



Education for Disaster Prevention in Elementary School in Japan

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Education for disaster prevention has become more and more important since the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami in 2011. More than 18 thousand people were killed or have not been found yet in the tragedy, however, in Kesen'numa, which is a city located in the seriously damaged area, there were few student victims of tsunami. This is because every school in Kesen'numa has excellent education systems for disaster prevention. They have several safety exercises and conducts emergency drills each year in unique ways which have been developed upon the tragic experiences of serious earthquakes and tsunami in the past.

For disaster prevention education, we should learn two important points from the case in Kesen'numa; to learn from the ancient wisdom, and to ensure for students to have enough opportunities of safety exercises and emergency drills at school. In addition to these two points, another issue from the viewpoint of science education can be added, which is to learn about the mechanisms of earthquake. We have developed disaster prevention and reduction programs in educational context, taking these three points into consideration.

First part of the program is to study local history, focusing on ancient wisdom. In Kesen'numa City, there were thirty-three monumental stones with cautionary lessons of the possible danger of tsunami before the great earthquake. The lessons were based on the disasters actually happened in the past and brought down to the current generation. Kesen'numa-Otani elementary school has conducted education for disaster prevention referring to this information with full of ancient wisdom.

Second part of the program is to make sure that every student has enough and rich opportunities to simulate the worst situation of any disasters. For example, in the case of earthquake and tsunami, teachers take students to the safest place through the designated evacuation rout according to each school's original manual. Students can experience this emergency practice several times in a year so that they can act right in danger.

The last part is to learn about the mechanisms of natural disasters such as earthquake and tsunami, and about the possible impact on people's lives. In science curriculum, students in the sixth grade are supposed to learn about crustal movement. They learn how earthquake occurs and what could happen to the area after the quake. They study some of the actual earthquakes in the past and gather information about the impact and damages. Then students apply the information to their own life environment.

Combining these three points, students learn the importance of disaster prevention and they make the most of what they have learned to have sustainable development of their lives. In order to have a better disaster prevention and reduction programs for students' safety lives, it is important to develop the program on their daily basis.