

3

Students learning and bringing communities and children together: Practical report on the “Doronko Group” volunteer organization for children

Iwate Prefectural University Faculty of Social Welfare, Associate Professor Takayuki Inoue

Applicable principle

Principle 9: A commitment to promoting sustainability through education

1. Introduction

Doronko Group, a volunteer group for children, launched two new activities in 2024. Takigi Study Space was launched by Doronko Group Mirai as a means of supporting learning and creating a sense of belonging, while Doronko Group Mogu Mogu Cafeteria is aimed at planning, operating, and supporting children's cafeterias.

Both are volunteer activities aimed at supporting the learning and lives of children in the community, and students themselves participate in planning and implementation based on an awareness of the issues. Although advisors provide ongoing support, it is the students who take a central role in proactively and autonomously developing activities.

In addition to Academic Impact principle 9 (A commitment to promoting sustainability through education), these activities are related to principles 1 (A commitment to addressing issues of poverty through education), 3 (A commitment to educational opportunity for all people regardless of gender, race, religion or ethnicity), and 10 (A commitment to promoting intercultural dialogue and understanding, and the “unlearning” of intolerance, through education) and, through providing educational support and creating a sense of belonging, serve as opportunities for interactive practices that address the welfare needs of children while also deepening the learning of students involved in these activities.

This section provides an overview of the activities conducted at Aiina Study Room for All through Doronko Group Mirai since 2020, and also reports on these two new activities from the perspective of a group advisor.

2. Activity development

Doronko Group was launched independently in 2004 by childcare students, and since then has continued to serve as a means of engaging in play and childcare support activities. The Doronko Group Mirai activity was established through student-led dialogue in response to a question asked during a 2019 lecture. Since then, participants have continued to conduct activities through grants and other sources of funding.

(1) Aiina Study Room for All (“Study Room”)

Located on Aiina Campus, a satellite campus next to Morioka Station, the Study Room is mainly used to support the learning of elementary and junior high school students. It is open on

Saturday afternoons, and continues to operate on schedule. It was started after being selected to receive funding from the Moriokashi Kodomo Mirai Kikin fund in 2020. It continued to receive this funding in 2021 and 2022, which is mainly used to pay for student traveling (fixed sum) and teaching material expenses. In 2023, it was selected to receive aid from the Tohoku Rokin Mirai e no Tasuki fund, and is expected to continue to receive support until 2025.

The Study Room is mostly used by junior high school students. Careful observation of how they engage in conversation and learning while interacting with the university students suggests that this activity provides students with a sense of belonging and a “third place” outside of school and the home, in addition to serving as a place for learning. It also provides parents and guardians with a moment of respite, allowing them to get their shopping done or simply sit down and enjoy a book.

During the second half of 2024, Study Room began serving dinners on the second Saturday of each month, in collaboration with an acquaintance of an advisor who runs a children's cafeteria.

Study Room has had a positive effect on the academic careers of students. For example:

- 2021: One student graduated to a prefectural high school
- 2022: One student graduated to a prefectural high school
- 2023: One student graduated to a private junior high school, and one student graduated to a prefectural high school
- 2024: Two students graduated to a private high school



Students studying together

(2) Takigi Study Space (“Study Space”)

The Study Space is operated out of the auditorium in Takizawa IPU Innovation Center located next to Takizawa Campus, with the goal of supporting learning and a sense of belonging. Meant mainly for junior high school students, it is open on Mondays after class, when junior high schools in Takizawa are not holding club activities.

This activity is the result of students who could not participate in afternoon activities on Saturdays due to having to work part-time jobs, but who still wanted to help out in some way between classes. This required reaching a careful balance between schools wanting to keep their students safe while

reducing their burden after classes, and students wanting to establish a place for providing support. After three years of preparation, the Study Space was finally launched with the cooperation of the Takizawa Board of Education and the NPO Innovabridge Takizawa.

This activity is conducted with support by the KIRIN Community Empowerment Project run by The KIRIN Welfare Foundation.

Although it was initially meant for use by junior high school students attending nearby schools, it is sometimes used by junior high school students who have trouble focusing on studying at home due to younger siblings being around, and are dropped off by their parents or guardians. It takes around 15 minutes by car to reach the Study Space, but it provides junior high school students with a quiet environment for studying, and provides parents and guardians with some time to get their shopping done or do other errands. Students running the support organization have received praise and words of gratitude for their efforts. The Study Space was opened 10 times in 2024 and used by a total of five children. Although there are currently not many children using the Study Space, there are plans to work more closely with schools and the community to raise awareness and promote participation.



Takigi Study Space

(3) Doronko Group Mogu Mogu Cafeteria (“Cafeteria”)



Flyer for Takizawa junior high school students (tentative)

Launched in 2024, the Cafeteria is the children's cafeteria division of Doronko Group, and was conceived by students who became aware of issues such as child poverty, isolation, inequality, and food concerns during lectures held in 2022. It currently serves two major roles: preparing the meals that are served at the Study Room, and supporting children's cafeterias operating in the town of Yahaba.



Preparing sandwiches on Aiina Campus

There are restrictions on preparing food at Aiina, so meals are prepared in the IWATE COOP kitchen and then transported to and served at the Study Room.



Dinner at the Study Room

Students are responsible for preparing and serving meals, supervising children, and supporting interaction in children's cafeterias in Yahaba, for children ranging from preschoolers to high school students.

This represents a new type of activity that supports learning in a way that remains close to children in their daily lives, in which the students themselves decide how best to offer support through meals while repeatedly reflecting back on past efforts.



Christmas party held at a children's cafeteria in Yahaba

3. Future activities

The Cafeteria received a new source of funding in 2025, and operations continue to grow more stable.

In addition to developing an even closer trust relationship with the community, the organization will engage in efforts to visualize activities and hand over operations to the next generation of students without issue, while further deepening practices as a sustainable, student-led community collaboration model.