Efforts in Formative Arts Education to Protect the Environment

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Background
March 1966: Graduated, Osaka Kyoiku University, Faculty of Education, Arts Department
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Summary

As a specialist in formative arts education, particularly industrial arts and crafts education, I would like to make two proposals relating to this symposium. First, we must not forget the historical fact that craftsmanship in Japan did not achieve its current form by developing in isolation. There was a deep relationship with other countries, particularly the countries of Asia.

A classic example is the development of Japanese ceramics (pottery). The Japanese fondness for pottery is unparalleled throughout the world, and in the classroom too, pottery is a valid part of the formative arts. However, it is not very well known that this situation came about, historically, due to great sacrifices by other countries. Looking back at the history, we find Toyotomi Hideyoshi's invasions of Korea in 1592 and 1597. During these invasions, a great sacrifice was made by the many potters who were taken from the Korean peninsula. Due to these Koreans, there was dramatic progress in forming and firing technologies, and it became possible for the Japanese to produce porcelain.

Also, even though government regulations have been strengthened in recent years, Japan relies largely on Southeast Asia for processed materials such as wood. This dependence is casting dark shadows, not only on the natural environment of other countries, but also on a global scale.

In this way, we must pause and reflect on the fact that, whether we are talking about technologies/techniques or materials, most if not all do not come from Japan alone, but rather come into being based on the sacrifice of other countries. And, in formative arts education too, it is important to know the culture and history of one's own country when making or appreciating works, but I keenly feel the need to make students also understand our relationships with other countries.

Next concerns the processed materials I touched on earlier. Whether we are talking about potter's clay, or wood materials, people tend to think that natural materials are limitless, and many people are don't care about these issues. Natural materials are definitely not limitless. They are finite, and in fact a new perspective is necessary in selecting formative arts materials due to today's problems relating to protection of the global environment.

In this regard, I would like to advocate "making things using familiar materials". In industrial arts and crafts, there is a tendency to think that highly priced materials or existing materials are the best, but that is definitely not true. There is beauty even in familiar things which we routinely overlook, and new beauty is created through ingenuity.

At present, I am providing practical guidance by advocating things like: making pottery using local clay, using the seeds of plants (like vegetables or fruits of trees) as decorative matiere for pottery, wood crafts using lumber from thinning cedar and Japanese cypress, and making craftworks by dying various trees which grow naturally in village forests.
"Woodwork using tree dyeing" is a technique applied to the brush trees which grow naturally in the village forest and are not being cared for by anyone. The trees are dyed from the inside using the photosynthetic action of the tree. Even though I say "brush trees", these are small diameter broad-leaved trees, and when they are dyed, an interesting dyed grain appears aside from the normal tree rings. Making wood crafts which add colors to this natural wood texture is not only a specialized formative arts activity of the academic department and graduate school, it also connects with general education, and thus is also effective as instructional material for nature schools.

Certain measures have previously been taken to effectively utilize lumber from thinning of cedar and Japanese cypress, but the utilization of small diameter broad-leaved trees like this ("brush trees") has been completely ignored. Also, because of the lack of thinning, trees compete against each other and do not grow in thickness, so that many trees die in mid growth, and this also causes a drop in the vigor of the forest.

In terms of those areas too, these activities provide new formative arts materials, and I also believe that they are significant as a means of turning students’ attention toward forest preservation and protection of the global environment.

In this way, I believe that it will be even more necessary in the future in all countries to regard limited things as precious, and develop a new formative arts education which is not beholden to previous existing concepts. The development of such "formative arts activities using familiar materials" is not something for just a single university or a single country. If it is put to work in the classrooms of Asia, I am convinced that a new solidarity will come into being.