

sustainable japan

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Briton James Moore's next goal is method's first high school in Japan

Montessori head educates Tokyo's children for life

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Years in Japan: 24

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 CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The Montessori education method, pioneered by Italian educator Dr. Maria Montessori (1870-1952), is now recognized worldwide. At its heart, Montessori is a child-centered approach, rooted in developmental science and emphasizing hands-on, self-directed learning. Rather than following teacher-led instruction, children explore at their own pace, guided by their own sense of curiosity.

While many people are familiar with the Montessori method, it is often seen as primarily for younger children. Indeed, a range of Montessori-based preschools and kindergartens can be found throughout Japan,



Moore has seen firsthand the powerful impact that a Montessori learning environment has on students—including his own children. COSUFI

with programs in English, Japanese or both languages. Yet the Montessori approach can continue to grow with children, keeping pace with every step of their education.

The Montessori School of Tokyo (MST) is a case in point. Located in Minamiazabu, the international school caters to children from ages 18 months up to 15, with plans to develop Japan's first Montessori high school in the near future. Head of School James Moore shared with us his thoughts on education, along with his Japanese journey and how he discovered his life's work here.

Taking a chance on Japan

Moore grew up in the U.K. with a passion for the performing arts. "I was deeply involved in theater and music throughout school and university, taking on lead roles in musicals and serving as president of the stage musical society. I even fronted the Leeds University Dance Band as a vocalist," he said. "However, I assumed I could always pursue music and theater as a hobby while focusing on a more traditionally 'stable' academic degree."

After majoring in mathematics and computer science at university, Moore was considering a postgraduate job managing student societies at his alma mater. Then, as is often the case, a spur-of-the-moment decision took him down an entirely different path. A friend had just applied to the government-run Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme (JET), which sounded like an exciting opportunity. With just a week until the deadline, Moore moved swiftly to get in his application for JET and, together with his buddy, subsequently found himself in Mie.

"My friend actually chose Mie Prefecture for both of us, simply based on its central

location in Japan. I knew nothing about it at the time, but it turned out to be a fantastic place! I ended up staying for three years, loving the work, the people and the lifestyle," he recalled fondly.

Eager to stay in Japan after three years on JET, Moore applied to MST primarily to extend his stay in Japan and experience Tokyo while considering his next career move. However, something "clicked" for the young Brit once he arrived at the school. "There was something different, something special about the Montessori approach," he explained. "Over time, it resonated deeply with me, and within a couple of years, I realized this wasn't just another job — this was a philosophy I believed in. It became my career."

Fostering a love of learning

According to Moore, MST's goal for students isn't just academic success; it's about nurturing confident, independent and self-motivated learners. Rather than memorizing facts for tests, as in conventional education systems, Montessori students develop life-long skills and a deep love of learning.

"Our classrooms are calm, structured environments filled with specialized materials that encourage problem-solving and independence. Teachers, or 'guides,' observe and support rather than dictate," Moore said. "The mixed-age classrooms — for example, ages 3 to 6, 6 to 9, and so on — foster mentorship, collaboration and leadership skills. Older students become role models, reinforcing their own learning by teaching younger ones."

Though MST is an English-centered learning environment, it also integrates elements of Japanese culture. There are native-speak-



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ing staff and Japanese-specific materials in the classrooms to support language development, while further chances for cultural exposure come through celebrating Japanese festivals and events throughout the year.

That said, Moore pointed out that the Montessori approach is universal and children are the same everywhere: "They need to feel capable, valued and respected, and to have opportunities to develop independence, emotional intelligence and social skills."

Building a community

Having been part of MST for over two decades, Moore has witnessed firsthand the powerful impact of this environment on

students, families and staff alike. He sees his multifaceted role as head of school as revolving around community-building, from overseeing admissions — ensuring that families understand and align with the school's values — to hiring passionate educators who share the institution's philosophy.

MST is also part of his own family's journey. Moore and his wife, an Australian, are parents to 11-year-old twin boys who have attended MST since they were toddlers. "Knowing that they're experiencing an education I truly believe in is incredibly meaningful," he said.

The goal of establishing Japan's first Montessori high school is now on the horizon. "I became the head of school in summer

Multi-faceted career, diverse interests

Born and raised in the Nottinghamshire village of Ravenshead, James Moore earned his bachelor of science degree at the University of Leeds. He came to Japan in 2001 on the JET Programme, where he taught in Mie Prefecture, before joining The Montessori School of Tokyo (MST) in 2004 as the sports and activities coordinator. During his more than 20 years with the school, Moore has seen MST go from strength to strength, and he became head of school in 2020. He also holds multiple Montessori qualifications from accredited facilities, including the Montessori Institute of San Diego. Among his many interests are skiing with his twin sons, playing family board games and performing with his cover band, Water Shed. A favorite quote is "Education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learned in school" (Albert Einstein), reflecting Moore's belief that a good education is one that allows you to identify your values, passions and how to apply them in life.

2020, taking on the role just as COVID started. Now that we've reached a time of stability again, I'm looking forward to guiding the school through the next phase of development," Moore said.

Outside of his role at MST, Moore stays active with a range of interests. He performs around Tokyo on a regular basis with his band, Water Shed, covering songs by acts such as Ed Sheeran, Van Morrison, Maroon 5 and Mumford & Sons. He is also a follower of soccer and baseball, and enjoys snow sports with his family. "I'm a big fan of board games, too. Whether it's playing Settlers of Catan with my family or strategy games with friends, I love the social and strategic elements of a good game night!" he said.



