



Flowers as Occupation:
Evolving Roles and Habits of Learning, Health and Wellness
from 5th Century Tradition into Contemporary Practice

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Banmi Shofu Ryu



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Background Information:

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Educational Background:

Dr. Carrasco has a PhD in Psychology, concentration in Neuropsychology & Occupational Dysfunction; MEd in Special Education of Gifted & Talented, BS in Occupational Therapy, BS in Marketing, Elementary Teachers Certificate

Biographical Information:

Dr. Carrasco has over 40 years of marketing, occupational therapy, and education experience in various parts of the world. He currently is Chair and Professor of the entry-level Doctor of Occupational Therapy program at Nova Southeastern University, Tampa (NSU Tampa). Prior to NSU Tampa, he taught in the US and several parts of the world on the subject of sensory processing across the lifespan. His clinical, academic and research experience as an occupational therapist include serving as Chair & Professor at the Medical College of Georgia, now Georgia Regents University. He has served many roles for state, national and international associations, and received the highest AOTA Award of Merit. He has numerous presentations and publications. Concurrently, he is Headmaster & Professor (*Iemoto & Momiji no Kyoshou*) of *Banmi Shofu Ryu* of *Ikebana* and travels around the world teaching the flower art. His most recent *ikebana* presentation was this past October to the first and largest *Ikebana* International Chapter outside of Tokyo, Japan, the Washington DC Chapter #1.





Abstract

The workshop introduces *ikebana* as art and discipline for acquiring routines and habits for learning, health and wellness. Participants will learn traditional terminology to understand the narrative inquiry designed to explore shared experiences of *ikebana* teachers and students. Author will describe the selected qualitative method for the study which allows participation by research participants selected using purposive, non-probability sampling during structured interviews that enhance the purpose of the study. A demonstration of creating select *ikebana* arrangements feature analysis of the activity, but also a description of its potential application as a treatment modality and medium for wellness.

Learning Objectives: By the end of this workshop, my objectives are, that the participant will:

1. Translate basic *ikebana* terminology
2. Summarize the evolution of *ikebana* as an art form and discipline of expression and teaching
3. Synthesize the larger study of evolving roles and routines that come with the expressing and teaching Ikebana
4. Model the demonstrated technique of flower arrangement as a novice practitioner of *kado*



Hallmark Banmi Shofu Ryu design created by Bessie Banmi Sensei for a Honolulu Hale exhibition.

***Ikebana* Basic Information**

Ikebana is the ancient Japanese art of arranging flowers, documented as far back as 1486 (Yoshikawa, 1936). The art, and the companion discipline of *kado*, (way of the flower) evolved from a ritual of randomly thrown floral offerings to the spirits of the dead in the birthplace of Buddhism – India. When Buddhism came to Japan during the 6th century via China, the flower practice came along with it. By the 10th century, priests, who were primarily responsible for temple floral offerings started the use of containers. Soon, the aristocracy took a liking for *kado*, transforming it from its religious purpose into a domestic, albeit royal aesthetic.

By the 15th century, *ikebana* achieved its status as an art form, while retaining its symbolic, philosophical, and spiritual underpinnings. The first teachers and students came from the religious and aristocracy, but now, *ikebana* is practiced at all levels of Japanese and Western societies. Various *ikebana* schools started when personal expression, business with the Western world, and adaptation to different home settings came into the picture. By 1936, there were 500 schools in Japan. Today, there are more than 5000 *ikebana* schools all over the world.

Roots of *Banmi Shofu Ryu* of *Ikebana*

Banmi Shofu Ryu originated from *Shofu Ryu*, which, like all other schools had its roots from the first school of *Ikebana* – *Ikenobo*. *Shofu Ryu* appealed to European taste because of its clever adaptation of traditional *Kado* principles to new conditions. Its name translates to pine or living breeze, and *Shofu* creations express a spirit of naturalness, as effortless as the wind on the pines on a summer day; they show both fluidity of line and fidelity to the way plants grow in nature.





In 1962, Bessie Yoneko Banmi Fooks, 1st Generation Headmaster of *Banmi Shofu Ryu* (see photo, left) took her first lessons in Japan, and because her creations took a naturalistic form, her *Ikenobo sensei* referred her to *Bansui Ohta*, then *Shofu Ryu* Headmaster. During *Bansui Ohta-sensei*'s frequent visits with her daughter in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, *Banmi Bessie-sensei*, then living on the island nation, continued to study with her. In 1972, she received her Professor's certificate, and authorization to establish *Banmi Shofu Ryu*. She started teaching in Tainan, and began exhibiting and demonstrating *Kado* during *Ikebana* International world and regional conventions for close to 50 years, and wherever her and her husband Gil's work with the US Department of Defense Dependents Schools took her family – Japan, Germany, Turkey, Philippines, among many. Her body of work highlights the hallmark of *Banmi Shofu Ryu* – employing the use of

driftwood, not as an artifice, but as a way of connecting with the spirit of driftwood in creating a floral design. The driftwood pieces she used came to life as they infused floral arrangements with their living spirit. Driftwood is featured in the school's identity graphic (designed by Kevin Banes and featured on the back page), together with the rising moon and happiness kanji.

