

Re-questioning the common sense of education from Amami

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My specializations are social education (adult and community education) and environmental education, but unlike in economics and biology, people don't quite understand these fields intuitively without an explanation. Therefore, I would like to introduce my specialization using the theme of Amami's "environmental culture," which I have worked on in Amami for the past several years.

The origin of the word "environmental culture" dates to 1994, when Yakushima was registered as a World Natural Heritage Site, a term used by the Kagoshima Prefecture and Yakushima. More recently, Amami National Park, born in 2017, once again shed light on this term. To be exact, this is an environmental cultural national park.

According to the Ministry of the Environment's explanation, "the natural environment of Amami, such as its forests, rivers, and beaches, have been deeply related to culture such as people's lives and activities. One of the attractions of the national park is the relationship between people and nature, such as ancient roads, coral stone walls, and rice cultivation, as well as the scenery with customs related to those practices and catching seafood on the reef." These should be protected and inherited, according to the Ministry of the Environment.

Meanwhile, the Kagoshima University Kagoshima Environmental Studies Research Group, where I have been active for the past ten years, has a different perspective. While the Ministry of the Environment says so, we may ask, "What meanings do these words have in terms of the experience and perspective of those who actually live in Amami?" The research activity that started from such a question has entered its third year, and we are currently preparing for the publication of the "Amami Environmental Culture Book." It is a compilation of interviews with 100 people of various generations from Kasari town in the north to Ukeshima and Yoroshima in the south. They talk about their relationship with nature. We have already listened to the stories of more than 80 people. We hope that you will see the content upon publication, but I would like to introduce some common items that we have come to understand by listening to these stories.

There are three points. First, we confirmed that childhood experiences were extremely important. The second was that everyone has a "guide" that serves to connect their relationship with nature, such as the sea and mountains. The third was that everybody had an opportunity to objectively review the meaning of their childhood experience.

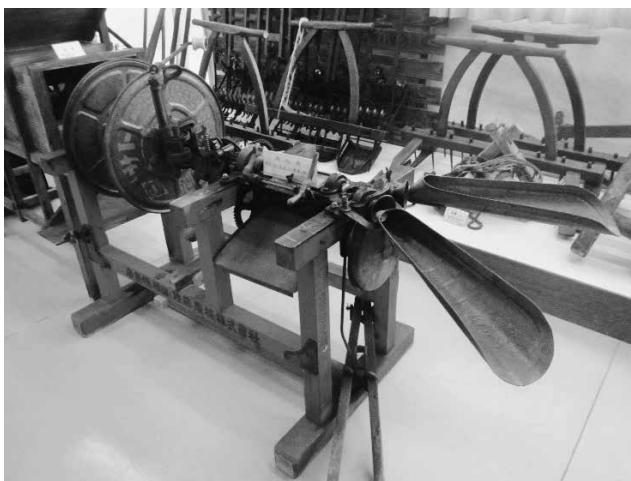
Each person had their own "guide" who invited them to this relationship: family members, relatives, the old men and women, the younger men and women in the village. What they had in common was that they all had some hint relating to nature, whether about

the habits of fish or how to catch them, how to make tools or how to use them. Even these relationships with nature are just experiences in childhood. However, this experience begins to develop a new meaning and value to the individual once they leave the island, were pointed out by others, or when reading a book.

There is no end to this list of realizations: the ocean that they took for granted was actually so beautiful and valuable, the *Shima-uta* that they sang without actually knowing had a deep meaning, the human interactions of the people in the village that they thought were so bothersome were actually done out of gratitude. The important aspect is that they have an “experience” to which they can give value with a new perspective. Let’s consider the *Habu* (a poisonous sneak, *Protobothrops flavoviridis*). There is a difference between people who have and those who have not seen, caught, or had a terrifying experience with *Habu* in their understanding of the scary aspects of the snake. Similarly, there is a big difference between understanding something on an intellectual and theoretical level, and understanding something through experience.

Such a point may seem obvious, and some may ask why this is so important. However, our value judgments and actions are based on these firm perceptions within us. That being said, has our society seriously considered what kinds of experiences should be given to children?

What we have found through our interviews is the importance of rich experiences that connect life and nature, and what has been recorded is proof of that situation. Humans do not develop in the narrow time and space that is school. They grow and develop with the surrounding environment and nature over a more extended period. Re-questioning the common sense of education from the Amami group of islands, and looking at future education are my specializations.



Rope knitting machine at the Folk Equipment Museum in Tawara village. The handmade museum was engraved with the footprints of the villagers.