praise from people. Furthermore, teachers’ tendencies to give preference to process over results can develop the sense of apathy and indifference over the outcome in their mind.

What is critical to realize is the fact that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for the teachers to comprehend a number of students’ behavior, attitudes, and mood shifts altogether with faultless precision. At least in principle, it is possible for the teachers to get control over the students if they have sufficient time and resources, and if they are able to have one-on-one contact with them. They may be able to closely monitor whether and how every teacher’s behavior and language is actually penetrating into the minds and bodies of the students. However, as a matter of fact, both time and resources are insufficient. The already limited time and
resources have been used for the preparation for school events, including the Sports Day, and the increasing office duties and general affairs.

Therefore, in contrast to the social expectation toward the public school teachers to keep a watchful eye on each individual student, the teacher’s guidance and instructions often become generalized. Since those generalized instructions lack detail in comparison to individualized instruction, some students tend to regard such instructions as words that do not have anything to do with themselves. As described above, for example, in the context of the Sports Day, there are both students who care a lot about the competitive aspects of some events and are concerning about winning or losing and who are not competitive. It is true that the competitive consciousness in the students’ minds and enthusiasms in the events pump up the event. Since the teachers deeply acknowledge the positive aspects of the sense of rivalry, even though they never allow a student to make a fool of the children who lose; however, they do not always crack down on those who are contributing to creating the carnival-like atmosphere of Sports Day. There is a disjuncture between what a teacher has to say and what s/he wants to say. Considering the social expectations towards teachers to spotlight all individual students’ personality and individuality, teachers avoid excessively prompting the students’ desire to win. However, they also believe that students’ enthusiasm during Sports Day is required to make the event unforgettable for the students.

From the point of view of environmental education, the negative point of emphasizing process over results, or doing one’s best cooperatively, should be well acknowledged. It is no doubt that this tendency, which might be called a norm of conduct or a behavioral pattern, is culturally and socially permitted. As noted above, this can bring about the tendency to disregard the results and effects of the cultural customs and social practice. However, according to the history of environmental problems, it has to be kept in mind that people’s activities have had much to do with the degradation of nature.

9.5 Behave in a flexible and impromptu manner according to the situation or context: “rinkiouhen na koudou”

In another context, a reason for their making efforts to achieve a purpose and overcome hardship in cooperation is attributed to the surrounding people’s eyes, or parents’, teachers’, and friends’ eyes. In concrete terms, it reflected in the expressions like “Do your best in order to stir your parents’ heart;“ “Don’t give up and run to the finish line to satisfy people looking at you;” and “Perform a dance in cooperation with your friends to show those younger than you your growth.” From another perspective, this way of explaining the significance of efforts and cooperation seems to legitimize deciding on behavior and lifestyle based on the other people’s eyes. This shows an image of people that the teachers are trying to make through the Sports Day.
After describing the fact that the teachers are either consciously or unintentionally teaching the students about the importance of using other people’s eyes and opinions as a standard of behavior, I am going to discuss the negative point of this culturally and socially accepted behavioral criteria from the point of view of environmental education.

Teachers are not intentionally or proactively trying to neglect the differences among individuals or bend their wills. In contrast, they attempted to focus on the individual student’s standpoint. However, if more than thirty children were allowed to do whatever they want individually, the class atmosphere would fly out of control. If about 150 fourth graders were allowed to act just as they please, it is impossible to let them perform the moving dance. If all KES students were freewheeling, the Sports Day could disintegrate into total chaos, and the audience including parents and local residents would not like it. Thus, teachers, for better or worse, have to finally get control over the children.

In order to discipline the students’ behavior and attitudes, teachers can explicitly and vocally give instructions to the students as the occasion arises. However, according to my observation, teachers have little relish for explicitly preaching to the students all day. Of course, the manners and frequency of disciplining the student’s school life vary among individual teachers. However, quite a few, if any, teachers liked to scold the children without giving them a chance to explain. This is partly because the teachers have a distinction between “shikaru” and “okoru” in their mind. While both words tend to be used interchangeably to refer to an action that teachers show anger to students. However, the KES principal told me that shikaru is an educational strategy, but okoru is just an expression of anger. Only when they have a clear purpose can teachers lead students by shikaru. In contrast, okoru is the expression of one’s anger to students without clear purposes. According to the principal, the latter is not an educational strategy. Also, teachers did not unilaterally condemn the students partly because of the indefinable boundary of how far the teachers get involved in the discipline of the individual child’s lifestyle, which is closely relating to the philosophy of the parents. As noted above, every household has its own expectations toward the school and teachers. Some parents consider that children should be disciplined at school and teachers need to train the students hard on the one hand; however, on the other hand, there are some parents who do not feel comfortable if they know that their children were scolded at school. It is too hard for the teachers to fulfill individual parents’ expectations with limited time and resources. Doubtlessly, teachers are generally altering their behavior dependent on the children’s characteristics and affections as a technique to manage the classroom. However, teachers do not do so in order to meet the parents’ request. Teachers flexibly alter their behavior and language according to the situation and their own understanding of the students and students’
background because it is practically required to deal with the students and their problems. When actually dealing with students, teachers may not care about the expectations and requests from parents. Some teachers were telling me that they were confining their attention to the students in front of them. However, it is also true that teachers cannot completely ignore the fact that individual student’s behavioral patterns and ways of thinking are influenced by his/her own cultural and family background. Consequently, teachers’ behavior, attitudes, and voices toward students are defined under the influence of the eyes of the parents regardless of the teacher’s awareness of it. Not surprisingly, it sometimes happens that teachers give students a tongue-lashing. However, as a rule, the diversity of parent’s requests and expectations toward teachers discourage teachers from explicitly showing authoritarian attitudes in front of children.

The second, more effective way to manage students’ behavior is to direct students to become sensitive about the stares of people surrounding them, including teachers, parents, and friends, and to use them as the criteria for their behavior. In Japan, behavior based on the proper understanding of surrounding people’s intentions and expectations is often called “rinkiouhen na koudou” (flexible and impromptu behavior based on the situation or context) and tends to be highly valued. For example, the school principal, Kawabuchi-sensei, mentioned in his morning speech some days before the Sports Day:

You will have much time and efforts to practice your dance and group event for the Sports Day. Please listen to the teachers’ instruction carefully. You need to always be sensitive about what to do and become a self-starter to warm up the school event. (My Field note, September 12)

He clearly told all KES students about the importance of following the teachers’ guidance in order to make their own events a success. According to Kawabuchi-sensei, the students were required not only to listen to what the teachers were saying, but also, to sense what they were expecting, or what they were having in their mind. After the internal struggles between his own will and others’ instructions, one will be valued as a “kinokiku child” (considerate child) if he selects to follow the teacher’s expectations, but he will be scolded as a “jibun katte na child” (selfish child) if he follows his own will. Through accumulating such experiences, every child becomes sensitive about the public eye; in other word, the public eye may become the influencing factor affecting the children’s decisions regarding their behavior, attitude, and ways of thinking.

Not surprisingly, one’s will and other people’s expectations do not always correspond. The Ohnuki-sensei’s words that warned the children not to overtly express their joy when they won, and, instead, praise all people’s efforts seemed to be somewhat in conflict with the winners’ will.
Member of the winning team experienced, either consciously or unconsciously, ambivalent feelings about their behavior—they wanted to cheer for their victory, but the teacher, or Ohnuki-sensei in that case, did not allow them to do so—and they were led to give preference to his words over their own will. Especially when the teacher’s words sound powerful, or s/he is angry, the children are almost forced to follow his/her instruction. Even when a teacher is not angry, by giving constant small advice to the children as occasions arise, s/he is calmly tracking the children to follow his/her instruction. Certainly, there are always some children who do not care about such a thing, and pay little attention to the teacher talking and expressing their discomfort to his/her instructions; however, most are finally led to follow the teacher’s instructions.

The following conversation between Asano-sensei and three mothers, which took place after school on the class-observation day in October clearly shows the fact that the flexible and impromptu behavior according to the situation or context was highly valued in society. Both these three mothers and Asano-sensei did not refer to the Sports Day at all, but I am going to quote this discourse here because it will give an insight into what kind of way of thinking the adults are trying to teach in the next generation today. Note that as the word “kyoiku mama” (education mama) exemplifies, Japanese mothers have long been assumed to have a critical role in the education of their children (see Rosenberger 2001).

Ohta-san: In the class, I heard the word zakoi from a boy.\(^{45}\) I know they use such a dirty language when they are playing with friends. But, do they really know that that is a casual word, or even slang? I consider that they should know that such a word is not supposed to be used in an official situation, or in front of many adults like a classroom observation today although I have hardly said it to my own son at home either…

Asano-sensei: I have been intending to scold the children when they are using the words like ‘Die!’ or ‘Kill you!’ since the beginning of this school year. Thus, I think that they don’t usually use such a word recently. Yet, when I heard the word zakoi in today’s class, I noticed that I have hardly condemned them for their insulting language and made sure that they use proper language in front of people like today and in the teacher’s office. I will pay attention to their linguistic usage from today on.

