

# Chapter 3-4

## Environmental Learning, Environmental Education

### Abstract

Surrounded by mountain ranges on all sides, Shiga Prefecture is home to Lake Biwa. Taking advantages of the natural fields and abundant natural sources with which it is blessed, the Shiga Prefectural Government implements a wide diversity of hands-on natural environmental educational initiatives with various organizations actively engaged in environmental education and conservation activities.

**Keywords:** Environmental learning, Uminoko, Yamanoko, Tanbonoko

### 1. Promoting Environmental Education

The nation's first ordinance to promote environmental education was enacted in 2004. Based on this ordinance, projects have been promoted to develop human resources capable of taking the lead in creating a sustainable society.

### 2. Environmental Education at Schools

#### 2.1 Environmental Learning Taking Advantage of the Nature of Shiga Prefecture

##### 1) Biwako Floating School "Uminoko"

"Uminoko" is a boat that has served since 1983 as a venue for education. All fifth grade students at elementary schools in Shiga Prefecture take part in a two-day one-night educational program called "Biwako Floating School."

This program aims to nurture students' abilities to proactively engage in environmental issues and forge a good relationship with other people through the Floating School with the mother lake, Lake Biwa, as the stage, and forms an integral part of school education.

Based on these aims, the two-day one-night educational program includes "Lake Biwa Environmental Study" and "Experiential Learning" to give children from different schools the chance to learn together. Activities include water quality surveys, plankton observation and tug of war competitions.



Fig. 3-4-1 The educational boat "Uminoko"

##### 2) Forest Environmental Learning Program "Yamanoko"

Since 2007, eight forest environmental learning facilities in Shiga Prefecture have been providing hands-on environmental learning programs to fourth grade students at elementary schools. These programs form part of school education for children who will shoulder the burden of the next generation and give them the chance to deepen their interest and understanding of the forest, as well as to cultivate their ability to forge good relationships with other people.



Fig. 3-4-2 Tree thinning experience

Working in liaison with “Yamanoko” instructors, each school implements distinctive programs such as tree thinning which aim to make children aware of how the forest, which occupies half of the total area of the prefecture, plays an important role as a water resource for Lake Biwa and participants in these programs go on to take part in the “Uminoko” floating school for fifth graders.

### 3) Agricultural Experience Learning Program “Tanbonoko”

Since 2002, the Shiga Prefectural Government has been supporting elementary schools through the “Tanbonoko Experience Project” to promote “Dietary Education from the Perspective of the Agriculture” to foster greater interest in children in agriculture and teach them about the importance of food and daily life.

This project gives children experience in from various types of farm work, including planting rice paddies or crop fields, harvesting, and cooking.

Feedback from schools includes comments such as “Enjoyment and hardship are both part of the experience of growing rice and other crops.”



Fig. 3-4-3 Children engaged in harvesting

## 2.2 Supplementary Material for Environmental Education

In 1980, Supplementary Materials for Environmental Education were published for elementary, junior-high and high schools. These materials have been revised several times and are used to enhance environmental education at school.



Fig. 3-4-4 Learning using supplementary materials

## 3. Information and Support for Environmental Learning

### 3.1 The Environmental Learning Center

As a hub for the promotion of environmental learning that leads on to environmental conservation activities, the Environmental Learning Center provides information, planning support and coordination in the Lake Biwa Museum.

### 3.2 The Nature Experience Program for Infants

Since 2001, hands-on training for the nature experience program for infants has been conducted for preschool and nursery teachers. Nature experience programs for infants are being prepared based on practical examples from the training program.



Fig. 3-4-5 Nature experience program on the shore of Lake Biwa

(Environmental Policy Division / School Education Division / Biwako Floating School / Forest Policy Division / Food Brand Promotion Division / Environmental Learning Center / Shiga Prefectural Government)