

Community-based outdoor education for the reality of place

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Abstract

A landscape in a densely populated country such as Japan is formed by interaction between a society and its land. The landscapes must be diverse according to history, industry and culture of each society and different characteristics of nature. Thus outdoor educators should take account of differences between places. But a place is often regarded as a mere site for activities in studies of outdoor education in Japan. There have been strong tendencies in those studies to focus on individual psychological effects of teaching in the outdoors or on the introduction of packaged programs imported from USA or England. The purpose of this paper is to seek theoretical and practical clues to establish community-based outdoor education that respects the reality indigenous to each place.

Introduction

Industrial society has always pursued universality. Berque (1994, p.156) described the consequence. “The idea of modernisation has been spreading over the earth erasing reality indigenous to each place. And the reality indigenous to each place was regarded as something wrong by definition under the Utopian universalism.”

A landscape in a densely populated country such as Japan¹ is formed by interaction between a society and its land. The landscapes must be diverse according to history, industry and culture of each society and different characteristics of nature. Modern scientific technology, however, has homogenised them even in rural areas. The homogenisation of landscapes means that relationships between each society and land are homogenised. In this situation, our acts and experiences are pushed into a particular pattern and we will lose ability to create our own environment and possibility to improve the relationship between our society and land.

The Japanese Ministry of Education constituted “the period of integrated study” in the national curriculum standards for elementary, junior high and high school in 1998. The standards emphasised the importance of nature oriented experience and daily-life experience in the community. The Ministry of Education only expected that these experiences would foster children’s moral development. However, placing an emphasis on concrete and particular experiences in nature and community requires a kind of educational program that promotes awareness, imagination and creativity of students in a particular place rather than teaching students a set of universal knowledge. To promote these abilities in students, complexity and diversity of place should be respected and teachers must go out of a controlled and universal space of the classroom or school with their students.

Outdoor education, therefore, has been recently reevaluated in school education but studies of outdoor education in Japan haven’t taken enough account of differences between places.

¹ Population density of Japan is 336 person/square kilometer (2002). That of Australia is 2.5 person/square kilometer.

There have been tendencies in those studies to focus on individual psychological effects of teaching in the outdoors or on the introduction of packaged outdoor programs imported from USA or England. A place was regarded as a mere site for those activities. If differences between places were taken into account, the reality of the place tends to be diffused into a universal narrative represented by such words as “Mother Nature” or “Untouched nature”. According to Brookes (2001), “there is a persistent tendency in outdoor education writing to assert the educational value of these experiences in the most general, abstract term. ‘A sense of place’, meaning any sense, of any place. ‘Ways of knowing nature’ meaning any ways, of knowing anything, about any part of nature. ‘Human nature relationships’ meaning any humans and any relationships. In some cases nature or place disappears entirely, and outdoor education is defined as a kind of socialisation process in which the outdoors is understood as an empty place”. A type of outdoor education led by abstract and universal discourse erases the reality indigenous to the place, though it intends to consider concrete and particular outdoor experiences to be important.

In the case of Japan, the reality indigenous to the place is often formed by interactions between a society and its land. Thus outdoor educators should take not only nature but also society into account. What the word of “society” means ranges from a concrete and particular community at the grassroots level to the more abstract concept of nation or international society. Outdoor education for the reality of the place should be started from the level of local community, because local people have actually formed the reality of the place for their life. A facilitator of this *community-based outdoor education* has to have local people involved in it. Not only students but teachers and local people will notice through the practice of the community-based outdoor education that the reality in the area has been influenced by the economy, policies and culture of a much broader society.

The purpose of this paper is to seek theoretical and practical clues to establish community-based outdoor education rooted in the concrete and particular reality of place. First, the concept of environment adopted in this paper is discussed, then a specific case of community-based outdoor education is examined.