Tamada-san: I consider that at least in the relationship between teacher and learner, they need to use respectful language (keigo). Yet, while looking at their interactions today, I was wondering whether I shouldn’t tell only my son to use it. Well… I’m worried that if they won’t be able to use the polite or respectful language when they need it, they will have a trouble. I don’t think that it is good idea to establish a clear hierarchical relationship between teachers and students, but, at the same time, I think that they have to respect

\(^{45}\) The word “zakoi” was a popular slang among the KES children. When they consider that something is “beneath their notice” or “no significance,” they say “that is zakoi.”
teachers. In retrospect, we were taught to use a respectful language in front of older people, especially teachers. But, today, children are used to establish nânâ relations.

I want my son to learn a clear distinction between people who teach and people who are taught. Because hardly learning to use a respectful language to a teacher from an early age, people today cannot use a proper language.

Kimura-san: I want my daughter to become able to flexibly change her behavior to fit the situation. That is, I want her to do rinkiouhen na koudou. For that purpose, we need to more actively teach dos and don’ts. I have been telling to my daughter to use a polite language to the teachers because they give her a guidance and instruction. It’s different from when you talk with other girls. I agree with Tamada-san. I don’t want her to get used to nânâ relations.

(My Field note, October 21)

In this discourse, Ohta-san, Tamada-san, and Kimura-san were sharing the perspective that children should be able to use both polite (respectful) language and casual language as the situation demands, and behave in a flexible manner according to the situation or context, or rinkiouhen na koudou. Otherwise, they will be faced with serious problems in their future.

However, as expressed in every mother’s voice, today’s parents (mothers) are feeling conflicted about the way to pass down their sense of values to their children. Tada-san mentioned that she wanted her son to use polite words in front of adults although it was ok to use dirty words in conversations with their friends or with their parents. Both Tamda-san and Kimura-san were thinking that people who are in a position to educate others should be respected, and expressed their discontents with the children who are using bad language to their teacher. Although these two parents were sharing a similar perspective, while Kimura-san clearly mentioned that she wanted her daughter to learn to use respectful language in the conversations with teachers, Tamada-san was wondering whether she should thoroughly teach her son to speak respectfully to teachers because his friends apparently did not care about it. As a matter of fact, Tamada-san was seemingly feeling apologetic for the way to discipline her son. While having a similar expectation toward their children, there was a difference in to what extent every mother was trying to pass their sense of values to their children. That is to say, although teachers were taking charge of more than thirty students as a matter of course, every student has his/her own unique cultural and family background. As the conversation shows, in the era that diversification of values among people is highly valued, both teachers and parents are groping for a way to educate children today.

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46 Nânâ relations mean “cozy relations” and “relations based on compromise.”
In addition to the tendency to prioritize the practice over the results, or the significance of putting all one’s efforts to accomplish objectives and goals in cooperation with others right to the end, rather than to deeply explore the meaning and value of the objectives, children were learning to be always sensitive about surrounding people’s, especially the teachers’, expectations and requests toward them and to actively behave in a flexible and impromptu manner according to the situation or context. As far as I observed, students are gradually but steadily habituating themselves to this culturally and socially permitted standards of behavior, called *rinkiouhen na koudou*.

Even small children generally actively decide their behavior based on their own experiences. It is a critical misconception if people disrespect the fact that even children’s behavior, attitudes, and language are constructed and selected under the influence of the social situation and cultural contexts. It is no doubt that small children often decide their behavior, attitudes, and language that are different from the parents’ and teachers’ expectations. For example, two girls who appeared in the description of the *Chûkan* clean-up event in chapter seven told me that they were not hesitant to drop litter on the street if nobody was watching them. According to the girls, they did not tell it in detail to their teacher even if the teacher asked them about the experience of littering. It is behavior that is far different from teacher’s expectations. However, it is no doubt that this kind of behavior is also put into practice according to the context. These two girls’ behavior and ways of thinking can be seen as improper from the teacher’s perspective; yet, it should be also true that these two girls behave according to the social situation and based on their understanding of what they are expected to say.

It seems that people who tend to be fixated on the idea that they should prioritize process over results, meaning, and outcomes of their own activities may downplay the need for evaluating those activities’ impacts on the society and the natural environment while wondering whether their behavior and language are appropriate for the social situation and cultural contexts. What should come under the spotlight is the discrepancy between the image of desirable people that elementary school teachers are trying to make and the concept of “*tsuyoi kojin*” (strong individual) (Kaneko 1999), which policymakers have tried to make through the modern educational system. According to Kaneko (1999), *tsuyoi kojin* is individuals who can contribute to the national economic development. This concept has something in common with the concept of the homo economicus, which is the rational being that many economists use when deriving, explaining, and verifying their theories, and serves as the basis for a majority of economic models. Also, the image of *tsuyoi kojin* has a strong relationship with the concept of individual citizens who have individual autonomy, or the capacity to live their own life according to reasons and
motives that are taken as their own and not the product of manipulative or distorting external forces (Kant 1785, Mill 1859).

As Kaneko (1999) points out, the concept of tsuyoi kojin figures centrally in debates over education policy, biomedical ethics, various legal freedoms and rights, as well as moral and political theory more broadly in industrialized countries including Japan. In the discussions on certain problems like environmental issues, people often unconsciously assume that individuals can make informed, logical decisions free from social influences with an understanding of the fact that they are bearing the responsibility for their own actions. However, as the descriptions of the KES teachers-students interactions have showed, people are not trying to make such individuals on the ground, at least at public elementary schools, where a majority of Japanese children between six and twelve years of age attend. In order to protect the natural environment, it is doubtlessly important to make individuals who willingly choose a lifestyle that is less harmful to the earth’s ecosystem regardless of what others are doing and saying. However, it should be noted that tsuyoi kojin also has both positive and negative aspects from the perspective of environmental education because such an independent person can be a person who decides to protect the natural environment and a person who exploits the natural resources in order to pursuing further economic development. Unfortunately, the history of environmental problems shows that educated individuals have been regarded as human resources and used for economic growth at the expense of the natural environment. This uncovers the fact that both tsuyoi kojin and people who are not very “strong” from the economic perspective but have social and emotional intelligence can choose an environmentally harmful lifestyle.

Since both images of individuals can be harmful to the natural environment, it is important to review the social structure that has tended to lead conscious, logical individuals to live in an environmentally harmful way while conducting environmental education at school. It is required to make a society in which people who learn about environmental problems can willingly make pro-environmental decisions. At the offset, policy makers and teachers are required to stop believing that environmental education can be conducted by just adding environmental education classes into the current school curriculum. As long as it has transmitted certain frameworks of decision making to the children, both academic and nonacademic activities including the Sports Day should be viewed as a part of environmental education.

9.6 Conclusion of chapter nine
Public school teachers are putting considerable time and effort into raising and shaping the children. Through every interaction with the children embedded in both academic and nonacademic circumstances, they transmit socially accepted knowledge, cultural beliefs, behavioral patterns, and the frameworks of decision-making to the children. Nonacademic circumstances certainly involve the Sports Day. Regardless of the fact that the preparation for the Sports Day removed energy for classes from the children, teachers spent a full month making the event enthusiastic and impressive. In this chapter, I pointed out the two messages that teachers are trying to pass on to students through this time- and energy-consuming event: (1) students should prioritize process over results and (2) students should choose their behavior and language based on other people’s intentions and expectations. The KES teachers transmitted the first message to the children by teaching the importance of doing one’s best (gamaru-koto) and the significance of cooperating (kyôryokusuru-koto) in order to attain certain goals and objectives, and the second message by habituating the children to decision-making based on social situations and cultural contexts (rinkiouhen na koudou).

In general, teachers were trying to make students who were attached to winning or losing. Rather than impelling the students to insist on the victory of each race, the teachers expected them to recognize the importance of the process, or whether they actually exerted all their strength. Behind such a tendency, there seems a basic belief in an ideology: Put forth your full effort and cooperate with friends, then all will be well. This ideology is often called “do your best-ism” (Rosenberger, personal communication). The diversity in the cultural and family background of the students can result in the difference of the goals and objectives that each student is trying to attain. However, even though goals and objectives are not the same, it is true that all people are required to have strength to achieve their own goals and objectives. The tendency to teach students to give a priority to process rather than results is reinforced by the widespread opinion that today’s children tend to put off or ignore unpleasant tasks. There is also a practical reason to let the students prioritize process over results. Teachers are not always allowed to have one-on-one contact with an individual student, but are often required to deal with a number of students at once. In such a context, if teachers allow all the students to undertake only what they want to do, they cannot handle the students as a whole. In order to manage students, teachers want the students to habitually devote themselves to the tasks at hand regardless of their values.

