Dear Friends of NIER

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It was in 1967, a time when international co-operation in education was not a generally accepted or commonplace occurrence, that NIER accepted a request from UNESCO and began its programme of international co-operation focused on Asian countries. In the 40 years that have elapsed since then, NIER has organized a total of 125 seminars, workshops and study visits, and has received 2,231 educational specialists from 52 countries, and UNESCO and other international organizations. I take pride in the fact that on each of these occasions, themes that were vitally important for the common theme of educational reform were made the object of lively exchanges of information and discussions, in the course of which suggestions were made for future co-operation, and that as a result, it has been possible to construct a valuable network, which has contributed greatly to the educational development of the Asia-Pacific region.

And in the summer of last year, 2007, in the presence of many invited guests both from within Japan and from overseas countries, we hosted a very successful event in the form of a 40th anniversary celebration of our achievements to date and an international seminar. With this event still in my mind, I want to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude for their consideration and cooperation over so many years to the UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education (UNESCO Bangkok office) and to the UNESCO National Commissions and Ministries of Education in many countries, as well as to the many people connected to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) within Japan.

Moving away from these reminiscences, as I told all our readers in issue No. 104 of this Newsletter, published in November 2007, the NIER headquarters in Meguro Ward was closed in December 2007, marking the end of 42 years in the same location, and from January 2008, NIER was re-housed within the MEXT building (Kasumigaseki, Chiyoda Ward). It is expected that as a result of the move, the ties between NIER and MEXT will be deepened still further, and that NIER’s role as a national organ engaged in educational policy research will develop even more strongly.

A further, deeply regrettable development is that it has become impossible for NIER to sustain the same pattern of educational co-operative activities vis-à-vis countries in the Asia-Pacific region that it has carried out hitherto, and March 2008 marks more or less a terminal point in terms of these activities. We will of course continue to collaborate with UNESCO and host various activities, but we unfortunately need to reduce the number of activities to be hosted by NIER.

It also follows from the above that this newsletter will cease publication and that this is the final issue. While expressing my heartfelt thanks to all our readers, I also ask you to bear with me while I say a few words in recollection of what has happened to date and about the outlook for the future.

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International Symposium on Educational Reform

On 8 and 9 March 2008, an international symposium on educational reform was held in the U Thant Hall, United Nations University, under the sponsorship of the National Institute for Educational Policy Research (NIER), the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), and the British Council. The supporting organizations were the Foundation for Promotion of Educational Research, the National Federation of Educational Research Institutes, the Science Council of Japan, and the Japan Science and Technology Agency.

The theme of the symposium was “Science Literacy through School Education: the Present and Future”; on the basis of the results, announced in December 2007, of the OECD-PISA 2006 survey, which highlighted scientific literacy, and on the basis of the present state of the curriculum in each of the participating countries and the image of “scientific literacy” expected of each country’s citizens, the current state of “scientific literacy” in Japan and overseas countries was confirmed, and the future development of scientific literacy was examined.

On the first day, 8 March, after initial greetings from the symposium sponsors, keynote speeches were made by Akito Arima, Chairman of the Japan Science Foundation, and Yukihiko Nunomura, Deputy Director-General, Elementary and Secondary Education Bureau (MEXT). Both speakers took up issues concerned with science education in Japan.

Following the keynote speeches, the invited speakers from overseas all gave talks reflecting the situation in their various countries; details of the speakers and the titles of their talks are as follows: Dr. Rodger Bybee (USA), Executive Director Emeritus of Biological Sciences Curriculum Study (BSCS), and Chair of the Science Expert Group for the OECD PISA 2006, USA, on “Assessing Scientific Literacy in PISA 2006: Challenges for the United States”; Dr. John Holman (UK), Professor at York University and Director of the UK National Science Learning Centre, on “Scientific Literacy in the UK: Status and Challenges”; Dr. Merike Kesler (Finland), Special coordinator, Centre for School Clubs, Finland, on “The Development of Scientific Literacy, the Present and Future Challenges in Finland”; Dr. Robert Laurie (Canada), Director of assessment and evaluation, Ministry of Education, New Brunswick, and Member of the Science Expert Group for the OECD PISA 2006, Canada, on “PISA 2006 Science in Canada: Context, Results and Possible Explanations”; and Dr. Robin Millar (UK), Professor at York University and Member of the Science Expert Group for the OECD PISA 2006, UK, on “Developing a Science Curriculum to Foster Scientific Literacy”.

