

## Feature Story

# “Class on Life” Designed to Empower Children to Change the World

Casio’s unique “Class on Life” initiative started with the aspiration to eliminate bullying and suicide from children’s world.

A cumulative total of over 15,000 children and their parents have already attended these classes, at over 200 schools.

### Class on Life

#### The Power of Children Can Change the World of Adults

“I wanted to help end the vicious cycle. Some 28,000 people kill themselves in Japan each year, and approximately 580 of them are youth under 20. Children learn by observing adults. In order to break this terrible cycle, I thought it was important to start by addressing our children’s world.” This is how Hisashi Wakao of the CSR Promotion Office, Secretarial and External Affairs Department, explained the “Class on Life” initiative.

The Class on Life was started by Casio Computer Co., Ltd., as a social contribution activity in June 2007 to help build a more sustainable society. So far the classes have reached over 15,000 children and their parents, providing them with an opportunity to question the purpose and consider the value of life. Wakao is passionate about the class: “After thoroughly pondering what I wanted to convey to children, the answer I arrived at was ‘life.’ I certainly didn’t want it to be a superficial effort, so I knew I had to be really sincere with the kids. That’s when I decided to teach them about the value of life.”



Hisashi Wakao, CSR Promotion Office, Secretarial and External Affairs Department

#### The Key is Talking with Sincerity

At first, the topic was considered to be too serious for elementary and junior high school students. When he first started visiting schools to give the class, teachers often cautioned him that the students might not understand and said they would not like to give a class on this topic. Wakao recalls, “In my class, I convey the value of life and its purpose. The message is the same even when I teach a kindergarten class. At one elementary school, I gave the class to first-grade students. After the lesson, one little boy came up to me and announced that he now understood the meaning of life. To my surprise, he said that the real purpose of life is to live life earnestly. Actually, this topic is not something children don’t understand; they understand it instinctively. As a result of our self-centered perspective, we adults tend to underestimate children and limit their horizons. If you talk to children sincerely, they will definitely understand the message.”

Sincerity is a word that Wakao uses often. “That is why there is no manual for my class. I make a point of trying to convey my own humanity in the lesson. Each class is different, and the lesson evolves each time I deliver it. I learn something from the kids, and then build on it for the next class. If I didn’t approach it this way, I wouldn’t be able to convey the message sincerely to the children.”



At a session in the Class on Life

## Empowering Children

The positive reaction to the Class on Life has grown so much that it has virtually become a social phenomenon. As a result of the initiative, Nagatadai Elementary School in Yokohama became the only elementary school to exhibit at Eco-Products, Japan's largest environmental trade show. At the event, students from first to sixth grades eagerly presented their ideas to adults walking by. Wakao explains, "The learning does not finish at the end of the class. The children that attend the class must go on to take action."

The influence on the children does not end here. Many of the kids that learn about the value of life in this class are changed dramatically. In fact, in letters that Wakao receives from students after the class, there are often comments such as "I stopped having suicidal thoughts," "I have looked the other way when someone is bullied so far, but now I want to be brave and try to stop it," and "I'll stop bullying others." Wakao says, "There are many children who tell me personal stories that they could not share with their teachers. Nothing could be more rewarding for me than discouraging suicide and seeing these kids return to their energetic selves."



Student booth at Eco-Products

## Movement spreading throughout Japan

The actions of these children are having a ripple effect across Japan, mobilizing adults as well. News of the class has gone viral, and requests for the class have been received from schools all across Japan. Many adults, including educators, parents, and local residents, have also been impressed by the actions of the children that attended the class. Wakao says, "It has also increased opportunities for me to give presentations to adults. When I talk about the significance of this class, and what I want to achieve through it, many people respond by saying that adults need to change, too."

Collaboration with teachers is also evolving. Wakao often gives presentations about his class to educators from around the world, as a model example of education for sustainable development (ESD), recommended by Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. In his presentation, he talks about how children grow and change after attending the class. Many international participants have responded to his presentation with comments such as, "This kind of serious ESD activity is new to me," "I was very impressed and want to introduce it in my country," and "I was very moved by the student's message thanking her parents for giving birth to her."



Presentation to educators

## Continuing with the class, as a broader Casio initiative

What does the company think about Wakao's initiative? Noriaki Kimura, Manager of the CSR Promotion Office, said, "I think he has had such amazing results because his words come straight from his heart to the children's hearts; he doesn't just talk in a formal manner. The issue we now face is replicating what he has done, so that the Class on Life can grow further and the entire company can get behind it. I would like him to train new instructors to do what he does, so we can develop it into a more structured activity that shows what Casio stands for."

Wakao says he is very grateful the company understands his initiative and has supported it. "Through this initiative I hope to show a lot of people that Casio does have such passionate people." Using the Class on Life, Wakao wants to help ensure that as many children as possible develop healthy minds and kind hearts. This is just one example of Casio's classroom initiatives, and it is sure to keep growing in the future.