However, as I argued, this tendency to prioritize process over results, or an ideology of do your best-ism, has not only positive aspects, but also negative aspects from the viewpoint of environmental education. This tendency can encourage the students to disregard the results and
effects of their activities. It is noteworthy that the accumulation of this kind of activity, in which the participants do not care about the results of their behavior, has deteriorated the earth’s ecosystems.

Through the Sports Day and its preparations, students were also learning the importance of behavior in a flexible and impromptu manner according to the social situation and cultural context. To decide what to do and what to say based on other people’s opinions and voices is regarded as a crucial technique to live in this society. As the mothers showed in the conversation with Asano-sensei, they wanted their sons or daughters to be able to change their ways of speaking according to the circumstances. If one is with his/her friends, s/he can use impolite words, but when one is with older people or teachers, s/he should actively choose to use polite language. Making the students habituate themselves to decision-making based on other people’s requests and expectations is effective strategy to manage the students from the teacher’s perspective. However, this socially and culturally accepted behavioral criterion also has negative aspects. If one relies too much on the other people’s opinions and requests when s/he decides his/her behavior and language, s/he might disrespect the importance of reviewing their activities based on the results of their behavior and its impacts on the natural environment. If the people who habituate themselves to prioritizing process over results decide the goals and objectives based on the other people’s opinions and expectations, it may be possible to presume that they will collectively damage and destroy the natural environment.

There is a gap between the image of desirable people that elementary school teachers are trying to make (people who have both above-cited two tendencies) and the concept of “tsuyoi kojin” (strong individual) (Kaneko 1999). In modern society, including Japan, policy makers and commentators tend to assume the existence of the tsuyoi kojin who can make decisions regardless of other’s wills and expectations and understand that s/he is assuming responsibility for his/her activities. Individuals who assume these virtues are often called homo economicus in economics and citizens having individual autonomy in politics. Thus, in the discussions of environmental education, the advocates of school environmental education tend to put their efforts into making a sophisticated list of the goals and purposes of environmental education and the attitudes that individuals should bear in order to solve environmental problems. However, decision-making is not merely an individual act, but a social and cultural process. Both people placing a high priority on cooperative behavior and those emphasizing the importance of making decisions regardless of what surrounding people are doing can contribute towards destroying the natural environment. It seems to indicate the limitations of what schools can do in terms of environmental education.

However, this does not mean that environmental education is worthless at all. I think that today’s
students have to learn about environmental problems. What I am going to argue is that people who have something to do with education should regard every aspect of a child’s life as a part of environmental education as long as it transmits certain frameworks of decision-making, culturally acceptable ways of thinking, and behavioral patterns to the children. Considering this point, it is certain that although discussions on environmental education have paid attention only to educational practices that are apparently related to environmental problems, it is meaningful to spotlight what kinds of messages teachers are teaching through every aspect of a child’s school life, including the Sports Day.

As long as society requires people who pursue individual happiness at the sacrifice of the natural environment as a member of this capitalist society, teachers may continuously contribute in making such socially desirable individuals. Consequently, people may not cast a critical eye on the present social systems that rest on the ruthless exploitation of natural resources. Today, it is required to create a society in which people who learned about environmental problems willingly choose a lifestyle that is harmless to the natural environment. In the beginning, it is crucial to explore the meaning of every message that teachers are unconsciously transmitting to the students in the everyday circumstances of their school lives from the perspective of environmental education by reviewing the educational system as a whole.
Chapter 10. Conclusion

10.1 Distance between children and nature: whether children are completely removed from nature

Nostalgically, Louv (2005) argues that many members of his generation grew into adulthood while establishing a relationship with nature. This kind of perspective has been ubiquitous in Japan as well. The majority of the parents and teachers who were engaged in this study shared a similar thought: when they grew up, people were naturally outdoors almost all the time, but today’s children scarcely have such opportunities to play with or in nature because of the lack of natural environment in the community.

Unquestionably, the cumulative impact of development has resulted in decapitation of mountains, creation of artificial landscapes, and the reduction of natural recreation areas as statistics show. Overdevelopment has caused the creation of multiplying park rules, well-meaning and necessary environmental regulations, and building regulations, which in turn, have brought about unexpected effects in the minds of the populace: that is, children’s free-range to play is unwelcome and difficult today.

There are a wide variety of factors distracting children from playing in and with nature today. Such factors involve apprehensive parents who keep their children close to home, the overly structured lifestyle of many families, close-packed after-school schedules, and the existence of a large variety of toys including advanced video games and trading card games with beautiful pictures of popular cartoon, game and sports characters.

Since the murder of a seven-year-old girl in Hiroshima in November 2005, Japanese populaces are sensitive about increasing crimes targeted at small children nationwide. The parents whom I interviewed were sharing a fear for the safety of their children: whether or not s/he was involved in certain incidents. Parents’ fears are exacerbated by the news of the crimes broadcast on TV and reported in newspapers everyday. Books and brochures on how to protect the safety of children have been published and a variety of new products, including GPS-equipped child-friendly handsets has been developed. Advertisement of such new products has also contributed to strengthen parents’ sense of anxiety about the safety of their child, and let them question how to protect him/her.

What made parents’ fears for children’s safety was not only the increasing crimes, but also there were a wide variety of causes triggering fear in the parent’s mind: such as, accidents caused by traffic and of strangers whom children may encounter on the street and children being injured while playing. Each of these has accelerated by the generalized social anxiety and media market-
driven excitability. Consequently, people, especially parents were viewing social interactions as more dangerous than it is; in turn, this has led to the situation that developing children were separated from the full essential benefits of nature. Increased fear was the most potent force that preventing parents from allowing their children from freely playing outdoors although parents themselves enjoyed the freedom in childhood. Exposed to information of crimes involving small children, teachers and parents were questioned how to teach youth about the magnificence of outdoor activities and the beauty of nature while they were forced to teach children about how today’s society is dangerous for them. Indeed, this social situation led some parents to make a decision to let their child go to juku (cram school) or naraigoto (enrichment lessons i.e. piano, swimming, and baseball) in order to ensure the safety of children. Furthermore, due to fear of being a target of criticism when a child was involved in a certain problem in school property, KES was not able to open the schoolyard for students after school (with a few exceptions).

If there is nothing else for children to do, parents may need to allow them to play outdoors. However, there are various kinds of popular playthings for today’s children, including video games and trading card games, as a result of the commodification of play. It is not today or yesterday that video games have become increasingly popular in Japan. As far back as 1983, Nintendo had already had a hit with their Family Computer (well known as Famicon) game console, selling more than 1.565 million systems until 1990. It has been reported that the total number of shipments of PlayStation2 console, made by Sony in 2000, reached over 100 million systems worldwide (about 22.2 million within Japan) in 2005 (Nikkei Net 2005). I did not conduct survey research on the prevalence rate of video games in KES or all fourth grade students as a whole, but from the casual conversations, it became apparent that almost all the Asanosei’s class students had more than one kind of video game consoles (not game software). In addition, children (particularly boys) were enthusiastic about collecting trading cards, and many had over a hundred cards. Even in the sunshine, I often observed boys gathering on the street in front of someone’s house to play the trading card games and video games. Video games and trading card games were apparently convenient toys for the children whose time was minutely segmented by the schedule of juku and naraigoto. Generally, the children’s tendency to devote their time to such video games and trading card games are considered as a matter of individual child’s preference. However, it is not only a personal issue; there are seemingly social and cultural reasons for the increasing tendency they choose to play video games and trading card games with their friends.

During my internship, I heard from many adults saying that they did not understand why today’s children are playing portable video games and trading card games in a park or on the
street on a beautiful day. From my perspective, parks and street might be seen as an extension of their own rooms in the eyes of the children. In other words, there is no clear distinction between outdoors and indoors for the child playing with friends. As far as there are, a number of types of restrictions on their outdoor play, playing outdoors are not so different from playing indoors under the supervision of parents.

As this society has become modernized and highly industrialized, people have come to look contemplatively at nature. Nature is becoming commercialized with the increasingly pervasive commercial trend that views and uses nature as a sales gimmick or marketing strategy, often through the production of replicas or simulations. The commodification of nature has occurred in smaller yet subtler ways. This phenomenon is new only in scale and to the degree that it permeates everyday life. Whether we are unaware of it or not, we see that commodity culture is re-constructing nature nearly everywhere. Mall and retail design is one way to package nature for commercial purposes, but the next stage goes a step further by using nature as an advertising medium. For example, eco-tours are now permeating travel agencies across the country, and a wide variety of tours, or responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, have been developed.

Development of media has enabled people to observe wild animals and plants that do not exist in the neighborhood. Through exposure to dramatic and extreme images of nature on TV, people tend to regard the media’s presentation of nature as “real nature.” In contrast, they tend to feel that they are not getting enough action when they are having a relationship with a small part of nature, including small insects, birds, flowers and trees. Figuratively speaking, under the influence of the advertisement of eco-tours and due to the landscape broadcast on TV, if they don’t see wild animals like a Humpback Whale spouting and breathing on the surface of the ocean and wild huge trees like Yakusugi (a largest ancient cedar) aged over 1,000 years old, then it is boring in the eyes of those people. Thus, many people today believe that it is the adult’s responsibility to get their children out into nature by spending considerable money and time.

