

JSPS London: Fellows Experience

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Host institution: Tokyo University of Science, Graduate School of Science & Mathematics Education

Host name: Professor Minoru Itoh

Research study:

My research explored the policy and practice of environmental education in Japanese high schools. During the three months I stayed in Japan, I completed a literature review, analysed relevant policies, interviewed 16 high school teachers and 4 educational experts and completed a draft of an article. I also presented the emerging findings at two seminars for Master's students – in Tokyo and Okayama. The findings suggest that the emphasis of environmental education has shifted onto Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) as a result of international policy direction. Further, much of the biology curriculum is devoted to ecology – a subject often aligned with environmental education in schools. Currently, the formal curriculum is focused on learning 'about' the environment with limited opportunities to develop advocacy or skills of environmental activism. There are limited opportunities to learn 'in' the environment – with the majority of these being offered after school, during the weekends or holidays. PISA's new assessment, Global Competence, which includes ESD, whilst currently unknown by the majority of participants, was thought to be an important 'subject' yet would be challenging to assess. As I analyse the findings further and compare the data with a similar study from England, I intend to set out future research and policy directions.

Tips for effective working methods:

Using interview methods can be challenging and required me to be very flexible and accommodating. Having translated text ready in advance, that outlines the study aims and your expectations of the interviews, would be very helpful both for expedience but also to ensure that everyone feels comfortable. I also found that I needed to build time into my research plan to ensure that ethics forms were translated, and triple checked for accuracy.

Living in Japan:

If visiting for an extended period of time I would recommend joining a group/ hobby outside your institution and participating regularly. Doing this enabled me to meet people outside the university, offering a different perspective on life in Japan – regardless of my limited Japanese. I cannot recommend Google Translate enough. Both in work – with policies and websites only available in Japanese – and also out in supermarkets and restaurants, the App just made life so much easier.

Photo: Tokyo University of Science, Kagurazaka Campus, Sakura April 2019.

