

Developing New Networks in Community through Environmental Education: A Case Study in Da Nang City, Vietnam

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1. BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Environmental education is considered to be one way of solving environmental problems. In recent years, environmental education through “community participation” has been expected to create new networks between the people involved and their community. In Vietnam, environmental education became one of the significant policies in addressing serious environmental problems caused by its tremendous economic growth. Though various activities have been conducted, most approaches are still limited in providing children with insufficient knowledge about environmental issues at their schools. These approaches usually do not involve comprehensive understanding of actual situations surrounding their own environment. Hence both the government and school teachers who are actively engaged in teaching environmental education aim to seek for a new framework of environmental education. There were few studies concerning environmental education already that have been done in Vietnam and most of these studies focus on the importance and improvement of environmental education practiced in school lessons.

The main objective of this study is to clarify the possibilities of developing an environmental education framework in Vietnam in which various stakeholders participate. In this case study, a set of activities for the environmental education based on the fixed-term assistance to developing countries was presented. In addition, this study provides some of the responsibilities of various stakeholders in order to achieve a brighter future of this endeavor in Vietnam.

2. OUTLINE OF THE PROJECT

GSGES conducted the project for environmental education in Da Nang City, Vietnam from March 2006 to March 2010. This project was a new challenge for Da Nang City because various stakeholders were involved. The purpose of this project was mainly to improve the awareness of the residents and children at the primary school in the communities through various activities such as town watching, cleanup activity, water treatment of the lake, and environmental education.

3. METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

Survey questionnaires about environmental education were distributed to the target residents whose children belonged to Vo Thi Sau primary school. The acquired datasets were statistically analyzed by cross tabulation. In addition, the spatial characteristics about the residents’ environmental awareness in each residential area of the case study were clearly determined using GIS. Finally, a comparison of awareness of living environmental problems between the participants and non-participants of environmental conservation activities of the project, and the residential areas was made. An interview with a teacher who had been responsible at the primary school was also conducted in order to identify actual situation and issues in the study area.

The result revealed the close correlation between the participation in the activities and the awareness of living environment. The participants had higher awareness than non-participants. It was also found that the relationships between the residents’ awareness of living environmental problems and their priorities for living varied depending on their geographical living condition.

4. CONCLUSION

Community participation is considered to be an effective way for making new networks and for relating the “attitude” toward environmental conservation and sustainable society into “action”. Both “attitude” and “action” or its relationship could be the goal of environmental education. The responsibility, however, is ours to show to the local residents about the new framework of environmental education involving various stakeholders. This research has also shown that there are some differences between the residents’ awareness of living environmental problems depending on their geographical living condition. Hence there is a need to consider these differences to accomplish the set goals. This also aims to provide the residents opportunities to find something new at their community through actual activities where they can participate.