Because of marketing of outdoor play, or commodification of play, whether children are isolated from the natural world has become not just a matter of lack of the natural environment in the neighborhood, or lack of opportunity, but also lack of time and money of parents who might otherwise take them out of the city. Based on their understanding of the present state of child-nature relationship, parents can either regulate or stimulate the child’s connections with nature. The parents who could provide such opportunities to their children tend to be confined to those who have enough money and/or time to invest in their children’s daily play, or pleasure, and willingly do so. For example, Tamada-san in chapter five enables her son to feel an affinity with
nature by letting him being a member of Boy Scout. Tamada-san told me that she had spent much
time, energy, and money to support the children’s activities. In contrast, Katori-san looked
apologetic when she told me that she could not go and enjoy camping with her son while she
wanted him to have good experiences of the natural environment. It is far easier to recommend
that parents take more time and money for nature than it is for the families to capture that
diminished resource because many parents already feel besieged by the difficulty of balancing
work and family life. It is understandable if they resist the idea of adding any to-dos to their long
list of chores. These points clarify the fact that child’s experiences of nature are at least partly
dependent on the parents’ sense of values, perspectives on their children’s play, and the family
socioeconomic background. As long as parents regard nature as something that does not exist in
their lifeways and view natural experiences as money- and time-consuming, insistent demands for
parents to get their children out into nature are possibly perceived as voices that perpetuate the
gap between the households that can let children enjoy experiences of nature and households that
cannot do so.

The major hurdles that people have to cross over in order to provide children opportunities
to play with and in nature involve destruction of the natural environment in the community,
design of the city that only aiming at resident’s safety and convenience, increasing private open
space encircled by iron railings, and parents’ sense of responsibility to protect their own children
from being victims of crimes or traffic accidents. These hurdles are not purely spilling out of
individual people’s minds. In fact, all these hurdles are culturally and socially constructed over
time. More precisely, these hurdles are made out of people’s goodwill in general, and people have
been accepting, if not always welcoming, the change of society because of goodwill. As some
mothers told me, parent’s busy lifestyles may also prevent their children experiencing nature
instead of the fact that parents’ busy lifestyle is a result of their willingness and responsibility to
financially support the household and let the children receive a better, if not extremely good,
education. In the eyes of parents who think there are many hurdles if they attempt to get their
children out into nature, it does not seem straightforward to let their children experiencing the
natural environment. Both individual people’s efforts and the revision of the social systems and
cultural norms of everyday behavior are required to overcome the hurdles that deeply embedded
in the modern society (Marx 1973).

However, in contrast to such parents’ perspectives, in a child’s eyes, magnificent mountains
or well-kept national parks may pale in comparison with the mysteries of a line of ants in a ravine
at the end of the cul-de-sac or a flock of birds singing on the roof of houses at sunset. Children
interpret and give meaning to a piece of landscape, and the same piece can be perceived
differently. The interpretation and meaning that children give to a piece of environment is
different from those of adults. Although adults often see themselves as separate from nature, for
children nature comes in many forms: beetle and stag beetle found in woods or sold at a pet shop;
locust and cricket hopping in an open field; birds singing in morning; fish, frogs, and crayfish in a
small pond; houndogs and cats, commercial hamsters ration in a small cage; tigers and elephants
in a zoo and dolphins raised in an aquarium. Also, open spaces with grass encircled by railings of
iron and they cannot enter or a schoolyard strewn with cherry blossom petals in spring, the smell
of the cool summer shower or the rice field turning a shining golden color in autumn; biting north
wind bringing a fair day in winter are other examples.

Although Louv argues that today’s children are almost entirely disconnected from every
conceivable part of nature based on a number of statements of middle-class parents and other
figures, based on my research, I cannot completely agree with him. For example, in his book, a
fourth grade American boy said, “I like to play indoors better, ‘cause that’s where all the
electrical outlets are” (Louv 2005:25). This boy’s voice seems to provide an insight into the status
quo of children today. Certainly, it is no doubt that there are boys and girls having similar ideas in
Japan. However, my participants’ voices reveal that today’s children have not completely lost the
relationship with nature. The KES principal was proud of the KES children vigorously playing in
the schoolyard in hot summer days. Asano-sensei expressed her perspective that KES students
were not dissatisfied with the given open spaces; instead, they exercised their ingenuity to play in
limited play areas. A female veteran teacher told me that it was more important to teach Japanese
and arithmetic rather than to conduct environmental education because today’s children were
playing outdoors by themselves. A mother of a fourth grade girl told me that her daughter always
playing with her puppy with the assumption that a house puppy is a representative of nature.
Another mother told me that her son liked to enjoy listening to singing of insects in a small cage.
In her eyes, the cricket and a little dirt in the small space was considered nature.

Two kinds of interpretations of child-nature relationship are coexisting in the minds of
teachers and parents as reality: today’s children are disconnected from nature for recent
overdevelopment; today’s children still have a relationship with (a part of) nature when they are
playing outdoors or with animals. The former image is supported by information continuously
presented in publications and TV programs on environmental problems; the latter image is
strongly reinforced by experiences of observing children playing outdoors. When viewing nature
as something that does not exist in their lifeways, such as beautiful mysterious mountains, people
tend to argue that children are removed from nature today. Conversely, when defining nature as
insects, birds, small animals, pet dogs and cats, plants in the community, and open area or small
parks surrounded by metal rails, they view that children still have a relationship with nature. I should not simply define which view of child-nature relationship is superior to the other because these two interpretations are coexisting in the minds of parents and teachers and they are carefully selecting and using interpretations of nature-children relationship according to the social circumstances and cultural contexts where conversations arise.

Virtually all the teachers and parents took it for granted that people had to care about nature today. More precisely, they were feeling that they were expected to say that they were giving high priority to the natural environment and doing something good for nature today. Thus, even a mother who was not able to get her daughter out into nature because she was too busy to work everyday emphasized that she knew natural conservation and that her daughter enjoyed having a relationship with flowers around her house. This mother was arguing that those flowers were undoubtably a part of nature. It is noteworthy that my participants in order to represent that they were giving high priority to natural conservation and to confirm that they were acceptable as defined by others used both interpretations of child-nature relationship as a rationale of the statement.

The “situational and malleable” character of the Japanese perception of nature (White 1997) enables parents and teachers to argue that they were conscious of the significance of nature. As long as what they mean by the word nature is unclear, it is almost impossible to comprehend what they imagine by the statement that their child has a relationship with nature. Because of the misapprehension of Lévi-Strauss’s original intent, the concept of nature has tended to be regarded as an opposition of nature versus culture (Bloch & Bloch 1980). However, there were seemingly no clear boundaries between the “natural” and “artificial” in the minds of my participants. Rather, my participants defined what were nature (natural) based on the context and social situations. There was not only one view of the environment or nature; instead, concepts of nature were conditioned by the context.

Because my participants did not see a clear distinction between nature and artifice and defined what was meant by the word “nature” based on the context, they could regard a wide variety of things around them as nature. Thus, in our conversations, some teachers equated taking care of the natural environment with cleaning up the places that people usually use, including classrooms, the schoolyard and playgrounds. For them, environmental education, in which teachers teach students about the importance of the protection of the (natural) environment, seems another name for the cleanup activity. Traditionally, Japanese people have regarded nature as something inscribed on culture and culture as something inscribed on nature (Rosenberger 1997). This has been epitomized by the traditional Japanese gardens. Based on the appreciation only of
certain elements of the environment and the association of places with notable people and events of the past, people have striven to make gardens with the worthiest natural landscapes and perceived them as an ideal microcosmic manifestation of the nature of nature (Saito 1996). The tendencies to view that nature and culture are blending each other have affected the ways to conduct environmental education at elementary schools. One clear effect is reflected in the fact that while accepting the importance of incorporating environmental education into the school curriculum, people and the government have continuously regarded schools as a social apparatus to sustain the modern culture that has caused environmental issues (e.g., Hashimoto 1991).

Although those two interpretations of child-nature relationship coexist in the minds of my participants, the view that children today lack experience of nature has obviously become dominant, as briefly noted above. When a person was moaning that children today did not know how to play in nature, there was a somewhat abstract and nostalgic view of nature based on his/her own childhood experience of nature. However, it is noteworthy that there are people and interest groups that benefit from the diffusion of the belief that there is no or scarce nature in modern people’s lifestyle. It is obvious from the fact that such nostalgic view of nature are accelerated by dramatic and mysterious images of nature broadcast on TV, such as in special programs on the wonder of nature and advertisements of eco-tour and various commercial goods (e.g., soft-drinks and automobiles). Here, we have to realize that creating certain knowledge, tagging a certain discourse as truth and highlighting certain information can either intentionally or unintentionally make other aspects of reality or society invisible (Foucault, 1974, 2006). Once a certain discourse obtains the public trust and becomes assumed as self-evident within a society and culture, it can attain the position of “common sense” (see Nakamura 2000). What is important here is the fact that people generally do not question what makes certain information reality and makes them believe a certain discourse as common sense. Today, it is assumed as an axiom that the environment has been dramatically destroyed so that children are detached from nature. Some people also take it for granted that they cannot get their own child out into nature without spending much time and money to enjoy traveling to the places that are endowed with mysterious beautiful nature.