On the second day, 9 March, there was a panel discussion on policies for developing scientific literacy. This began with an explanation on the purpose of the session by the co-ordinator, Yasushi Ogura, Senior Researcher of the Department for Curriculum Research, NIER, and Member of the Science Expert Group for the OECD PISA 2006. The theme of the first session was “Scientific Literacy Standard and Its Realization”. The session opened with a lecture by Prof. Kazuo Kitahara, Professor at the International Christian University, Japan, and Chair of the Science Council of Japan's 21st Century Science and Technology Literacy Project, on “Science for all Japanese: Designing 21st Century”. Next, Yoichi Kiyohara, Senior Curriculum Specialist in the School Curriculum Division, Elementary and Secondary Education Bureau, MEXT, introduced the new science curriculum standard of Japan. Discussions among the special overseas and Japanese panelists were developed on what should be taught in science curriculum based on information of their respective countries.

The second session, under the theme, “Teaching and Teacher Education to Foster Scientific Literacy”, opened with a lecture by Dr. Hugh Williots, Head of Science, Settle College, UK, on “Teaching 21st Century Science”. Following his talk, information was provided by each panellist on the teaching of scientific literacy and professional development of teachers in each of their respective countries.

In the third session, which had as its theme, “Keeping a Balance between Fostering Scientific Literacy and Educating Future Scientists”, in response to a request by Toru Amano, Executive Director of the Japan Science and Technology Agency, each of the special invited panellists provided information about the situation in their country, and a panel discussion ensued.
The “eco-school” concept in Japan and Germany

On 1 December, 2007, a symposium on the theme of “eco-school” was held at the Goethe Institut in Tokyo.

At the G8 Summit of major leaders held in Germany in the summer of 2007, the Government of Japan proposed cutting the emission of greenhouse gases in half by 2050, and the proposal was incorporated into the summit communiqué. And in December 2007, the 13th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 13) was held in Bali, where a dialogue was set in motion about creating a new international framework to combat global warming from 2013 as a successor policy to the Kyoto Protocol. Furthermore, at the G8 Summit to be held at Lake Toya in Hokkaido in July this year, environmental problems, with a central focus on climate change problems, will be a major theme, and the role of Japan, as a leading country, will be very important.

Against this background, in which environmental problems on a global scale are raised and emphasized as a common world issue, and the debate continues to be taken forward, voices are heard demanding that in Japanese schools, environmental education is promoted to a much greater extent than has happened in the past, and that plans are made to establish an eco-school, specifically, “a school which gives deep consideration to reducing the impact on the environment and to co-existing with nature”.

It was from this kind of perspective that an international eco-school symposium, taking as its theme “Children and the Environment”, was held, sponsored by NIER and co-sponsored by the Goethe Institut, the Tokyo Institute of Technology and Waseda University.

News of the event attracted the interest of many persons concerned with this field, so that a decision was taken to set an early closing date for the receipt of applications. On the day of the symposium, the number of people who turned up exceeded the set quota, and the total number of attendees amounted to 210 persons.

With Professor Isami Kinoshita from Chiba University in the chair, the symposium opened with greetings by Shinji Kondo, Director-General of NIER, the main sponsoring organization. This was followed by greetings given by Dr. Uwe Schmeltler, Director of the co-sponsoring body, the Goethe Institute.

The former part of the symposium began with a keynote speech given by Dr. Peter Hubner, professor emeritus from Stuttgart University, on the theme “An eco-school made by children”, presenting an example of a project from an environmentally advanced country like Germany. This was followed by a keynote speech given by Mr. Mitsuru Senda, President of the Japan Institute of Architects and of the Association for Children’s Environment, on the theme “Creating an environment for children”, showing what was being done in Japan.

The latter part of the symposium was taken up by a panel discussion, in which Prof. Morio Uzuki from Waseda University acted as co-ordinator. A lively discussion on the theme “Creating an eco-school in Japan and Germany” developed among the panelists, who included Ms. Barbara Hubner, wife of Dr. Hubner and architect from the German architectural firm, PLUS+ bauplanung (GmbH), Prof. Kazumi Kudo from Toyo University, Mr. Junji Iguichi from the Suginami City Board of Education, and Mr. Koichi Shino from the Educational Facilities Research Center of NIER.

Seminar on the Establishment of University Facilities using PFI

On 25 February, 2008, a seminar sponsored by the Educational Facilities Research Center of the National Institute for Educational Policy Research (NIER) was held on the theme of establishing university facilities by using PFI (Private Finance Initiative) as a funding mechanism. The seminar was an integral part of research activities concerned with higher education facilities.

In Japan, a significant number of projects using PFI have already been implemented by national universities, and a large number of projects have already progressed to the management stage. In this situation, a need has developed for appropriate attention to be given to monitoring.

