

Japan-U.S. Teacher Exchange Program for ESD Impact Report

Merinda Davis – Lakeridge Junior High School, Orem, UT – 2012 participant

My teaching career, a journey impacted by the Fulbright Japan-U.S. Teacher Exchange for Education for Sustainable Development has been transformed from walking small steps to running giant strides, increasing my ability to positively impact the lives of the world's future generation. Starting in San Francisco, I was introduced to a new teaching perspective. Then the Japan Program opened a world of possibilities followed by the Tokyo Conference, which helped to establish international projects that will be integrated into my curriculum.

Possibilities and ideas began to flow during the first meetings in San Francisco. This is where I was introduced to many concepts in Education for Sustainable Development [ESD]. During this time I was able to meet teachers from all over Japan and the U.S., discuss ideas and establish the groundwork for many of the projects that are now taking place at my school.

When we arrived in Japan, it was like a world of possibilities opened. This experience exemplified unity and accomplishment through the theme of, "Think Globally, Act Locally." Allowing students to take action was a common thread throughout, as we saw in the collaboration between schools and World Heritage Sites. When we unite with our community, environment, and the world we can accomplish something that is life and world changing. When we realize the interconnectedness of everything, we realize that the world is not as big as it may seem. Sustainable development is the thread that connects the world; it connects all people to each other and to the environment. We were able to visit schools, meet teachers and students where we were introduced to new ideas and perspectives. Observing in these schools has really helped my teaching in that I was able to gain an international perspective to help my students and community. One of the most effective sustainable practices that I witnessed was students' cleaning the school. This is a common practice in every school that we visited, which helps students gain more personal responsibility. Since learning about this practice I have made it common practice in my classroom to have the students clean the room before they leave class, including cleaning their desks. These schools exemplified "Think Globally, Act Locally" through these practices and their focus of World Heritage Sites. This inspired me to use more of the heritage sites in my area when teaching Utah Studies.

During the Tokyo Conference project plans started to solidify. After having a better idea about the Japanese school system, the cultures, and traditions planning went more smoothly. We were able to establish and plan the projects that we are now implementing. Since the Tokyo Conference, my Japanese counter-parts and I have been in regular contact, establishing goals and objectives through continued communication. Therefore, we have been able to create projects that can be sustainable through curriculum integration.

Since participating in Fulbright Japan-U.S. Teacher Exchange for ESD; I have been promoted to department chair, featured in the district newspaper, chosen as my school's representative on the State Social Studies Committee, selected to participate in Columbia University's Sustainable Communities Professional Development Program, I am collaborating with Adobe Youth Voices/SHIFT program to create multi-media projects for my students and have helped create new sustainable development based curriculum which is currently being implemented.

As a result of Fulbright Japan-US Teacher Exchange for ESD I have been able to integrate international projects and sustainability projects into my curriculum. Using sustainability concepts

as the focus to teaching World Geography has made my classes more interesting and applicable to my students. My co-worker at Lakeridge Junior High School, Mr. [REDACTED], took part in this program last year and we have been able to collaborate on integrating sustainability concepts into our school culture. Because we both have the same goal, to establish a culture of sustainability in our school and community, due to our participation in the Fulbright program, we are able to collaborate our efforts. We have been working on recruiting other teachers to join the cause of ESD.

As ESD continues to develop at Lakeridge Junior High School, the Social Studies Department is making strides to create a school and community sustainability culture. In my classes the overriding theme in every unit is "Think Globally Act Locally." This concept, in collaboration with sustainable development perspectives and projects, is being infused into new curriculum currently being implemented. In the seventh grade Utah Studies courses the focus is on Community. Students study how they can be active members of their local community through learning about their history, environment, and government. They take action in their community through service projects, research, and interviews. The ninth grade World Geography courses become more intensified in their study of sustainable development. In every unit the focus is on sustainability; how the environment, economy, equity impact every aspect of human civilization. They participate in "Think globally, Act locally" projects as part of a school-wide Model United Nations Conference [MUN].

I set many goals before going to Japan, now I am accomplishing them. I am implementing the projects [explained below], I learned more about ESD and how to apply those ideas, and am continuing to build international relationships. Each project is being integrated as part of my new sustainability based curriculum. While many of the projects are in the pilot year, the plan is to continue these projects into the future.

