

Demystifying Decades of Occupational Passion for Ancient Art, Discipline & Tradition of Ikebana ©


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<https://ikebanabanmishofu.com/words-from-bansui-obta>

Abstract: Combining autoethnographic and heuristic methods, this study evokes the rich narrative of over six decades of ikebana occupational engagement. The qualitative inquiry traces occupational transitions that led to sustained engagement in an ancient eastern occupation during contemporary times while in the western context. By combining the two methodologies, I felt empowered to creatively, yet reflexively explore the trajectory and meaning of my own ikebana experiences, away from the stories shared by my sensei peers in a recent multiple ethnographic narrative, while guided by iterative immersion with, and reflection about headmaster generations

that came before me. I also found comfort and guidance from my heuristic methodology mentor, and the constructs of tacit knowing. Ultimately form, function and meaning of converged with the experience of my sensei peers from both Japan and western locations.



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What is Ikebana?

Ikebana is an art form and discipline of arranging flowers following driven by spiritual and traditional ways of doing (*kaden*), passed on for generations since the 5th century Japan. It derives inspiration from nature and the desire of humanity for connectedness, imagination and artistry. It captures, interprets, and enhances the beauty of nature with consistently practicing this way of the flowers (*kado*). In India, it started out as random offerings of fragrant flower petals to the ancestors. As a Buddhist ritual in China and Japan, it was first practiced by the nobility and the priesthood. Soon, China published books on flower arrangements, created flower vases and baskets. Later, Japan modified the process to its culture, and before long, schools that represented different styles of flower arrangement were born.



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Introduction: The study is part of a larger project called **Flowers as Occupation and On Human Becoming**. A recent project probed into the shared experience of six ikebana (Japanese flower arranging) sensei (teachers) on how they evolved ancient roles, routines, and habits into contemporary practice. The findings of the multiple ethnographic study inspired the current project that focuses on one sensei's decades-long occupational passion and engagement in ikebana.

Statement of purpose/Questions:

1. To understand sustained engagement in an ancient art form, discipline, and tradition using both insider and outsider lenses
2. To trace the personal and cultural transformation into roles, routines and habits from deshi to iemoto
3. To discover congruence of traditional and modern transformational experiences in the evolution of ikebana practitioners
4. To extract form function and meaning of the sustained occupational engagement from an individual's life experience



CC BY-SA 4.0, File:2. Moribana Kansuike, Ric Bansho Carrasco, 2014, Tokyo, Japan.jpg

Research Questions:

1. What occupational transitions nurtured my sustained occupational passion in kado?
2. Who have benefited from my ikebana occupational engagement?
3. What ancient routines and habits evolved from my ikebana practice during contemporary times?
4. How do form, function and meaning from one life experience relate to similar human experiences?

Methodology:



Employing **autoethnographic and heuristic methods**, this study evoked the rich narrative of the author's decades-long ikebana occupational engagement. The qualitative study traced occupational transitions that led to engagement in the ancient Eastern occupation in the Western context during contemporary times. To do this, the author reviewed historical artifacts such as sensei and former iemoto lesson plans, tape recordings, pictures, sketches of flower arrangements, ancient books, heirloom

documents, flower arranging tools and materials. The author continually documented hands-on training and participated in apprenticeships during demonstrations and other relevant activities.

Phases of the Heuristic Process

The heuristic process begins with one's own self-awareness regarding a question or problem (Moustakas, 1990), involving 6 phases: initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis. **Initial engagement** in the process starts with the researcher's personal experience, driven continually throughout the inquiry, by a strong desire to find meaning in the experience and that of others (Moustakas, 2001, p. 265). **Immersion** occurs through iterative and reflexive conversations with oneself and review of artifacts and materials relevant to the topic while paying attention to form, function, meaning of the experiences. This phase takes time and revisits to allow for time away for the **incubation** phase to happen. I liken this



CC BY-SA 4.0, File:8. Ric Bansho Morimono 2010-001.jpg.
Leu Gardens, Orlando, FL

phase to the term I use when I set aside a written work or a plan to “percolate” only to go back to it later with “rested eyes” and be able to see improvements that need to be made, or not. However, this incubation period or rest away from the topic is essential in **taking the process-focused attention into the tacit dimension**. In this phase, it becomes necessary to rely on what happened during incubation so that the acquired tacit knowledge can be used to look at what has been discovered in a previous study involving sensei peers to achieve **illumination**. This combines newly gained awareness with those that had been previously discovered. This revelation of combining experiences forms the phase called **explication**. The results reported here, combined with what is decided as a way to celebrate six decades of passionate engagement in this flower occupation is the **creative synthesis** or the final phase of the heuristic process. Would it be a haiku, or maybe a scholarly article, or a blog, or maybe this presentation?