Against the above background, 2 specialists were invited to this seminar from Korea, where the establishment of facilities through the use of PFI is enthusiastically promoted as an important national policy and where the number of such facilities exceeds those established in Japan. The invited specialists were Dr. Yu, Woong-San, Director of the Private Investment Support Team in the Educational Facilities Management Center for Private Investment within the Korean Educational Development Institute, and Dr. Rie, Ho-Soupy, Professor in the Department of Architectural Design, Dong-Eui University. In the course of the seminar, they described the system used in Korea for implementing projects, as well as giving an explanation of a number of case studies.

From the Japanese side, Hirohiko Machida, Director of the Private Finance Initiative Promotion Office in the Cabinet Office, explained, on the basis of a report prepared in November 2007 by the PFI Promotion Committee in the Cabinet Office, current issues and the likely future direction that PFI would take in Japan. A further explanation, focusing on the current state of PFI and future policies in relation to national university independent administrative institutions, was given by Masao Yamazaki, Director of the Office for Facilities Planning, National Facilities Division, Department of Facilities Planning and Administration, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. Next, Prof. Satoru Takahashi from the Department of Anatomy and Embryology, Biomolecular and Integrated Medical Sciences, Graduate School of Comprehensive Human Sciences, University of Tsukuba, gave an overview of PFI at the University of Tsukuba and an explanation of the present state of monitoring, focusing particularly on projects already implemented and on the way in which monitoring of project management was carried out.
In July 1967, the Section for Educational Research Workshops in Asia was newly established in The National Institute for Educational Research (NIER) under the leadership of the External Services Department, and the UNESCO-NIER Regional Programme for Educational Research in Asia started in October of the same year.

An English-language newsletter began to be published in 1968, a year after the establishment of the Section for Educational Research Workshops in Asia referred to above. Initially, the publication did not take the form of a newsletter as such; instead, it was issued as a pamphlet bearing the title “Unesco & National Institute for Educational Research” and making the announcement that NIER had begun a programme of close co-operative activities with UNESCO. But in consideration of the importance attached to transmitting information to various foreign countries, in September of the following year, 1969, NIER-NEWSLETTER, Vol. 1, No. 1, was published under the heading “UNESCO-NIER REGIONAL PROGRAMME FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH IN ASIA: Newsletter”. From that time on, the newsletter was published over a period of about 40 years until it reached its present final issue, No. 105.

That said, after the first issue of the newsletter, publication came to an initial halt, but as the tempo of seminars and workshops picked up, the pattern of publishing the newsletter 3 times a year came to be adopted, and this has persisted up to the present time. It should also be noted that in 1978, the Section referred to above was restructured, with a slight increase in the number of researchers, as the Section for Educational Co-operation in Asia.

I personally was appointed to the staff of NIER in 1980, after a period of service in the UNESCO Bangkok office, and since then, have worked at implementing and managing activities in NIER for 28 years. In my younger days, you could literally see the sweat on my brow as I worked, and as time passed, I was fortunate enough to be given the chance to exercise team leadership responsibility.

My recollections are inexhaustible, but in particular, I recall with nostalgia firstly 2 Directors General, Dr. Masunori HIRATSUKA, who had a very strong desire for Japan to contribute, through UNESCO, to international co-operation in education, and who sowed the seeds for future activities, and Hiroshi KIDA, who took up and continued Dr. Hiratsuka’s thinking. I also recall the many others who occupied the post of Director General over the years, and among my other colleagues, Kihei KOIZUMI, Head of the Section for Educational Co-operation in Asia, who stood by my side in bearing responsibility for NIER’s activities, Section Head Toshio KANAYA, Miharu KAJITA, Nobuya HIGUCHI, and others.

For more than 10 years past, we have seen great changes not only in the social environment surrounding NIER itself, but in the social standing in the world and the social environment of many Asian countries. We have had to respond to many new circumstances and issues in terms of international co-operation in the face of the many changes in the countries of Asia and the Pacific, including steady and, at the same time, remarkable economic and cultural development, utilization in the educational field of the very rapid development of information and communications technology, and Education for Sustainable Development, and it is against the background of changes such as these that what is required of us from now on is a new pattern and modality in terms of regional international co-operation.

Of course, notwithstanding what I have said above, quantitative and qualitative international research co-operation with international organisations such as UNESCO, OECD and others, as well as specialists from different countries, must continue and develop still further. In order to achieve this aim, all the members of the Department for International Research and Co-operation will exert every possible effort. I hope that we can continue to count on your co-operation and friendship in the years to come.

Dissemination of information in the future will be carried out through the medium of the web sites of the three main institutions concerned, the National Institute for Educational Policy Research (NIER), the Ministry for Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), and the National Information Center for Educational Resources (NICER). Contact details are set out below, and I hope the various web sites, which are accessible at any time, will serve as useful reference sources.

http://www.nier.go.jp/ (NIER)
http://www.nicer.go.jp/ (NICER)
http://www.mext.go.jp/ (MEXT)