

3.2.4 Promotion of Education and Public Awareness

Japan

Disasters and Education: Maiko High School in Japan

It is said that more than 90% of the people killed by the Great Hanshin-Awaji (Kobe) Earthquake lost their lives within 30 minutes. It is also said that more than 80% of the people who were saved were rescued by their neighbors, not by the Japan Self-Defense Force or Fire Service rescue teams. The most important lesson of this disaster is that the citizens noticed for the first time that they should protect each other's lives themselves. It was a crucial event that made citizens realize how little they were aware of and prepared for disaster.

Japanese people naturally regard schools as a refuge during the disaster. For example, during the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake 310,000 people escaped from the collapsed and burning city to the schools. Schools also have another important function, in that they offer the only place where disaster mitigation education can be carried out systematically. Schools thus have two functions: a place of refuge and a place of disaster mitigation education.

In disaster mitigation education so far, we have focused on emergency management just after a disaster has occurred place, such as training in evacuation and extinguishing fires. During the process of moving from emergency management to recovery, the students will come to notice that not only concrete aspects such as building codes, reconstruction of railroads and expressways, a reliable water and supply, and so on are important, but also that less tangible aspects, such as the importance of the community, help from neighbors, the importance of human life, and welfare and human rights are also closely related to disaster mitigation. This shows that disaster mitigation is closely related to every aspect of school studies. It is therefore possible for the teachers to offer disaster mitigation education in every subject if they so wish.

Maiko High School started its environment and disaster mitigation course in April, 2002, seven years after the Great Hanshin-Awaji (Kobe) Earthquake. The purpose of establishing this course was to convey the lessons we learned from the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake to the world and prepare citizens to cope with disaster. The educational goal of the course is to have the students think about how we live in a symbiotic society. It provides the students with disaster mitigation education concerning both the natural and the social environment.

Practical experience is the keyword of the environment and disaster mitigation course. Many people are invited to school to talk about their experiences during and after the disaster. These guest teachers come from universities, police stations, fire stations, life-line related companies, the city and prefectural governments, volunteer organizations, and so on.

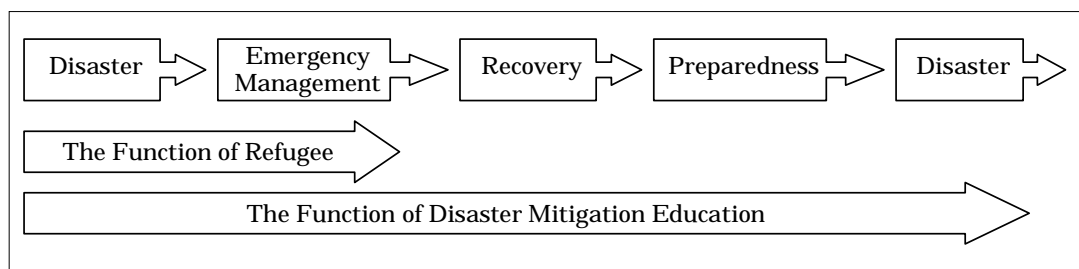


Figure 1: Disaster Cycle and School Functions

The students visit the Disaster Reduction and Human Renovation Institute, the Museum of Nature and Human Activities, and Hokudan-cho Earthquake Memorial Park. They go to Mount Rokko to investigate the faults, dangerous streams of debris flow, and the raised river beds that were the cause of floods in Kobe.

While studying disaster mitigation, the students do not only attend lectures to obtain knowledge, but are also set problems or give themselves tasks to solve by themselves or in cooperation with other students. The students use computers to make reports, give presentations, and obtain information from the Internet. Through these activities the students master fundamental computer skills.

Maiko High School works together with an elementary school to do the disaster mitigation education. The students make a regional map together with third-grade pupils. Through this task, they become serious about disaster mitigation for the community if the map is full of places they like and are proud of. The students talk about their experiences of the Great Hanshin-Awaji (Kobe) Earthquake to the fourth-grade and sixth-grade pupils. Maiko High School students themselves were first- or second-graders at the time. To teach the mechanism of the earthquake and the importance of preparedness they use a "Wall Newspaper". To the fifth-graders the high school students show an experiment concerning flooding and teach the history of heavy flooding in Kobe through a newspaper they produced themselves.

Maiko High School has started an international exchange with Nepal with the help of the UNCRD Hyogo Office and NSET-Nepal. The purpose of the exchange is international friendship and the exchange of disaster experiences. The students learn a lot from the activities of NSET-Nepal.

This disaster mitigation education has just started and we don't have sufficient materials, nor a concrete approach to this type of education. Many teachers seem to be at a loss when carrying out disaster mitigation education. We published our results and information on the Maiko High School Web site to support teachers who are interested in or must offer disaster mitigation education but don't know how or what to do. Our task is to build a network for disaster mitigation education among schools.



Figure 2: Dialog between students and foreign experts

- Contact Details

<http://www.hyogo-c.ed.jp/~maiko-hs/index.htm>