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## **Abstract**

### **Background**

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), a goal of the United Nations Decade of ESD 2005-2014, has been promoted in Japan as a part of its educational policy. ESD is to be implemented in various educational settings, including schools. With regard to ESD in schools in Japan, most focus is on implementation through curriculum, while little attention is paid to school culture. Questions such as whether the school culture is supportive of ESD have been under-represented in ESD research and practice. It is important to clarify the relation between school culture and ESD, and identify which elements of school culture are most vital for achieving cumulative outcomes of ESD practices in schools.

### **Objectives**

The aim of this study is to answer the questions: What kind of school culture exists in Steiner Waldorf schools in Japan? Why can this school culture be considered as supportive of ESD practices? How are the ESD-supportive aspects of school culture being enhanced in Steiner Waldorf schools?

Although this study focuses on alternative Steiner Waldorf schools, the findings have implications for schooling in general.

### **Research Design**

Ethnographic survey was conducted in two Steiner Waldorf schools in Japan. Core data were collected in 22 interviews with parents and teachers. Complementary data were collected through participation in school events, informal communication, from school

news-letters and other sources. Data were analyzed in a framework of four aspects of school culture. Concepts from self-determination theory and the theories of cultural transmission were utilized.

### **Findings**

Analysis confirmed that all four aspects of school culture in the two schools were student autonomy supportive. A new finding was that schools achieve this goal not simply by unique educational principles, but also by maintaining autonomous motivation of teachers and parents. Teachers' and parents' orientation towards valuing learning as a meaningful process of personal development rather than a means to acquisition of competitive advantage, lies in the core of ESD-supportive school culture.

### **Significance**

There is lack of research on the relationship between ESD and school culture, as well as on the potential contribution of Steiner Waldorf schools to ESD. This study may inspire further research on aspects of Steiner school culture, and help create more opportunities for interaction between public sector and Steiner schools.

### **Keywords**

Education for Sustainable Development; School Culture; School Climate; Steiner Waldorf Education; Self-Determination Theory; Cultural Transmission