The concept of *Huudo*

An outdoor education program is arranged for the place where it is carried out, and the place is chosen according to the program. Wilderness in remote national parks or enclosed nature such as campsites have been considered as suitable places for outdoor education in Japan. Most of the programs were formed for those places, because outdoor education has been only for urban people who wanted to communicate with nature while escaping far from the city. On the other hand, the place for community-based outdoor education is a regional space in which participants are living. A regional space consists of both community and a natural environment. Now we need to find a concept that brings them both together in the same arena and which gives us a framework for community-based outdoor education. I think that a Japanese word “Huudo” gives us that arena. The word huudo is used in daily life – it is not a technical term. “Huu” actually means the wind in Japanese. It includes the meaning of atmosphere of thing or place. “Do” means the earth or land. The English for the Japanese word “huudo” is “climate” in dictionaries. It is not enough to explain the whole meaning².

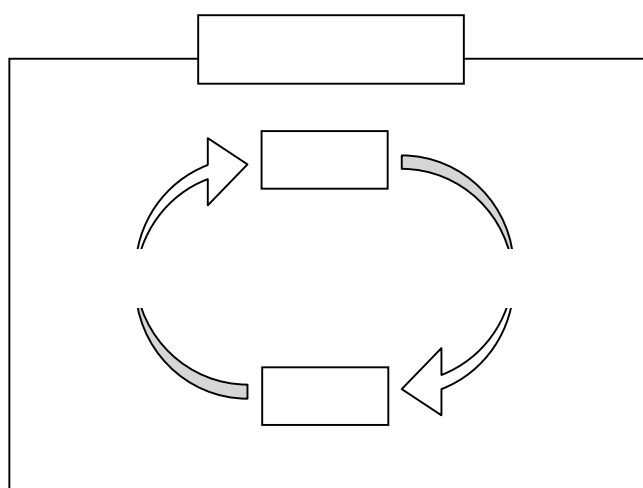
² “Climate and culture” of a Japanese philosopher, Tetsuro Watsuji, may be popular as an English translation of “huudo” in western countries.

Amuro (1996, 195) reviewed discussions about environment in Japanese folklore studies. He suggested a theory of huudo that integrates *the level of understanding of nature* with *the level of action directed at nature*. Huudo for him is “prescribed by way of humans’ understanding of natural environment through culture (socialised nature) and way of their action directed at the socialised nature by folk skills”. Human beings cannot realise their natural environment without any culture nor can they act on the natural environment without any culture such as folk skills. Huudo is formed by the interaction between humans and nature. Amuro stated that “to talk about huudo, one has to compare it with another”. The huudo that one belongs to can be realised by comparison with another huudo. This suggested that a huudo has a boundary.

Kada (1997, 65) added *the level of collectivity* to Amuro’s definition of huudo. According to Kada, interaction with natural environment is not only physical interaction but also sensuous. The sensuous action is like “having memory” or “having topophilia (termed by Yi-fu Tuan)” which is formed “as a culture in a social connection and succeeded over generations”. It is collectively rooted in a community, not in an individual. The boundary of huudo that Amuro suggested is formed by a circular process of action and understanding mediated by the culture rooted in the collectivity.

A regional space is neither physical environment nor community as a pure social relation. Members of the community understand nature in their land by acting on it and they act again on nature according to their understanding of it. Nature is altered by the action while the community is altered by the change in nature. The continuous action/understanding cycle between community and nature generates a particular huudo. The process is mediated by local culture rooted in collective consciousness of the community. Community-based outdoor education is an educational practice embedded in the huudo. What participants experience is the socialised nature generated through the action/understanding cycle involving the community and its land. What guides participants to that socialised nature is local culture acting directed at nature in the community.

Figure 1



A example of community-based outdoor education in practice

Community of Nakashibetsu and Nakashibetsu elementary school

The community of Nakashibetsu is a part of Shibetsu city in Hokkaido, the northernmost island in Japan. The number of household in Nakashibetsu is about 200 and half of them are farmhouses. The population is around 500 and has been decreasing since the period of high economic growth in Japan (1950s – 1970s), a trend common to all Japanese rural villages. The basic industry of Nakashibetsu is agriculture and its main products are rice, potato, wheat and beans.