What does it mean from the children’s perspective? Because of the change in views of nature, children have become unable to play in and with perfect nature. What they are always looking at has already been tagged as imperfect, partial, and synthetic nature. Children are either explicitly or implicitly receiving a message that what they know as nature from their real experiences is one that is miscreated and completely altered in history. Thus, many of them cannot imagine what “real nature” from their experiences is. While consistently receiving a
message that where they are usually playing is incomplete nature, children are learning to attribute reasons for the degradation of nature to their own lifestyle regardless of the fact that they themselves have not contributed directly to environmental destruction yet (this point is discussed in the following section).

Nevertheless, as traditional Japanese gardens exemplify, Japanese people have historically enjoyed nature in constructed settings in general. Shrines, paths to shrines, and temples are other examples of the constructed nature. Japanese people have stored knowledge of the ways to manage nature and to live with the constructed nature. By using fallen leaves as fertilizer, using the trees themselves as fuel, and eating edible plants and vegetables, the Japanese have made good use of the forests near rice paddies and fields. This type of area where the forest plays a vital role in people’s lives is called satoyama (里山). This word refers not only to the forest but also to the rice paddies, waterways, levees between fields, and reservoirs nearby. Satoyama areas are different from places deep in the mountains where nature has remained untouched by human hands; in and around satoyama, people live closely together with nature as they cut trees and tend to their fields. Because of its rich ecosystems where various kinds of plants and animals live, satoyama has played an important role in environmental conservation (Ichikawa 2003). The ground of satoyama is covered with mulch that results from falling leaves piling up, and this mulch forms a kind of “green dam” that prevents rainwater from flowing away. It also acts to clean the rainwater as it soaks into the ground. Additionally, the roots of the trees that grow on slopes stabilize the ground and prevent mudslides and the collapse of hills. The terraced rice paddies found on the slopes of mountains play a similar role by holding in large amounts of water. Comparing to the idea that the natural environment should be used wisely, the discourse of enjoying nature “in the raw” and “in the wild” has been recently widespread across the country partly due to the impact of western globalization. The natural landscapes that parents and teachers were familiar with in their childhood were the environment consisted of the constructed nature although they said that today’s children did not know what “real nature” was.

10.2 What teachers are teaching and what children are learning in relation to environmental problems: official and unofficial environmental education

I have presented various descriptions of teacher-student interactions and sited many voices heard from teachers, students, and parents in this thesis. In chapter six, I explored the fact that although teachers realize the importance and need of environmental education today, images of environmental education varies among teachers. There is a practical reason that has caused the diversity, and resulting ambiguity of teacher’s images and interpretations of environmental education. Teacher’s practice is governed by the logic that outsiders cannot easily see and
understand. That is certainly the case with environmental education practices. Environmental education practices are governed by their own “structure or structuring” (habitus) and the given situation (see, Bourdieu 2001). Although people outside schools tend to presume that all teachers share a somewhat similar image of environmental education, each teacher always and extemporaneously constructs their own view of environmental education. These include teacher’s views of education, outlook of society, sense of values, social and cultural expectations toward elementary schools, parent’s view of children and expectations toward teachers, including the relationships among teachers, students, and parents. The variety of the images of environmental education is derived from the complexity of each factor, which cannot be covered only by focusing on teacher-student interactions in environmental education or trying to get teachers’ voice by surveys and questionnaires.

In chapter seven, I pointed out the fact that teachers were teaching environmental education through the lens of their own values more than through the lens of environmentalists or officials outside of the school through the description of the fourth grade environmental educational activities conducted in the Period of Integrated Learning (i.e., the creation of digital environmental map and participation in the Chûkan clean up). The Ministry of Education (MOE) has encouraged each school to use the Period of Integrated Learning wisely and effectively to conduct environmental education. Thus, KES teachers were conducting environmental education while struggling to decide what they should teach and what kind of hands-on activities they can provide to the students. However, even in environmental education classes, teachers cannot completely comprehend whether students actually learn about environmental problems as they are expected.

Teachers can map out a plan for environmental educational activities. However, there is a gap between what teachers expect students to learn and what students actually learn. Students learn more or differently than what teachers assume in the process of making class schedule. For example, on the way to Chûkan, students encountered a young man who naturally dropped cigarette butts on the street without feeling of guilt when no other adults were looking at them. The children, who had told not to throw their garbage on the street, were following the movement of the ash attentively. It was difficult to comprehend what the children thought when they observed the scene. However, they certainly received a certain message from the two young men’s movement. Another unpredictable factor that derailed the preplanned class schedule was the preparation for the Sports Day. It had a strong impact on the teacher-student interactions on what students could learn in environmental education because students needed to devote their energy to the preparation as well as to the classes. Due to the lack of concentration and endurance,
children were often disrupting and speaking with friends while being engaged in hands-on activities. Thus, when their voices became too loud and annoying, the teacher often scolded noisy students during a class.

While observing the process of students’ activities, teachers had come to change their criteria for evaluation of students. Teachers eventually evaluated individual students based on whether one made efforts and cooperated to accomplish his/her tasks while being engaged in environmental educational activities. They paid little attention to whether one could understand the complexity of environmental problems or learn the significance of nature protection. As noted above, from my perspective, the tendency to call various activities as environmental education seems to reflect the fact that nature and culture are blending in the teachers’ minds. Every fourth grade teacher had his/her own image of the environment that should be protected. There were both teachers who tend to refer to the natural environment around the school and who tried to tell the students about beautiful nature like a beautiful emerald green ocean that most students had not ever seen. However, in general, the natural environment was regarded as worth protecting as long as it contributes in making people’s lives comfortable. This was exemplified by the title of the fourth grade’s environmental education conducted in the Period of Integrated Learning—“Hito ni yasashii shizen ni yasashii machi zukuri” (To realize a ‘people-friendly, nature-friendly community’). According to the fourth grade teachers, essential features of the “people-friendly, nature-friendly community” are convenience, safeness, comfort, vibrancy and respect for the human rights of all people. From their perspectives, the concept of natural protection is almost equivalent to the protection of the culture and society in which people pursue their own comfort and convenience. Thus, a large variety of activities practiced in the Period of Integrated Learning can be tagged as environmental education. Whether an educational activity in the Period of Integrated Learning is called environmental education depends on the types of meaning teachers try to give the activity and how they explain its value and purpose.

Furthermore, this evaluation criterion seems to have something to do with teachers’ perspectives of school education: what teachers are trying to teach and what people they are trying to make through both academic and non-academic activities as a whole. As chapter eight and nine showed, teachers are trying to make people who assume moral and social intelligence as well as information and knowledge involved in textbooks (kashiko child). Among many characteristics of a kashiko child, I primarily focused on two of them: (1) tendency to consciously utilize surrounding people’s eyes, behavior, expectations, and intentions as standards of behavior and utterance; (2) tendency to make all-out and concerted efforts to achieve given goals and objectives without concern for the results. I focused on these two characteristics in
order to point out that while making efforts to conduct environmental education, teachers unconsciously assimilated what they were conventionally attempting to teach in teacher-student interactions embedded in other aspects of school life into the purposes and objectives of environmental educational activities.

Description of ordinary teachers and students behavior and utterances are not generally involved in environmental educational discourse. However, from my perspective, it seems problematic to discuss environmental education as a thing isolated from other practices because such discussions necessarily lead to creating an image that elementary school teachers are able to conduct environmental education if they realize the importance of environmental education and gravity of environmental problems. I think that there is not an exaggeration to say that such a way of discussing environmental education is relying on the functionalist perspective of education. Because reducing agents (teachers and students) to merely a cog in the wheel, advocates and scholars of environmental education have hardly referred to hurdles that should be overcome in order to conduct environmental education at public elementary schools. However, this way to construct a discourse on environmental education seems to have contributed to hiding important aspects of education about the environment.

By focusing on concrete student-teacher interactions, I provided an insight into the fact that each behavior and utterance was intricately constructed. A public elementary school as a part of huge entire social system consists of agents with multiple cultural and socioeconomic background, friction, confrontation and tension between those agents; deference and resistance to authority between those agents. What becomes obvious from the description of student-teacher interactions is the fact that not only students’ (generally viewed as the powerless), but also teachers’ (generally considered as the powerful) words and behaviors are highly restricted both in academic and non-academic aspects of school lives. Both the powerless (students) and the powerful (teachers) were changing their behavior and words according to the context. In front of the powerful, the powerless intentionally select appropriate words and behavior, and try to construct a desirable relationship with the powerful. Without the eyes of the powerful, the powerless seem to be able to act more freely and frankly. In front of the powerless, the powerful are intentionally acting and speaking as the powerful. At first glance, this may appear that the powerful are attempting to establish authority over the powerless. However, as long as they are making decision on their behavior and utterance in consideration of the gaze of the powerless, it is possible to say that attitudes, behavior and utterance of the powerful are also highly restricted.