Tacit Knowing & Heuristics

- 1st, the functional structure of tacit knowledge is the process of **matching the features of the person, task, or object**.
- 2nd the phenomenal aspect is more of an understanding part or apprehension. This means that we know we will **recognize a person, task, or object among the crowd based on the features**.
- 3rd the semantic form, where we **convert from meaningless feelings to meaningful ones**.
- 4th the ontological approach where we are able to know the person after identifying. Ontological knowing is basically the **understanding of the entity based on the features or particulars**.

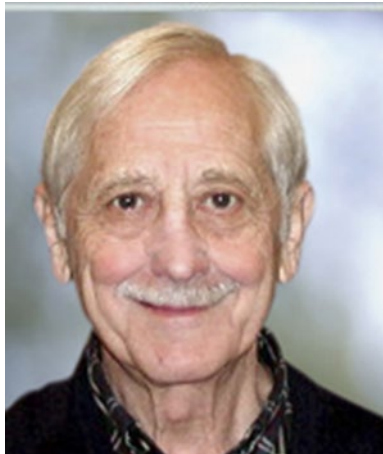


CC BY-SA 4.0File:16. Ric Bansho Sensei.jpg

The combination of autoethnographic and heuristic methodologies empowered the author with confidence to creatively discover and to find the nature and meaning of the ikebana learning and practice experiences, away from those of peers, while guided by at least three immediate past headmaster generations through historic documents and in person through Bessie Banmi Yoneko Ibrao Fooks. The author also found comfort and guidance in employing the heuristic methodology from a mentor, Clark Moustakas (1990), as well as the constructs of tacit knowing from Michael Polanyi (2009).



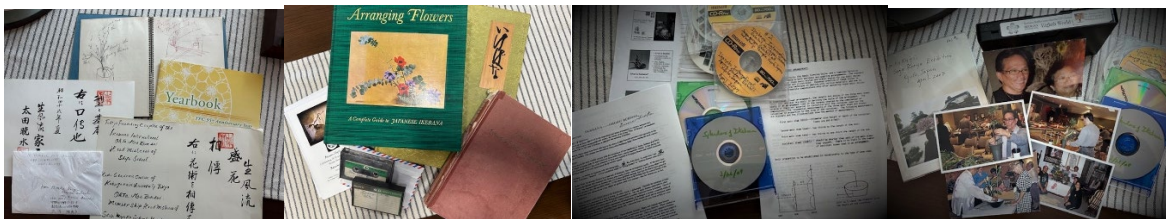
Michael Polanyi, 1891 - 1976



Clark Moustakas, 1923 - 2012



Bessie Banmi Fooks, 1930 - 2008



Role of Tacit Knowing in Heuristics

The functional structure of tacit knowledge is the process of matching the features of the person. We know the features of the person and are able to compare and match those features among millions of people. On the other hand, the phenomenal aspect is more of an understanding part or apprehension. This means that we know we will recognize a person among the crowd based on the features. The third aspect is the semantic form, where we convert from meaningless feelings to meaningful ones. The author takes the example of using a walking stick by a blind person. Although he is not using his hand directly or not touching the surface to get the idea of the place, he uses the stick to understand where is standing. When he uses the tool to get the haptic feedback using the stick, he can indirectly get the sense of the place by placing the stick on the surface. The sense of the impact of touching on the surface by the stick is transferred to his hands. This is called semantic knowing. The fourth aspect is the ontological approach where we are able to know the person after identifying. Ontological knowing is basically the understanding of the entity based on the features or particulars.

Phases of the Heuristic Process

According to Moustakas (1990), the heuristic process is an investigation that begins with one's own self-awareness in regard to a question or problem. Heuristic process involves phases: initial engagement, Immersion; Incubation; Illumination; Explication; and Creative Synthesis. These phases are recursive and iterative and involve both the researcher's internal processes and the external processes of participants and their data. Heuristic inquiry is a unique method that focuses on the researcher's lived experience to understand a phenomenon.

Data: Resources and data for investigation included historical books, journal articles, and artifacts such as heirloom documents, pictures, and flower arranging tools and materials, audiotapes, hands-on training, and apprenticeship/teaching notes.

Results: The autoethnographic data revealed the author's evolution from initial ikebana engagement with an intentional strategy for stress management while working as a business executive in Japan. *Immersion in ikebana* (and Japanese culture) resulted in *the intention becoming more a creative and cultural engagement* that led to formal lessons from a headmaster that lasted for three years and over thirty years of mentorship and friendship. The author's immersive experiences showed *patterns of personal and creative transformations* that followed the *blueprint of Japanese apprenticeship practices* based on spoken and written traditions that were recorded or published in ancient and modern manuscripts, heirloom documents, audio recordings and photographs that contributed to a reflexive and iterative analysis of the *investigator's lived transitional experiences passed on by mentors*.