The landscape of Nakashibetsu has been changed drastically since the 1980s by the national land improvement project. Local people had no choice but to accept the project to protect their farming against the liberalisation of imports of farm products. All the irregular, small farmlands were standardised into vast, flat and rectangular sections for large-size tractors. Winding small streams were straightened and the bottom was covered with concrete blocks for efficiency of flow. Among local people, the standardisation and rationalisation of farmlands changed their awareness of nature and their ways of interacting with nature. An old man in the community said with sighs, “we used to swim in this stream and to catch fish with a trap or a net after school or during summer vacation. But there are no fishes here anymore and it is too dangerous to swim in such a fast stream.” He drives his car for 3 or 4 hours to other rivers to enjoy fishing now. Interestingly, although he said “no fish”, there are actually still fish in those streams. This example indicates that fish have disappeared from his awareness of nature in the community because the memories of his experience swimming and catching fish in the stream have lost connection with the present time because of the river improvements.

Nakashibetsu elementary school is the only school in the community and has 4 teachers and 13 pupils. The school is allowed to accept children from other areas of Shibetsu city to fill their quota, even though children usually have to go to school in their community. On the other hand, the local city government is planning to close the school, owing to the depopulation of the community. The locals have held some meetings to discuss how to keep the school, because the school has been not only a place to educate local children but also a center of various activities of local people. Teachers of the school are also trying to establish a special curriculum with local people to attract children from other areas.

The school has another problem peculiar to small school in rural Hokkaido. Children have few opportunities to play with friends after school, as their houses are separated from each other. Children, therefore, have less chance to experience the land and nature through outdoor play in their daily lives, although there are still many places suitable for play such as woods or open field in this area. Parents, teachers and local people are afraid that children can't feel reality of life in their community and can't feel that this community is their home.

The school prepared an organised camp in the summer of 2002 to give the pupils an experience of nature. The teachers invited and hired a professional instructor of outdoor education from the big city (Sapporo, the capital of Hokkaido) to arrange and implement the program. The program included activities such as living in tents, cooking with gas stoves, playing games to be aware of nature, roasting marshmallows on a campfire, and so on. These were not related to actual local cultures of their community and the program was held at a campsite in other town. The instructor ignored the existence of local cultures that people have generated through the action/understanding cycle involving their land, and ended up focusing

on ready-made activities formed in some other place. The elementary school teachers also didn't notice that they could arrange outdoor education programs for children within their community. There was a strong belief in their mind that outdoor education should be done in wilderness areas or facilities such as campsites (there is no campsite in Nakashibetsu town). The teachers recognised some social and psychological effects of the program on children such as cooperativeness or thoughtfulness but they felt that they had to arrange another program for children to experience nature within the reality of the community. They started to plan a new program with local people and the Hokkaido University of Education in 2003.

An executive committee for the program was established in May, 2003. It consisted of teachers, an associate professor and students of the university, parents and leaders of the community. They shared same desire to establish an educational practice that allowed local people to teach local children various local cultures of the community. The committee called their program "Nakashibetsu little explorers" and the idea of community-based outdoor education was suggested by members of the university.

Planning of community-based outdoor education

Planning of the community-based outdoor education was divided into 3 steps; 1) local study, 2) arrangement and casting, and 3) making story maps.

Local study

The first step "local study" is to investigate local cultures in a local area. Yoshimoto (2001, 195) notes that local study is "an intellectual and creative act by local people in everyday life to create life or local culture that make their community and environment sustainable. First, residents investigate their local area with people out of the community to understand their huudo. They can discover again their community and its feature by accepting points of views of people from outside. Then, they try to create their original life through conversation with broader changes outside of the community." Objects of local study are not only valuable ecosystem, or fauna and flora of the area, but also ordinary things for locals such as field crops, traditional games, tools, foods, small streams, hills behind houses, community events and so on. Outsiders, rather than local people, are able to discover the value of these things. Local people can again realise the particularity and richness of their area through the view points of outsiders. They also start to involve themselves in the solution of community problem through local study.