Implementing projects

Infusing these sustainable development perspectives and projects into my curriculum has helped to focus and direct student learning on "Thinking Globally and Acting Locally." The following are projects that currently being implemented:

1,000 Cranes World Peace Day Project:

As an introduction to global thinking, World Peace Day and the 1,000 Peace Cranes Project has been a great way to initiate the program. Two weeks leading up to World Peace Day, students wrote messages of peace and folded origami cranes in class and at home. Because every ninth grader at Lakeridge Junior High School participated in this project, peace became a daily topic of discussion. I am convinced that as this project continues each year, it will become part of the school culture.

Japan-US Student Video Exchange Project: see Attachments 1a, 1b, 1c, and 1d

Open to all ninth graders, students apply to participate in this project. We are working with two different schools: Toyoda Junior High School and Jiyu Gakuen. Because Mr. [REDACTED] from Toyoda Junior High and Mr. [REDACTED] from Jiyu Gakuen have different needs and ideas, I have project groups to collaborate with each school.

International Peace Project:

The first school, Toyoda Junior High, Mr. [REDACTED] and I created a pilot curriculum for this project focusing on peace topics to get students to "Think Globally and Act Locally." We have paired students based on their gender, personal and global interests. Skype night dates have been set and students are preparing picture based PowerPoint presentations to share with their Japanese

counterparts. The end result will have students collaborating internationally on a Public Service Announcement [PSA] video, which will include a call to action (*see attachment 2c for unmodified outline*). As students discuss global issues we hope they will gain a new perspective and know they are able to take action and make a difference.

Going Global: Changing the World:

The second school, Jiyu Gakuen, Mr. [REDACTED] and I have had more language issues. Mr. [REDACTED] and I are collaborating with the Japan Society of New York/Tokyo on this project. They are assisting us with communication and planning. I observed that students on both sides of the Pacific have really enjoyed learning more about each other through their Skype sessions. Although there is a slight age and language difference between our students, I think this project works well.

As a result of this project these students desire to visit Japan. They are in the planning stages of fundraising and grant writing to fund their trip. I plan to take a small group of ninth graders to Japan this summer. While in Japan we will create a Video Documentary Presentation [VDP] of their experiences.

The students participating in this project will also be paired with visiting Japanese students from Nishiyamoto Academy in Nara. Every year students from Japan visit Utah. They participate in homestay visits and spend a day shadowing an American student at Lakeridge Junior High School. This is a wonderful opportunity for students to be exposed to another culture and to gain international perspective.

Model United Nations – Rio+20 Topics: see attachments 2a, 2b

In order to teach World Geography in a way that is interesting for students and incorporate sustainable development education we have established a school Model United Nations [MUN] Conference. For MUN students are assigned a country in which they research and represent. Using themes from the Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development as committee topics for students to debate makes sustainability an important learning tool for our students. In preparation for MUN students must find a current event from their assigned country on one of the topics, find a corresponding local current event and then compare and contrast the two events. This has been a good introduction for students to begin making connections globally and locally. Within the scope of the MUN we have created and updated a project packet for each student as they prepare for the conference.

This MUN Conference creates an opportunity for students to research, think for themselves, and to take action. One of the most beneficial achievements a teacher can accomplish is to help students become active and productive adults. Through this Conference, we as teachers become facilitators of learning. Allowing students the opportunity to explore and learn through active participation will help them learn how to problem solve in real life situations.

Human-Environment Interaction – Cross-Curricular VDP project:

As the dust settles from the MUN Conference students will be assigned a cross-curricular VDP focusing on Human-Environment Interaction.

Folktale Exchange: see attachment 3

My seventh graders will be exchanging folktales with schools from Japan and the U.S. They are creating “A Day in My Life” video to introduce themselves and Lakeridge Junior High School to the other participating schools. Each participating school will select a local native legend or folktale, which will then be translated into both English and Japanese, illustrated and shared with the other

schools. The compilation of stories will be turned into an eBook.

Sustainable Girls Club:

An after school club will be a tool to help girls with self-esteem, learn important life skills and how to be self-sufficient. “More than ever, young women have all the tools and education they need to be true leaders. Yet they’re being brought up in a culture that undermines their confidence and imposes barriers to living fully into their potential.” Dr. Steiner-Adair, author of “Full of Ourselves: A Wellness Program to Advance Girl Power, Health, and Leadership, will discuss the ways parents and schools can counteract these negative influences.”

We also hope to have boys in this club so that they can learn sustainable practices. In this club students will create videos and documentaries on what they learn, culminating with a film festival at the end of the school year.

This entire experience has been life changing. My professional and personal educational goals are now focused on International Education and ESD. This program has helped me cultivate a greater respect for international education. My experience in Japan has awakened a greater desire to accomplish my goals. I will continue to use the lessons I learned to enrich the lives of my students for years to come.