"In evolving Banmi Shofu Ryu, I used natural materials in simple lines provoking movement and symbols that in turn achieved serenity and tranquility; I could view the designs from any angle. They were simply the end product of a process that connected me spiritually with plant and driftwood materials. This has been my experience that began in Japan years ago; I continued to learn from Bansui Ohta Sensei, and transplanted what I absorbed in Japan to Hawaii and to the many places in the world where I traveled and connected with friends who love flowers," (Banmi Bessie Fooks, 2005)

For 5 years, Ric *Bansho* and Bessie *Banmi -sensei* hosted annual *Banmi Shofu Ryu* workshops in Florida. From December 2008, the annual event it was changed to the Bessie *Banmi* Fooks Memorial Annual Workshop. In 1996, they refined the *Banmi Shofu Ryu* curriculum, based on the translation of a Japanese manual of flower arrangement handed down from *Bansui Ohta-sensei*. It is now a manuscript used to teach *Banmi Shofu Ryu* to students and prospective teachers. The curriculum dovetails with levels of *Banmi Shofu Ryu* study.

In July 2008, Bessie *Banmi-sensei* installed Ricardo *Bansho* Carrasco as the 2nd Generation Headmaster of *Banmi Shofu Ryu*. Ricardo *Bansho -sensei* was one of her students in her first classes in 1972 in Taiwan, and received his initial teaching certificate in 1974. Since then, they continued working together for over 40 years, their last creation shown during the 2008 North American Regional Convention



held in Monterey, California. Upon installation, *Bansho-sensei* launched a 5-year plan, a formalization of their shared vision, but until then, not combined nor communicated to the entire family, and only to a handful of *ikebana* communities. The 5-year plan includes a promotional brochure, a book on driftwood and *Banmi Shofu Ryu kaden* (not so secret methods), a website, and an aggressive education initiative called *Hashi Series*. The mission of *Banmi Shofu Ryu* is to preserve, grow, teach and communicate the legacy of its *Banmi Sensei* aligning with the motto, “Friendship across the Globe through Flowers and Driftwood.”

Bridging ikebana Practice with Scholarly Curiosity:



Active involvement for over 40 years in Japanese flower arranging (*ikebana*) is the source of my curiosity about occupational role evolution from *ikebana* student (*deshi*) to artist to teacher(*sensei*),, and finally, and hesitantly, as headmaster (*iemoto*) upon the untimely death of my predecessor, the 1st generation *Banmi Shofu Ryu iemoto*, Bessie *Banmi* Fooks in Summer of 2008. In my transformation to headmaster, I have seen and interacted with many *sensei* and *iemoto* of different *ikebana* schools around the world through local, state, regional and international conventions as well as through the classes and demonstrations that I teach to grow the *Banmi Shofu* school. In doing so, I personally

experienced and witnessed others grow in expressing the art, and experiencing the discipline that comes with making flowers (*bana*) live (*ike* – from *ikeru*). As an occupational therapist, I also increasingly became aware of the activity itself to be a wellness type of activity, a medium of relaxation, a source of self-worth, and an affirmation of my own talents and gifts, while turning away from the temptation to overanalyze the process of artistic construction from a neuroscientific perspective. I was able to accomplish this, only to hear from my students and peers their thoughts about the therapeutic value of the activity, which they verbalized while they created their flower designs, or through stories they told about their flower arrangements, as well as through their reflections during summative closure discussions at the end of a teaching class.

Brief Literature on Mindfulness, Roles, Routines & Habits as They Relate to *Ikebana*

Occupational science provides a unifying body of knowledge that supports the use of purposeful activities, referred to as occupations, such as *ikebana* or Japanese flower arranging (Yerxa, 1996). The practice of occupational therapy includes habits, routines, roles, rituals, and behavior patterns (American Occupational Therapy Association, 2011). Duhigg, (2012) identifies three components of habits: trigger, routines and rewards. Each component relies on neurological underpinnings to develop and successfully apply habits for work and life actions. In the practice of occupational therapy, human factors include the interaction of habits, routines, roles, rituals and behavior patterns in an optimal intervention process.