The executive committee chose three themes to research; farming, foods and traditional games. The reason why they chose farming as a theme was that local cultures to interact with nature were embedded in it. For local people, foods represent ways of using nature. Play can promote children's positive involvement in the program and traditional games represent a particular way of understanding nature in this area via body movements.

Members of the committee discussed about these three themes and wrote items on each map of the area at the first meeting. For example, farming items were bear attacks, horse plows, farming calendars, kinds of soil, history of products and a way of making straw sandals, and so on. Food items included wild vegetables in spring and summer, fishes in the streams or the river, mushrooms, berries or field crops in autumn and homemade pickles. There were many traditional games like flying kites and spinning tops (these were handmade), setting traps to catch fish and swimming in the streams, making a water pistol by stems joints, keeping

insects like stag beetles or grasshoppers, riding on a sled or skiing at slopes near houses, and so on. University members interviewed some local people after the meeting and added some more items on the maps.

Arrangement and casting

In the next step, the committee chose local cultures to be experienced by taking account of pupil's physical strength and developmental stage, and the safety of places for activity. They decided activities which were suitable for experience the local culture. They then arranged the activities into a kind of story in which the local cultures were expressed in each narrative. What they paid attention to was that these activities in the program must give experiences of the reality of the community life. The committee was careful to use proper nouns indigenous to the community such as names of places, persons, animals and plants and not to use universal and abstract words such as "nature". They called the story "the basic story". It is similar to a drama script and the committee assigned some parts to local people. Each of them was familiar with the local culture or the place where they were to teach the children.

The basic story of the 10th stream

<p>At the headwater of the 10th stream.</p> <p>The little explorers met an old man, Mr. Hirose, at the headwater of the 10th stream. He said, "there were about 10 farm houses around here until 30 years ago. The flat area of clayey soil in the east part of Nakashibetsu drained badly, so settlers cleared forests on this slope to cultivate. There were much more Mizunara (oak), Nire (elm) or Doronoki (a kind of poplar) around here at that time. Higuma (brown bear) often came here and ate crops. And many people were attacked by the bear. Takahashi Kamekichi, an old man who lived here, seemed to encounter bears and be scared to death many times. I heard a tale that a pet dog tried to help his owner's family and was killed in a bear attack. Yes, yes, there were many Zarigani (crawfish) in this stream. I often got them when I was child."</p> <p>The little explorers were afraid of the bears, but they decided to start finding crayfish. There might still be crayfish in the stream. Mr. Hirose taught them that crayfish was often hiding under stone. Anyway they went into the stream.</p> <p>Mr. Hirose came to the little explorers and showed an interesting thing like a pipe. He put water in it saying "I used to make it to play, when I was child". Then, water gushed out of it. It was a Mizudeppou (water pistol)! He showed the them the water pistol made from the stem of Itadori (<i>Reynoutria japonica</i>). Mr. Hirose taught the explorers how to make it. And they played with it for a while.</p> <p>Then Mr. Hirose said, "There are many wild vegetables and berries such as Warabi (<i>Pteridium aquilinum</i>), Fuki (<i>Petasites japonicus</i>), Wasabi (<i>Wasabi japonica</i>), Yamabudou (<i>Vitis coignetiae</i>), Gumi (<i>Elaeagnus</i>), Sanchin (<i>Crataegus chlorosarca</i>), Noichigo (<i>Fragaria vesca</i>) or Kuwa (<i>Morus bombycis</i>) around here." They tried to find something to be able to eat.</p> <p>Mr. Hirose said, "It's time to go". He gave them a map to go to their next expedition. They put wild vegetables and berries into their rucksacks and said thank you and good bye to him.</p>	<p>Place for activities: the headwater of the 10th stream</p> <p>Character: A person who knows about the 10th stream, edible plants and Itadori water pistol very well.</p> <p>Story about: Agriculture; 1) Why settlers made fields on the hill. 2) Why fields had to drain well. 3) Soils in Nakashibetsu. 4) How many farm houses were here.</p> <p>Brown Bear Edible plants; 1) Where wild vegetable and berries are. 2) What we should look for to find them. 3) How to keep them.</p> <p>Crayfish Water pistol of Itadori</p> <p>Activities of children: 1) Finding crayfish 2) Making water pistol 3) Finding wild vegetables and berries</p> <p>Tools: 4 saws, 4 drills, 4 sickles and old newspapers</p>
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Making story maps

The basic story wasn't directly indicated to pupil because the committee thought there was a possibility that children would focus on reading the story rather than experiencing the reality, or lose interest in the activities by reading the story beforehand. The basic story was divided into parts and problems to solve were established for each part. The subjects were indicated on story maps (letters with a map), which the pupils would read to decide their move³.

