

Expression Activities in Art Education to Think about a Sustainable Society: Application of Contemporary Art to the Development of Subjects

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ABSTRACT

In 2017, the Yokohama Triennale was held in Japan. One of the participants was a contemporary artist, Olafur Eliasson, who uses light in his work. His project involved the fabrication of a lamp together with refugees and members of the public. This he named, the “Green Light” project. The Green Light lamp was designed to help people to learn and collaborate, and through the process of lamp production, gain a better understanding of how we can live together.

Through the process of creative expression in contemporary art, we develop a “deepening of ideas within the expression of works” and record the idea development processes with junior high school students. To investigate the possibility of adoption of modern art as a method for ESD (Education for Sustainable Development) and consider this as a subject of analysis within the art department, on October 9th, 2017, I participated in a workshop paired with the student to make a lamp as part of the Green Light project. Through this experience, I researched the student conceptual understanding of the “refugee problem” and investigated whether this activity could indeed relate to a “sustainable society”.

Societally we should consider global problems from an international perspective. At the same time, we need to consider the sustainability of Japan within a world context. While interacting closely with others, using our hands and eyes to solve various problems that are intertwined we can internalize these interactions. The art department needs a systematic approach to help us express shape colour and ourselves.

1. INTRODUCTION

ESD has traditionally been practised at school sites in the field of comprehensive learning, special activities, and natural sciences. However, we believe that the problems of modern society will become more complicated, and we will need to develop an ESD curriculum that effectively utilizes various characteristics for each subject, considering more about the diversity of people's thinking and dialogue.

Therefore, in order to examine ESD in art education in the future, we should consider the method of modern art thinking that expresses the problems of modern society through the approach of the visual language of shape and colour. We should investigate the possibility of ESD within the art department, which actively relates to social issues and fosters a creation of a sustainable society for the future.

2. METHODOLOGY

First, I took the example of the Yokohama Triennale, 2017, to look at what kind of works which seemed to consider ESD in art education by contemporary artists expresses the problems of modern society. The workshop had been performed several times and was chosen as a research object to participate in with the female junior high school student to enable discourse concerning the refugee problem.

Next, I analyzed the details of the workshop, through qualitative study. I discussed the workshop through interviews and questionnaires investigating the changes in the responses. In addition, interviews were conducted with cohabiting parents.

3. CONTEMPORARY ARTWORKS AT THE YOKOHAMA TRIENNALE

Contemporary art has become more and more diversified in recent years. Many of these works reflect contemporary social situations and problems. They make us feel as if we offer a critique of art history and society. Therefore, art becomes a point of contact between the themes of our age.

In the Yokohama Triennale, where the artists live in the same age as “us” and gather together with modern themes, I found some works with the possibility for ESD. For example, Ai Weiwei had presented an installation of recovered lifejackets and lifeboats in connection with the European refugee crisis. And Yanagi Yukinori had exhibited the project “Godzilla landscape with an eye” reflecting the image of the mushroom cloud of the Haramizubo experiment in his eyes. Other works expressed gender and tradition using everyday goods and industrial products. There were also many works which expressed how individuals are facing the material world in their daily living environments by creating a theatrical space using light and video. It was considered that the subject of ESD in art education was highly likely to be appreciated by children through lively dialogue.

4. AT THE GREEN LIGHT ARTISTIC WORKSHOP

On October 9, 2017, at the Yokohama Museum, I participated in the workshop of the contemporary artist, Olafur Eliasson, who uses light, with a third-grade junior high school female student. This green light lamp was designed to help us think about learning together with others (understanding the course), making (lamp production), and living together. He is an artist who connects the environment, energy, and social problems while relating different organizations and people through the work concerning light. In an on going series of workshops hosted by various institutions around the world, asylum seekers, refugees, and members of the public are invited to construct Green light lamps and take part in an accompanying educational program .

In the introduction of the workshop, we learned about the refugee problem for 90 minutes via a lecture from “AAR Japan” (meeting to help refugees). The student, at first, was eager to take notes, but she was not able to concentrate on their talk. In the end, she gave up taking notes within about fifteen minutes. She showed me her strong motivation and willingness to learn, but in later interviews about the introduction, she told me that the content of their talk was difficult for her to understand. I think it is very important to understand how to make the introduction to subject matter linked to learning.