For example, according to my research, while often murmuring about the fact that only teachers could enjoy an air-conditioned room on a hot summer day beyond eyeshot of teachers,
students took it for granted in front of teachers, and hardly complained about it. Even though feeling that teachers are wasting paper while teaching students not to use too much paper, virtually no students explicitly showed their discontent with it. It is partly because such opinions can possibly provoke teachers’ antipathy. On the contrary, while trying to act as a good teacher in front of students, teachers were complaining that today’s children easily ran away from troubles and that children had dislike for tests printed on recycled coarse paper so that teachers had to use a new beautiful paper in the teachers’ office. Although students viewed that teachers were able to enjoy an air-conditioned room, teachers hardly spent time in the teacher’s office between 9am and the end of school because they felt responsibility to keep an eye on students’ activities. In addition, teachers are feeling that regardless of the fact that they are given too much responsibility for raising and shaping the children, parents and ordinary people hardly understand the teachers’ busyness. Thus, while acting as if they have confidence in their attitudes and behavior in classes, teachers are not always acting and speaking with abundant self-confidence. Instead, many teachers are in practice under pressure to find a way to forge a trusting relationship every student. Teachers think that they do not have enough time and a place to make their dissatisfaction and grievances explicit. They consider that students should be forced to suffer if teachers cannot have a balance in their life. Therefore, teachers are enduring their busy and grueling lifeways.

In this era of global environmental problems, there were no teachers who explicitly said that people should pursue economic development in return for natural resources in front of students. Indeed, none of the KES teachers disagreed with the necessity for the implementation of environmental education at elementary school. Thus, as the MOE has declared, it is possible to argue that environmental education has recently been conducted at elementary schools. However, we have to know that the way to control behavior and attitude of people is not only by explicit restrictions over unedifying performance, poor behavior, unforgivable sins, and immoral conduct. People’s ways of thinking and behavior are often shaped in more tacit and unintentional ways.

Foucault’s studies (e.g., 1977) provide an insight into how people are disciplined and governed in this capitalist society. One of central threads of his study is an analysis of the transformations in the nature and function of power occurred in the transition from medieval to modern times. He challenges the common assumption that power is an essentially oppressive force that expressed in recognizable ways, including the mechanisms of law and censorship. According to Foucault, this “juridico-discursive” conception of power (Foucault 1978:82) has roots in the nature of sovereign power, which is exerted by particular and identifiable individuals like the king, the prince, and the agents thereof. Those who possess sovereign authority exercise absolute control over the population through the threat or explicit display of violence in response
to a certain set of circumstances. Thus, when power of this sort operates, people can clearly know that they have been acted upon, in what ways, and by whom.

However, from the seventeenth century onwards, as demographical issues such as fostering of life and the growth and care of populations became a central concern of the state, a coherent political technology, or “bio-power,” emerged. “Disciplinary power” is an important component of this new political technology. Covaleskie (1993) points out three differences between sovereign power and disciplinary power. (1) The former operates through specific visible agents, but the latter spreads over a wide area and among a large number of people, emerging from everywhere and affecting every individual. (2) While the former is vulnerable to resistance because of its visibility, the latter is difficult to locate and therefore difficult to resist since it is invisible and widespread. (3) In comparison with the former affecting only a limited part of an individual’s life, the latter affects virtually all aspects of individual’s life and subjects every individual to the possibility of constant surveillance.

In his study of the practice of discipline and training associated with disciplinary power, Foucault (1977) uncovers the fact that these practices contribute in subjecting human activities to a process of constant surveillance. While optimizing the body’s capacities, skills and productivity, disciplinary practices promote its usefulness and docility as expressed in the following statement:

What was then being formed was a policy of coercions that act on the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behavior. The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it… Thus discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, ‘docile’ bodies. (Foucault 1977:138-139).

Furthermore, Foucault (1977) examines how disciplinary power shapes and molds human minds after producing the subjected and practiced bodies. In the disciplinary society, individuals’ thinking, behavior, and decision-making are shaped not through the explicit application of power by the sovereign, but through an impersonal, invisible, disciplinary gaze. Disciplinary power is a form of surveillance that is internalized. With disciplinary power, each individual disciplines him or herself. Therefore, the basic goal of disciplinary power is to produce docile individuals in terms of body and mind (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983).

According to Foucault (1978), normalization is an important strategy to govern individual conduct. Based on his analysis of the history of sexuality, he argues that the spread of bio-power (and disciplinary power) closely relates to human and social science discourses, which work on defining the human “normality.” Once human and social sciences establish the categories of normality and abnormality based on assessment, diagnosis, prognosis of society, people tend to
approve various political technologies assuming a pivotal role to treat and reform “abnormal” behavior as in the interests of individuals and society. Thus, the establishment and reinforcement of human and social sciences is a fundamental process of the creation of disciplined subjects. Doubtlessly, this sense of normality belongs to neither human nature nor nature of human society. Such normality is formulated as a discourse that is constituted by power relations. By definition, “normal” is just a certain social form of life within the dominant discourses that power creates. It should be nothing more and nothing less than it (Covaleskie 1993). However, according to the Foucault’s discussions, in this disciplinary society, people are led to see “normal” as a goal and an ideal. Normalization defines for people the way they are supposed to be and to do. Due to the invisibility and lightness of the disciplinary power, individuals tend to confound the “normal” with the “natural.” They confuse the defined and desired “normality” with a “true” measurement of the way the world is (Covaleskie 1993). Certainly, such “truth” is socially and culturally defined. Foucault repeatedly reminds us that “truth is not the reward of free spirits,” but “a thing of this world” that is “produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraints.” Each society creates its own “regime of truth” to control its population (Foucault 1980:131). In other words, social institutions, schools of thought, parents, and teachers—all of these collaborate to create a context in which something has been established as “true.”

According to my research, teachers were trying to make students sensitive to surrounding people’s eyes, expectations and intentions in order to decide their behavior and words. In addition, they were trying to lead them to make all-out and concerted efforts to achieve given goals and objectives without concern for the results. Teachers believe that these are crucial for students to learn in order to live in this and future society. They considered that people who can survive in this society “normally” assume these characteristics. Teacher’s efforts to make people assume these virtues are seen as a process of normalization. Consequently, by learning these virtues here and there, these virtues come to have power to shape or affect people’s daily decision-making.

From the standpoint of environmental education, these socially and culturally accepted virtues can have not only positive effects but also negative effects on the natural environment. The former characteristic, or making people sensitive to social situations and cultural contexts in deciding their own behavior, attitudes and utterances, is generally regarded as an art of managing in society. Especially because the public share a perspective that today’s children lack shakari-ryoku (social competence, see Kadowaki 1999, 2002), it is said that students have to learn social intelligence at school. While accepting the importance of individual rational decision-making on one’s behavior and attitudes based on one’s own knowledge and experiences, people believe that they are often required to go along with the crowd. Thus, teachers are trying to teach students to
get a feel of the place and use surrounding people’s expectations and intentions as a guideline of their behavior and utterances. However, regardless of the fact that teachers are not teaching students to disregard the importance of their own knowledge and experiences, students often struggle to extract the way to act and speak according to the social situation and cultural context. It seemed to me that some students were actually utilized other people’s gazes, expectations, and intentions as criteria of their decision-making, and extracted the correct answers based on other people’s opinions as a convenient and useful art of getting along with people in this world. When students come to rely heavily on the majority’s intentions and expectations when they decide their behavior and attitudes, it can be harmful to the earth’s ecosystem as the history of environmental problems proves. Japanese have gone along with the dominant discourse and allowed economic growth to ravage their land.

The second virtue, or tendency to make all-out and concerted efforts to achieve given goals and objectives without concern for the results, also can have negative effects on the earth’s ecosystem. Particularly through the description of Sports Day and the preparation for it in Chapter Nine, I pointed out that students are learning a tendency to prioritize process over results. Behind such a tendency, there seems to be a basic ideology that everyone is equal or the same at the level of effort, or more than that, do-your-best-ism: Put forth your full effort and cooperate with friends, then all will be well. Although goals may differ, the act of fostering strength to pursue goals is appropriate to all students. There is also a cultural perspective that people have to be concerned about the immediate context and bring harmony and be successful in relation to the immediate group and relationships around them. The process of gaining status via success in the group and successful relationships is actually competitive to a greater or lesser extent. However, people are expected to gain them in a subtle way in Japan.

However, in the context of the Sports Day, students were seemingly enjoying their own victory behind the eyes of the teachers. In such cases, the teacher’s statement that process should be prioritized over results means that people sometimes need to obscure the fact that they are pursuing a victory. Showing they are praising their friends’ efforts instead of enjoying their own victory does not necessarily prove that those students prioritize process over results, but can contribute in creating a harmonious atmosphere at the moment.