Mindfulness meditation can produce positive effects on brain and immune function demonstrated by left sided anterior brain activity (interpreted as a positive effect), and significant increases in antibody titers to influenza vaccine (Davidson, et al, 2003). Meta analyses and systematic reviews of the literature on meditation practices in health care have shown significant improvement in design and results, but sustained rigor in methodology, implementation, analyses and dissemination continue to be a priority for the future (Ospina, et al, 2008). *Ikebana* in popular literature has been featured as a beneficial mental health strategy (Yalom, 1996). Shenpen (2004) and Stanley (2008) posited that *Kalapa Ikebana*, initiated by *Chögyam Trungpa* (1984), blends the traditional teachings of *ikebana* with contemplative meditation practice

Banmi Shofu book of *kaden* explains the spiritual relationship that evolves between *ikebana* practitioners and the materials they work with:

“Regardless of *Ikebana kaden* (rules or methods of engagement), usually prescribed by schools, practitioners will sooner or later, and invariably, enter into a personal relationship with plant materials, equipment, and in the case of *Banmi Shofu Ryu*, the driftwood. This relationship is one that is spiritual in nature. It is a relationship that shows respect, practices discipline, and brings coherence to the relationship of the person with self, and with the larger milieu of the universe. The end product is a way to reach into the soul, but also to reach out to others who view the creation. (p. 6).”

Learning basic *Ikebana* designs requires persistent training in joining heaven, earth and man, which is very explicit in *ikebana* as the student deals with space and form and the three main elements (*shin, soe and uke*), put together in different variations. Through rigorous, sometimes repetitive active, definitely not passive, observing and doing processes, the student enters an environment that requires sustained attention and vigilance to details easily missed. This results in a sharpened use of all the senses and their use in non-aggressive ways to connect with others and enter inner peace.

Davey and Kameoka, (2005) view *Ikebana* as a lifelong journey, much like calligraphy, *aikido*, tea ceremony or *chado*, and other traditional Japanese arts, that teaches respect for nature, and “following the flow of *ki* – the connective tissue of the universe – to (sic) produce works of soothing beauty, color, and form.” They aver that *Kado*, or the way of the flower and the process of floral composition is a form of active meditation. The creator becomes one with the plant materials, and attains calmness, concentration, and willpower that translate into positive qualities for everyday life.

In the same manner as *bushido* (martial arts) *chado* (tea ceremony) *shodo* (calligraphy), *kyudo* (archery), *sumi'e* (brush painting), or other Japanese traditional art forms and discipline, *Kado* starts with learning the basic forms using traditional equipment, tools and materials in achieving wisdom, and reaching levels of spirituality and peace in the way of the flower. Each *ikebana* school has its own *kaden* or rules and methods of engagement, apprenticeship for teaching and practice, and headmaster or *iemoto* succession which usually passes from within a family's generation to the next. These are explicit expressions of how *ikebana* practitioners

assume very specific roles, develop skill competency, highlight aesthetic expression, assume useful routines, and integrate new habits into their *ikebana* occupation.

Research Question:

This awareness became the impetus for an inquiry that asks the question, “What is the experience called *ikebana*?” More specifically, what is the experience by those who are passionate about it, such as active *sensei* and *deshi* of *ikebana*? What inspires them to initially pursue learning, and then continue to be flower artist/teacher/student through the years? Importantly, how did they evolve into their *ikebana sensei* or *deshi* roles, and what stories do they tell that may relate to tranquility, peace, or anything that may contribute (or not) to their well-being when following the way of the flowers (*kado*). Additionally, what roles, habits and routines do they recollect to improve, develop, or even acquire in order to experience *ikebana* success? The aim of the inquiry is to draw experiential themes from *sensei* subjects in how they evolved into their *Ikebana sensei* roles, and what they and their *deshi* shared as stories related to tranquility and peace that contributed to their well-being when following the way of the flowers (*kado*).

Methodology:

Researcher will employ the qualitative method of narrative inquiry with subjects selected using the purposive, non-probability sampling. This allowed choosing subjects for structured, recorded interviews based on the specific purpose that enhanced the study, i.e., exploring shared experiences of practicing *ikebana sensei* in a West Central Florida chapter of *Ikebana* International, and therefore assured a clear representation of the larger population of *ikebana sensei* around the world. Computer assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDAS) will allow the researcher to systematically identify, analyze themes and recursive abstractions from encoded transcriptions.

Demonstration (Audience Participation, time permitting):

1. Moribana
2. Nageire
3. Chabana
4. Hashibana Maru

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