Next, the “green light” that the refugees produced, and became their income source was constructed in pairs. Before long we understood what we needed to do to assemble the lamp. If we didn't talk and cooperate with each other, it wouldn't be possible. The student showed a lot of interest in making the work, getting the knack faster than adults, and she gave me many instructions. She combined each part of the lamp one after another, leading to the completion of even the complicated parts. At this time, many adult participants praised her careful work and dexterity. She became more eager to work on the creation of the lamp and we completed the fastest of all the ten pairs. (Figure 1)



Although the assembly was difficult, for a student who likes to make something, it was something that could be considered "an activity which is motivated by initiative" to undertake it with subjectivity.

Figure 1: Student assembles accurately

In addition, linguistic remuneration from others became an informational aspect, and she thought that the sense of self-affirmation also increased.

During the production phase, the facilitator came and talked about the refugees who are also making the same things. She said that “If the production process is too easy, they lose their motivation and they don't have any reason in their life, so we purposely make lamps difficult to produce”. For each dialogue, a pair is a different combination; from another region, old people, young men and women. We went on to discuss this.

5. SURVEY AND INTERVIEWS

At that time, the female student was in the third grade of junior high school. She had average grades compared with her peers and liked reading. Her personality was gentle and she had liked to make handicrafts and draw pictures from childhood but had not experienced attending any workshops. She had at that time no interest in and knowledge of modern social concerns such as refugee issues. She had a pet and liked animals. It seemed that she was interested in natural environment problems, but she had no interest in global warming. After the workshop, I tried to consider from the questionnaires and the interview surveys her changing thought processes. The questionnaires, after omitting parts of free expression, provided results in the following table.(Table)

Considering the transition of thoughts in the table, it is shown that the production activity remained in her mind as a happy experience. It was thought that a feeling of self-affirmation increased during the activity and remained as a deep impression as a good memory. After the lamp production was completed, the emotion from the impression of the beauty of the work remained. However, we should take some time to consider that there is a change in her third answer, as to her interest in the refugee issue. Moreover, her interest was directed not only to the refugee problem but also the wider problems of society. The social problem concerning wildlife of Australia was written in a free description. In addition, we can see that she has adopted a posture to positively get involved with social problems through volunteering.

Table . Changes in the thought processes of the student over three questionnaires

Question Content / Time	After WS (2017.10.10)	2nd (2018.1.31)	3rd (2018.7.31)
Do you recall the activity?	Remember very well	Remember well	Remember well
Was the activity fun?	It was so fun	It was so fun	It was so fun
Thoughts during the activity	Difficulties in production	The need for cooperation	Interest in volunteering
Feelings when it is completed	Very beautiful	I was healed by the green light	Refugees have a difficult life
Interest in refugee issues	It was very heightened	I have developed interest by myself	I want to actively examine the problem
Interest in social issues	My interest in the refugee problem has risen	I am also interested in the wildlife problem	Actively looking for information

Her changes are likely to be influenced by the accumulation of life experiences that affected her developmental stages and deepened her relationship with society. However, interesting information was also revealed in the interview with the student's mother.

She has a close brother who has a similar personality and hobbies. and he also had no experience of workshops. The mother said that when the refugee problem was discussed on a TV news program, the younger sister talked about it, but the elder brother was not interested. Recently though, the mother said that as her daughter had been interested in general social issues in addition to the refugee issue and had been actively talking about the protection of wild animals, dialogue on the problems of the modern society within the entire family had increased.

6. CONCLUSION: THE POSSIBILITIES OF ESD

In consideration of the workshop episode, the tracking of the change of thought processes through subsequent questionnaires, and the comparison of a sibling who grew up in a similar environment, I believe the techniques of modern art help to promote thinking in different ways using the visual language of shape and colour. People are becoming more interested in society in the process of personal development. I will continue to interview to deepen my research on the subject of ESD expression activities in art education by increasing the number and content of my survey, and it will create “questions” for society, to derive solutions by dialogue and cooperation.

The Yokohama Triennale 2017 closed on November 5. The last three days ended with a large sphere that connected the lamps produced by more than 200 participants.

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