Words from Bansui Ohta – Occupational Transitions Leading to Sustained Engagement

While looking for materials for refreshing the Banmi Shofu website, I found a note sent by Gil Fooks (husband of the late Bessie Banmi Fooks), with message that said, *"I am forwarding a translation of a cassette tape made on May 5, 1970, recorded with a talk Bansui Ohta-sensei delivered. She was Bessie's Shofu Ryu teacher in Japan."* Aolana (Banmi's grandchild) helped with the translation." I did the necessary copy editing for publication (Carrasco, 2019). A significant occupational transition for becoming Banmi Shofu's headmaster was the responsibility of global connections. The website was

one of the major steps in making the connection happen. Listening to Bansui Ohta's tape recorded voice took the past into the present and into the future in legacy forming. A new headmaster is also expected to introduce a new flower arrangement design to the school. While Banmi Fooks introduced driftwood to the Shofu style during her leadership, the investigator's contribution were three designs with the name hashibana, translated flower bridge to signify the link between 19th century Shofu styles and the contemporary expressions of Banmi Shofu Ryu.



<https://ikebanabanmishofu.com/words-from-bansui-ohata> - Futa kabu design showing 3-day progression of floral maturation

Day one.... day two..... day three....

*"The beauty of the flowers is brief because the flower can't live forever.
Remember the flower's beauty in your heart. Keep it and enjoy it forever.*

*The life of flowers is very limited. How you face the shortness of the flower's
life is the essence of ikebana. I'd like all of you and myself to not be too
proud but, keep learning forever with your challenged spirit."*

Bansui Ohta, 1970

Ancient Routines & Habits into Contemporary Ikebana Practice

This study is a testament to the meaning and embodiment of creativity in human occupation, involving a continual process of imagination, revisiting meaningful moments from the past, creating something new, reliving ancient traditions, immersion in unfamiliar cultural practices and ways of learning in unfamiliar contexts. Visualization of themes and convergence of the investigator's lived experiences with Japanese traditions of apprenticeship and learning illustrated the progressive, albeit hesitant transformation from deshi (student) to sensei and finally as iemoto (headmaster) of an ikebana school. The narrative illustrates human transformation that involves cultural humility and resilience in the process of occupational engagement while doing, being, becoming and belonging.

Form, Function and Meaning Relate to Other Human Beings

Ikebana, the Japanese art of flower arranging, is based on principles of simplicity, harmony, and respect for nature. What became apparent through this autoethnographic and heuristic processes is that the form, function, and meaning of ikebana, extracted from iterative heuristic analysis can be seen in the following ways:

Form

"Ikebana arrangements are often spare, with a focus on a few carefully chosen elements. The arrangement is usually asymmetrical and includes negative space to create a sense of movement. Kado practitioners feel that flower arranging is a time to appreciate aspects of nature commonly overlooked in daily life. As a sensei and iemoto, the flower art has taken an added dimension of the discipline of practice beyond creating flower designs alone or in front of a large audience, but also learning kimono and other rituals of a headmaster's role."

Function

"Ikebana is grounded in Japanese aesthetics, which emphasizes simplicity, understated elegance, and a respect for nature. Ikebana can be spiritual and philosophical in nature. Some practitioners feel that flower arranging is a time to appreciate aspects of nature commonly overlooked in daily life."

Meaning

"Ikebana is about expressing a sense of balance, harmony, and the beauty of impermanence. It can also be a reflection of a specific moment in time, paying reverence to the season."

Implications related to Occupational Science: Visualization of themes and convergence of the investigator's lived experiences with Japanese traditions of apprenticeship and learning illustrated the progressive, albeit hesitant transformation from deshi (student) to sensei and finally as iemoto (headmaster) of an ikebana school. The narrative illustrates human transformation that involves cultural humility and resilience in the process of occupational engagement while doing, being, becoming and belonging.

Relevance to Conference Theme: This study is a testament to the meaning and embodiment of creativity in human occupation, involving a continual process of imagination, creating something new, reliving ancient traditions, and immersion in unfamiliar cultural practices and ways of learning in unfamiliar contexts. Although originally part of an ikebana school in Japan, Banmi Shofu Ryu was founded in Taipei Taiwan; this set the school apart the larger, more known ikebana schools. In being so, the school has continued to defy tradition but also because, its second headmaster (the

author) is either Japanese in nationality, but also not a blood relative of the previous generations of headmasters; instead, the relationship is that of a fictive kinship. With this trajectory, the school and the author have contributed to a social transformation that is similar yet so different from the ikebana cultural blueprint.

Discussion Questions to Further Occupational Science Concepts and Ideas

1. What occupational strategies did you employ to lead your professional life and at the same time keep your ikebana occupational passion alive?
2. How did you navigate the occupational challenges of critical theory and transformation sp. in relation to the blueprint of ikebana and learning traditions
3. Please explain the importance of tacit knowledge and the heuristic methodology in this particular autoethnographic revelation?

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