Teaching students to give a priority to process over results is widely accepted for both ideological and practical reasons, including the widespread perspective that today’s children lack endurance and if teachers allow all students to do their own things in their own way, they cannot manage the students as a whole. However, as I argued, this tendency to prioritize process over results has negative aspects from the viewpoint of environmental education. This tendency can
encourage students to disregard the results of their activities or to act as if they are just caring about the process so that they have no responsibilities for the results. The accumulation of this kind of activities has deteriorated and destroyed the earth’s ecosystems.

Certainly, it is too hasty to argue that through the efforts to discipline students, teachers are a party to creating individuals whose behavior and attitudes are harmful to the earth’s ecosystems. If the disciplinary power thoroughly operates, or students completely adopt these virtues, it may be possible to say that teachers have had something to do with the creation and escalation of environmental problems. However, this level of efficiency is never achieved. There is an “everyday” part of life that exists outside of (to some extent) the reach of discipline. As Certeau (1984) argues, there are opportunities for ordinary people to subvert the rituals and representations that institutions seek to impose upon them. By using imposed systems in certain ways, people can resist the historical law of a state of affairs and a fait accompli, and revolt against its dogmatic legitimation. While learning to accept and endure the state of affairs, people do not completely equate the accomplished fact with a law. Although feeling social expectations to submit to the facts and established “truth,” people resist “the statutory fact of an order presenting itself as natural” (Certeau 1984:16). Certeau argues:

The actual order of things is precisely what “popular” tactics turn to their own ends, without any illusion that it will change any time soon. Though elsewhere it is exploited by a dominant power or simply denied by an ideological discourse, here order is tricked by an art. … [“Popular” culture] is not a corpus considered as foreign, fragmented in order to be displayed, studied and ‘quoted’ by a system which does to objects what it does to living beings (1984:26).

In addition, although the disciplinary power is widespread and implicitly operates, every individual can be affected by the power differently. At school, the agents with diverse cultural background intentionally and often wisely adjust their behavior and attitudes to the context. Thus, even if one is acting on these two virtues in a classroom, it is not possible to conclude that this student is also acting in the same manner outside the classroom.

The discourse of school environmental education has doubtlessly molded and shaped the characteristics of school environmental education today by highlighting certain aspects of environmental education and hiding different characteristics of it (Bowers 2001, 2002). As Foucault argues, defining the meaning of things, or constructing a discourse should not be simply

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47 What Certeau (1984:25) calls “la perruque” (wig in English) can be an example of the practice, which is outside of the reach of everyday discipline.
equated to talking about the things or clarifying the meaning that is originally associated with the issues; rather it is the process of creating the effects under discussion (Foucault 2006). Thus, we should be mindful that language, discourse and definition are not only just telling people the meaning of subjects, but also contributing to shaping and molding people’s understanding of and interpretation of the subjects. According to my research, the discourse of environmental education has either directly or indirectly led teachers to believe that environmental education has the following characteristics, meanings and values: (1) all individuals must equally accept responsibility for environmental problems so that schools have to conduct environmental education. (2) Schools taking a serious approach to conduct environmental education are those investing much time and effort in teaching environmental education based on hands-on learning activities in the Period of Integrated Learning. (3) Because the destruction of nature in return for economic growth has removed today’s children from nature, teachers need to provide students opportunities to find the natural environment in the school community. (4) Environmental education can be conducted as a unit separated from other traditional classes.

Children are considered as individuals who are possibly harmful to the natural environment just as adults who have caused environmental problems. Thus, teachers are expected to prevent students from damaging the natural environment through environmental educational activities. Indeed, teachers are attempting to teach students not to damage the remaining natural environment. However, students do not know the fact that people have historically destroyed the natural environment. They have not learned the history of environmental problems yet, and do not realize the invisible hidden relationships between nature and their daily life, or how their culture and society has damaged the natural environment. People assume that environmental education can contribute in creating ecologically literate people who do not destroy nature. However, before teaching students about the importance of the environment, environmental education makes students believe that every individual has to feel responsible, or even guilty for the destruction of the natural environment. In environmental education, children are taught to become conscious of being a victimizer who is harmful to the earth’s ecosystems. It is important to lead everyone to assume a tendency to review his/her own lifestyle to protect the natural environment. However, the effort to teach the degradation and destruction of the natural environment as a problem caused by common people can prevent children from giving an eye to the fact that underlying causes of the environmental problems are deeply rooted in the way this capitalist society functions. On the ground, teachers were hardly illustrating how children’s lifestyle are damaging the natural environment; however I observed that they were trying to make students become conscious that they have responsibility to protect nature and never referred to political aspects of environmental
problems in front of students. It was partly because of their belief that it is too difficult for elementary school students to understand political issues.

Another reason for the fact that teachers disregarded the political aspects of environmental problems has something to do with the second characteristic of environmental education. Although teachers were conducting environmental education as a component of anti-pollution movements since the 1960’s in Japan, the MOE has recently labeled schools investing much time and efforts to aggressively provide hands-on environmental activities in the Period of Integrated Learning as environmentally conscious schools. While deciding the contents and methods to conduct environmental education as a part of the Period of Integrated Learning, teachers are often struggling to conduct environmental education that is qualitatively different from what had been conducted under the name of anti-pollution education. Teachers have generally come to give high priority to hands-on learning instead of transmission of knowledge of complicated environmental problems to students. Consequently, hands-on activities are designed to give students opportunities to consciously establish a relationship with nature around the school and to detect something that they are usually overlooking in their living environment.

This way of planning hands-on environmental education is reinforced by the belief that today’s children are lacking a relationship with nature. Although this belief is pervasive throughout the country today, it is sometimes inconsistent with what teachers are thinking while looking at children actively playing outdoors. As already discussed in this chapter, this perspective of child-nature relationship is constructed under the influence of media. As environmentally-conscious people repeatedly argue that today’s children are removed from nature in some TV programs, in books on environmental problems and environmental education, and in magazine articles, the public has come to believe this pervading perspective of child-nature relationship.

Finally, teachers consider that environmental education can be conducted as a unit separated from other traditional classes like Japanese and social studies. MOE has integrated environmental knowledge into all relevant classes, but it has not led to fundamental reform in the conceptual foundations of the modern school curriculum. Instead, it has contributed in making people believe that environmental education can be conducted by an “add-on” approach (Bowers 1997). However, regardless of whether teachers either view it as environmental education, teachers constantly, intentionally or unintentionally are passing on socially, culturally accepted ways to think, act and speak, and framework of decision-making to students. The issues that teachers teach students necessarily shape the way the students deal with nature. In other words, teachers are conducting official and unofficial environmental education in everyday school life. Therefore,
at least in theory, it is imperative to review whether teachers have unconsciously and continuously contributed to lead students to pay little attention to the natural environment in comparison with other aspects of their lives. From this point of view, it is no exaggeration to say that every student-teacher interaction is directly or indirectly serving as a part of environmental education. In Orr’s words, “All education is environmental education” (1992:90).

Yet, teachers were seemingly relieved of their responsibility to review their general activities and just forced to add environmental educational class to the current school curriculum. Virtually no environmental educators focused on teachers’ words and behavior embedded in their daily lives. This seems to be related to the diffusion of an idea that environmental education can be conducted as an issue that is completely separated from other educational activities. Thus, teachers who believe that environmental education should be conducted only in the Period of Integrated Learning tend to unconsciously demonstrate to students that it is possible to evaluate value, efficiency, and convenience of things based (only) on economic criteria for judgment when they referred to environment-related contents in other classes. The curriculum itself has had a deep cultural perspective on human-nature relationships. Adding environmental education to the school curriculum without consideration of the conceptual foundation of the curriculum seems to ignore the fact that the real problem is embedded in what is being taught at school. While learning the importance of natural environment in limited environmental classes, students were still encouraged to utilize judgmental criteria accepted in this economic-centered capitalist society to judge the value of issues in other aspects of their school lives.

KES teachers, and perhaps teachers of other public elementary schools, are investing significant time and efforts to conduct hands-on environmental educational in the Period of Integrated Learning. Often, they are struggling to project and design valuable and interesting hands-on activities to provide students in their busy days. However, in preparation for the class, teachers realized the fact that they did not have enough resources and time. Environmental problems are complex and difficult issues to teach elementary school children. Students do not have enough knowledge and experiences to clearly comprehend the issue. While concentrating on the preparation for the Period of Integrated Learning in the face of various obstacles, such as lack of time and resources and the complexity of environmental problems, teachers are eventually unaware of or disregard the fact that any and every teacher-student interactions affect the way children perceive the environment.