Times Gallery



Peruvian Ambassador Roberto Seminario receives a visit from Arfiya Eri, a parliamentary vice minister for foreign affairs of Japan, prior to her trip to Peru in February. EMBASSY OF PERU



Panama's ambassador visits the president of the Japan Shipowners Association with Luis Roquebert, administrator of the Panama Maritime Authority. EMBASSY OF PANAMA



Yemeni Ambassador Adel Alsunaini with Tokyo Gov. Yuriko Koike during the annual reception hosted by the capital's government in honor of ambassadors. EMBASSY OF THE REPUBLIC OF YEMEN



Albanian Ambassador Ermal Muca with Cabinet minister Minoru Kiuchi at the reception hosted at Europa House on Nov. 28 celebrating the 112th anniversary of the independence of Albania. EMBASSY OF ALBANIA



Gamagori Mayor Hisaaki Suzuki and the charge d'affaires of Bolivia, Natalia Salazar, hold a meeting to celebrate the Aichi city's 70th anniversary and Bolivia's bicentennial. EMBASSY OF BOLIVIA



Brazilian Ambassador Octavio Henrique Cortes hosts the chair of the Japan-Latin America Parliamentary League, Yuko Obuchi, for lunch on Jan. 15. EMBASSY OF BRAZIL



Thousands of runners take on the scenic Kochi Ryoma Marathon on Feb. 16, passing iconic sights like Katsurahama and the Niyodo River along the way. KOCHI PREFECTURE



The Embassy of Malaysia hosts a Chinese New Year Reception, featuring a lion dance, traditional delicacies and festive cheer, uniting the diaspora and friends of Malaysia. EMBASSY OF MALAYSIA

Tsukuba massif granite, one of the world's few heritage stones

ESG/SDGs

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In 2024, the Tsukuba massif granite of the Mt. Tsukuba Area Geopark was certified by the International Union of Geological Sciences as one of the first 55 IUGS Heritage Stones, which have been "used in significant architecture and monuments" and "recognized as integral aspects of human culture."

In a recent interview with The Japan Times, Mt. Tsukuba Area Geopark Promotion Council specialist Kaoru Sugihara, a geologist and former professor, spoke about the characteristics of the region's granite and the positive effects that the certification has brought.

The geopark covers a large area in central Ibaraki Prefecture west of Lake Kasumigaura, Japan's second-largest lake. With Mount Tsukuba at its center and many other smaller mountains, the area is home to three main types of granite, formed at different times and named after the areas where they are found: Tsukuba granite, Kabasan granite and Inada granite. "They can be further divided into smaller groups based on their characteristics," Sugihara said. "But it is not only the geological diversity and scientific value that the IUGS recognizes, but also the cultural and historical value of the stones based on how local people have used the resources."

He explained that the council had decided

to apply for certification for a number of reasons. "By having our important regional resource certified by a global organization, we will be able to promote not only the stones, but also the geopark itself. This will help increase the international presence of Japan's geopark network and contribute to the broader global geopark community," he said. Another purpose was to promote and support the local stone industry. "We need to preserve the special techniques of mining and stone working while securing human resources. This certification was a perfect opportunity for people in the industry to think about how to preserve the mining culture in a sustainable way while preserving the geological heritage itself."

The certification was also an opportunity to reassess the local history and culture. Sugihara noted that in ancient times, mountain worship flourished in this area, and huge stones and rocks found in the mountains were the object of worship and places for ascetic practices. In the Kamakura Period, the value of these stones as building materials was further recognized, and stone-carving technology developed in the area.

"With the introduction of Western culture to Japan during the Meiji Era, Western-style stone architecture flourished in the Kanto region, leading to the extensive use of granite from the Tsukuba mountains in buildings that are now recognized as National Treasures and important cultural assets," said Sugihara.

He pointed out that a major outcome of the IUGS Heritage Stone certification has been an increased interest in the geopark among those involved in the stone industry, and a heightened sense of confidence and pride in the history and techniques of the local stone industry. "There has also been an increased awareness of the need for sustainable practices within the stone industry. I believe it is possible to find ways to improve the sustainability of stone quarrying and processing while preserving the rich history and culture of the region, which is rooted in the use of stone as a resource," he said.

He also noted that efforts are being made



An artisan works on a Makabe stone lantern made from Kabasan granite. MT. TSUKUBA AREA GEOPARK PROMOTION COUNCIL

to improve technology to increase the proportion of commercially viable stone, which has been less than 30% of the total extracted from the mountains. "The development of new products using stone waste, including toys and craft items, is also underway," he said.

The council is also planning tours to Tokyo this year to visit places and buildings where Ibaraki granite is used. "For example, the granite mined in the Inada region, in the northern part of the geopark, is used in the walls of the Supreme Court of Japan," Sugihara said. He noted that various parts of the Diet building and Tokyo Station are also made of granite from Ibaraki. "We hope to bring people from Tokyo and other parts of Japan to Ibaraki to see the quarries and how the stone is processed," he said.

The Tsukuba Geo Museum features exhibits, educational installations and video materials that help people learn how stone is formed, mined, processed and made into building materials and traditional crafts such as stone lanterns. "Through various efforts, we aim to arouse interest in the industry among younger generations in order to preserve the regional culture," Sugihara said.

Tsukuba is a member of the Sustainable Japan Network, a group of companies that cooperate with this newspaper to spread information about sustainability in Japan. You can also be part of the network; scan the QR code for more details.



A worker cuts Inada granite, which is used in various buildings in Tokyo. MT. TSUKUBA AREA GEOPARK PROMOTION COUNCIL

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