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## Feedback on the Class on Life

### About the Class on Life

The Class on Life conducted at our school is "life education" based on diverse knowledge and multiple perspectives, going beyond the usual pre-packaged classroom experience and lesson. I feel that it is a revolutionary class from many different angles, teaching students how to approach life, learn, and live. Mr. Wakao kindly incorporates the wishes of the teachers, and the thoughts of the children, into the content he conveys, making his classes always fresh and new. His efforts do not end when the class is over, as he continually shares ideas with us that we can implement. With his involvement throughout the year, I feel the class has become a company-school partnership like no other. At our school, we have included the Class on Life in the curriculum for all grades, and we carry out educational activities based on it throughout the year.

This class has steadily generated positive change in the children. The children and teachers are more aware than ever. Being cognizant of the connections of life helps with awareness of interconnectedness when confronting today's increasingly complicated issues. It also motivates people to solve problems.

In order to reduce our reliance on Mr. Wakao, we intend to create a school program that is able to take on the challenge of education for sustainable development, centered on each teacher's own "Class on Life."

Masaharu Sumita, Principal, Nagatadai Elementary School, Yokohama

### Messages to the Class on Life

Teacher

The Class on Life has taught our students about connections between rice fields, the environment and Japanese tradition. Since Mr. Wakao's class is based on his own personal experience, he is able to maintain the children's interest while increasing their enthusiasm for Integrated Studies.

Teacher

This class allows the connections of life to be instilled in the children's hearts. It has made them aware of many things, and we are able to maintain their awareness of the importance of life throughout the year.

Teacher

The Class on Life is always a turning point for my students. It is an opportunity for them to start learning, it motivates them when they lose confidence in their learning abilities, and it helps them discover new perspectives. By listening to Mr. Wakao, someone who is not their usual teacher, and receiving his support, the children become more motivated to learn, which improves their confidence.

Junior High School Student

After the Class on Life, I became really aware of how valuable life is. Thinking of all the people who have lost their lives, I want to live each day to the fullest. Now I am thankful I am able to live this way, and I want to live my life with no regrets. No matter how sad or painful my life may become, I will always be grateful to be alive. Thank you so much for making me aware of this truth. I am really grateful.

Junior High School Student

We all have a precious life, and we are connected with bonds. The class made me realize that everyone has their own purpose in life. Now I will confidently walk my own path, and live my life.

Junior High School Student

The Class on Life made me think about the importance of life, something that I don't normally do. Now I want to live my life more sincerely. Life is very important because you only get one. In order to help reduce the number of people that take their lives, I will try to actively stop any bullying or discrimination I see. Next time, if I can, I would like to learn more about the value of life. I also want to tell various other people about what I have learned.

Junior High School Student

In the Class of Life, we heard about a 13 year-old girl who battled with cancer. She tried to live her life positively and with courage, even while fighting the disease. This gave hope to herself and the people around her. I'm short-tempered and sometimes get irritated easily. After learning about that girl, I want to try and improve myself. I found out that there are many people in the world with physical disabilities. In my case however, I can run, eat, talk, and feel things. When I think about people with disabilities, it feels strange to be irritated with my own life. It is very unfortunate that the girl died, but I pray she will find eternal peace in heaven.

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Elementary School Student

I think it is a miracle I am alive. The class made me realize no matter how insignificant my life may seem, I should value it since it is the one and only life I have. I want to try my best not to forget this, and be someone who is caring and looks out for others. I will appreciate each day of my life, and not forget what I have learned.

Elementary School Student

The Class of Life made me realize the importance of life, the importance of connections, and the value of having friends. I intend to remember what I have learned in the Class on Life for my whole life—even when I'm a grandfather. I will try to remain thankful just for having family and friends.

Elementary School Student

After the Class on Life, I felt like changing the world. Whether people are important or unimportant, messy or neat, I want them to see that everyone's life is valuable. Mr. Wakao taught us something that will remain in my heart. I am thankful to have learned something that will be a huge support to me throughout my life. I will live my life step by step, holding tight to this knowledge.

Elementary School Student

The Class on Life made me realize something about war. War originates in the minds of people. Therefore, it is important to have a peaceful mind, to accept others and get along with them. Since people can't change their minds so easily, I think that is why war continues. So everyone should try to maintain peaceful minds and spread this way of thinking to others. We need to build a "fortress" in our hearts. I intend to take this seriously and put it into action.

Elementary School Student

I learned a lot of important things in the two years since Mr. Wako first came to my class. At first, I couldn't understand everything, but gradually I became interested in what he taught us: the value of life, the kindness of people, the greatness of nature, and the fun of speaking sincerely. Now I think these are all very important. I find it really exciting to find the little moments of happiness all around me. I hope that more and more people can discover these small joys.

Parent

After attending a presentation about the Class on Life, I once again felt the desire to convey the value of and gratitude for life to my family and many other people. I'm so glad that I attended the presentation today. I hope I can become someone that gives support to others.

Parent

By attending the Class on Life presentation, I was able to reflect again on the importance of life. It made me realize how important seemingly ordinary things are in our daily lives. I am grateful for this experience, and I hope to live my life while appreciating how important it is. Despite all the issues going on in the world, I would like to discover what I can do, and notice the things that make me feel alive.