As noted above, although they are also expected to teach students the fact that there are no or scarce natural environment in Japan, teachers comprehend that students are actually having a relationship with small parts of nature in their everyday lives. Thus, teachers wonder how they
can explain the difference between those insects, small animals, trees and flowers that children always play with and so-called “nature that has already been destroyed.” The discrepancy between what has been said in the discourse of environmental education and teachers’ perception of child-nature relationship prevents them from having confidence in the ongoing environmental education. Moreover, they do not have efficient ways to evaluate whether students are truly learning the importance of the natural environment and whether teachers could promote love for nature in students’ minds. It is also uncertain whether the ongoing environmental education actually has a positive influence on the children’s future decision-making. In addition, because there are no textbooks of environmental education used throughout the country, teachers do not know the minimum level of what they have to teach students in environmental education at a public elementary school. Consequently, even though spending much time and energy to realize environmental education, it appeared to me that teachers did not have confidence in the ongoing hands-on environmental education.

I am neither intending to conclude that environmental education is of no value, nor teachers’ efforts are futile. Certainly, children are enjoying learning about the environment in environmental education classes. What I revealed in this thesis is the fact that teachers are conducting environmental education with wide variety limitations and the fact that students are constructing their perspective of environment based on various information, knowledge, and cultural messages gathered in all aspects of their lives. The readers may feel that I emphasize powerlessness of individuals at first glance. Yet, the reality is that I have argued through the descriptions of teacher-student interactions that both teachers and students have a choice in every interaction. Teachers can choose environmentally conscious words when they speak to students, and they can use environmentally friendly judgmental criteria to evaluate values of things in front of students. According to my analysis, two major factors accelerate the teachers’ sense of powerlessness in terms of environmental education: the fact that they already have a lot of work and been overwhelmed by their busy schedule; the fact that they cannot have confidence in the ongoing environmental educational activities for the reasons discussed above. From my perspective, it is crucial to keep these two points in mind when discussing the importance of school environmental education. Note the following conversation between Yamazaki-sensei and Akiyama-sensei quoted in chapter six:

Akiyama-sensei: [Teachers] have a lot of work to do at home such as preparation for classes on the next day. Who appreciates our everyday efforts?
Yamazaki-sensei: We’ll never get such appreciation, and we shouldn’t expect it.

Akiyama-sensei: I strongly think that we should be liberated from time constraints and mental pressure to establish a good relationship with the children. Don’t you think so?

Yamazaki-sensei: I totally agree with you. When we are too busy and too exhausted, we, as people, tend to overlook the subtleties of the children’s emotions. (My Field note, November 16)

I think that environmental educators and policymakers who are supportive of the incorporation of environmental education into the current school curriculum should try to understand individual teachers’ efforts and struggles in general. Furthermore, from the perspective of environmental education, instead of turning over the responsibility of children’s education to schools and teachers, it is required today to build a society in which teachers can concentrate on the education of children. Vygotsky clearly makes this point.

Hence, the relation between education and life, and between the school and the social order, becomes understandable, moreover that this relation must serve as a starting point for pedagogies. Questions of education will be fully solved only when questions of social order have been fully solved. Every attempt at constructing educational ideals in a society with social contradictions is a utopian dream, since, as we have seen, the social environment is the only educational factor that can establish new reactions in the child, and so long as it harbors unresolved contradictions, these contradictions will create cracks in the most well thought-out and most inspired educational system. (2005: 234)

Orr (1992) also stresses the importance of the reform of society in order to create good schools: “How do we create good schools without first creating a good society that values the life of the mind and lives lived with heroism and high purpose” (38). By the word “good schools,” he does not suggest for-profit schools that are designed by reformers to equip their own nations with an excellent labor force to compete more favorably in the global economy and to provide each individual with the means for maximum upward mobility. Instead, for him, “good schools” are those aimed at preparing “people for lives and livelihoods suited to a planet with a biosphere that operates by the laws of ecology and thermodynamics” (1992:27).

As described above, KES teachers, and perhaps other elementary school teachers in general, are trying to make people who habituate themselves to shaping their actions to surrounding people’s eyes, behavior, expectations, and intentions, and who are accustomed to make all-out and concerted efforts to achieve given goals without concern for the results. In order to make
these people live environmentally conscious lives, it is crucial to create a culture and social system that is kind to the natural environment. It is not just an educational issue, but also a social, political, and ideological problem that we have to embark upon today. I strongly recommend that an urgent priority in the discourse of environmental education is to define what individual schools and teachers are unable to do at school in relation to environmental education. As Hirota (2003) and Wulf (2002) point out, there is a tendency to make a list of what schools are expected to do from a certain perspective in educational discourse. Because virtually all people have experiences of education today, people in a wide variety of positions and fields (educational sociologists, philosophers, psychologists, policymakers, journalists, comedians, artists and others) have been discussing the desirable image of schools. Educational drama, such as *Kinpachi-sensei* (broadcast for over 25 years since 1979) and *Jouou no Kyôshitsu* (July 2—September 17, 2005) are so popular nation wide. Educational comics are also popular in Japan (e.g., *Gokusen, Dragon Sakura*, etc.). Those drama and comics also create certain images of education and schools: What schools should be. However, there are insufficient efforts to uncover the limitations of schools, which are only one institution, and set of interactions affecting children’s lives. This way of constructing the discourse on education unconsciously, but doubtlessly has forced schoolteachers to suffer strong pressure between desirable images of schools and the status quo. In discussion on environmental education, we need to clarify what is difficult to implement from teachers’ perspectives, and plan around that. What is the most significant and urgent for the teachers is to acknowledge the fact that their ordinary behavior and words directly or indirectly help students establish their own perspective of the environment. In this regard, KES teachers may need to quit thinking that they conduct environmental education only for the fourth graders. It is doubtlessly important to teach environmental problems as issues occurring in their neighborhood because it may be difficult for fourth graders to imagine what has been happening outside of the country. However, the fact that Japan has degraded and destroyed the earth’s ecosystems can be much clearer when looking at the history of environmental problems in a broader picture. Thus, I recommend teachers to keep the history of environmental problems in their mind, for example, when teaching about the International trade in social studies classes.

This does not mean that teachers do not have to conduct environmental education. I believe that they must learn about environmental issues to teach students. However, as far as I observed, teachers are already struggling to deal with their everyday tasks and lacking time and resources to challenge something new. In order to ask teachers to conduct environmental education at a public elementary school, teachers need sufficient time to study about the basics of environmental problems by participating in study sessions. Although teachers are currently feeling that they do
not have enough time to study environmental issues, the understanding of the severity of those issues will urge them to reevaluate their ordinary behavior, attitudes, and language from the point of view of environmental education. As a result of the reevaluation of their ordinary activities, teachers would be more likely to bring a concern for environmental problems into various classes. They may also be able to make an environmental educational club in which teachers and students will contribute in making the school district clean and environmentally friendly. By making such a club, teachers can be forced to live busier lives. Consequently, in order to continue such activities, adult volunteers in the community might be necessary. Although such volunteers may add stress to teachers’ lives because they change the atmosphere and relationships of the school, the clearer understanding of the impact of environmental issues on the children’s future will enable them to feel that they are engaged in worthwhile, satisfying activities. In order to encourage teachers to make a step toward such activities, it is crucial to consider the effects of exams. For example, if private elementary schools do not teach their students about environmental problems and try to help them prepare only for their entrance exams, teachers of public elementary schools can feel that conducting environmental education may put their students at a heavy disadvantage in entrance exams.

It is not enough for educators and policy makers to know the status quo of environmental education based on statistics from outside. It is social relations that teachers can establish with their surroundings—co-workers, students, parents, and society as a whole—that have defining impacts on their conducts, or *modus operandi*. It is social relations that children can construct with their surroundings—friends, teachers, parents, and society—that determine the ways they behave and the ways they perceive and interpret the world. Thus, in the discourse of environmental education, what kinds of social circumstances would provide the proper context for environmental education to take place and the ways to realize such social circumstances that help teachers and children build a rapport with each other must be discussed as matters of urgent and crucial concern.

I do not intend to argue that outside researchers and policymakers assume the privilege of speaking in the name of the insiders, or ordinary people. I do not believe that outside researchers are able to comprehend and verbalize everything about insiders’ lives until nothing is left because they cannot assimilate completely into the insiders’ world. While trying to study the traditions, language, symbols, and art that compose a culture, researchers often ignore the ways in which people reappropriate them in everyday situations. Based on scientific methods, researchers can retain “movable elements (tools and products to be put in display cases) or descriptive schemas (quantifiable behaviors, stereotypes of the staging of social intercourse, ritual structures)” (Certeau
1984:20). However, they overlook “the aspects of a society that cannot be so uprooted and transferred to another space: ways of using things or words according to circumstances” (Certeau 1984:20). Nevertheless, I think that it is too hasty to conclude that a political mastery can substitute for the researcher’s effort to understand the insiders’ lives. It is required for people and interest groups that are playing an important role in the discourse of environmental education to put themselves in the context of ordinary people’s lives, view environmental education from the insider’s perspective, and discuss existing problems and obstacles for the implementation of the environmental education within ordinary language. It will make the current discourse of environmental education more practical and fruitful.
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