Story map 1 (The map is omitted)

Good morning! Nakashibetsu little explorers,

It is the day to expedition. Are you ready?

First, you must go to the headwater of the 10th stream. You know there is a quarry there. One of elders, Mr. Hirose is waiting for you in front of the gate. You must listen to him, and solve some problems!

Problems to solve;

1. Ask him about fierce beasts that appeared around here and what kind of accident happened.
2. Ask him about edible plants and get some. Don't forget to ask him how to keep them.
3. Ask him about creatures in the stream and catch them.
4. Make toys using plants. You can ask him some hints.

Elders of Nakashibetsu Town

Guidance plan of "Nakashibetsu Little Explorers"

Date: 16 July 2003		
Place: along the 10 th stream in Nakashibetsu town in Shibetsu city, Hokkaido		
Participants: 8 pupils of Nakashibetsu elementary school (3 rd to 6 th grade)		
Time	Activity	Aim
9:00	Move to the headwater of the 10 th stream from the school	
9:30	Finding crayfish, wild vegetables and berries Making Itadori water pistol Storytelling about history of agriculture in the community	To understand life in the hills To learn how to play in the stream To understand history of relationship between the community and nature
11:00	Move along the stream Story telling about horses and life in the community	To understand the role of horses for life in the community
12:00	Move to the Nakashibetsu shrine Lunch (using wild vegetables that pupils picked)	To be aware of richness of nature in this area through cooking and eating wild vegetables
	Traditional games	To learn traditional games from old people To learn to create toys using materials around them
	Story telling about the shrine	To know roots of their ancestors

³ The committee adopted the idea of the story map inspired by Bølge Dahle's practice of sustainable tourism development for the community of Rennebu in Norway.

13:30	Down the stream by canoe	To experience history of settlers who moved with canoe
	Catching fish with traditional traps and nets	To experience traditional ways of catching fish
15:00	Back to the school Trying to eat wild herbs	To experience the tastes of wild herbs To be aware of richness of nature in this area
15:30	Giving certificate of Nakashibetsu master	

Conclusion

In constructing a community-based outdoor education, understanding the reality indigenous to the place (huudo) of the area, which was formed by the action/understanding cycle between community and its land, is the most important. Careful investigation of the reality based on the experiences of local people is indispensable for this understanding. In the case of Nakashibetsu, there was an obvious gap between the experience investigated by university members and the experience of local people who were involved in the program. For example, at the headwater of the 10th stream, Mr. Hirose was to tell a story about brown bears and the lives of settlers in the basic story. Instead, he told the pupils, “There were no bears that appeared here, when I was child, but there were many snakes here. I was really scared of snakes”. He finished telling the story about bears in an instant and sidestepped into a story of snakes. Both of the experiences are true. But there is a time difference between these experiences. This gap came about because university members investigated the experience of bears from a chronicle of Nakashibetsu history. They should have asked Mr. Hirose about his experience of the 10th stream.

Those who need to recognise problems in the relationship between a community and its land, and become concerned enough to create better huudo are the local people. Outsiders of the community have a role to play in that they give local people a chance to notice the reality indigenous to the place. In this sense, the duty of the university members as outsiders is to develop a principle that generates educational practices for reality indigenous to each community, not to apply an established program everywhere.

The idea of community-based outdoor education doesn't fit with the motto “Think globally, act locally”. It follows the principle of “Think locally, act locally” and emphasises the universal fact that each community has its own reality. Based on this principle, it aims for the cooperation between communities and an expansion of the concept of “community” to include the whole earth.

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