



FOREST KINDERGARTEN LEARNING TRIP OBSERVATIONS

UNDERSTUDY & VISIT

WITH NAGAYOSHIKA &
YANGCHAO

IN KAMAKURA, JAPAN

Kamakura is situated at the southern beach of Japan, surrounded by a mountain range. You can hike through the Kamakura range in a day.

The forest kindergarten (aka Nagayoshika) was the brain child of **Aiko** sensei in 1985. She is now 65 years old. The Nagayoshika was created to meet the ever growing gap of disconnection by the urbanisation and structuralisation of education in Japan. **Aiko** wanted to create a village and community spirit in raising the children together, in a space with nature and farms.

CONTEXT



Yangchao on the other hand, is a creation by the parents of the Nagayoshika. As there was no Nagayoshika for children 5-6 years old at that time, the parents came together and formed the Yangchao group, with the support and blessing of **Aiko** sensei herself.

Atsuko, my sensei for forest school, is a parent whose eldest son attended the Nagayoshika & Yangchao more than a decade ago. She learnt the ways through the community.

CONTEXT





NAGAYOSHIKA

Parents are required to be rostered into the session as assistants to the sensei of the session. And if the parents rostered has a baby, the other parents will share the responsibility and help to take care of the baby, while the parent goes on duty.

Characteristics of Nagayoshika

Duration: Tue, Thu, Fri (3 times a week)

Time: 9am to 1pm

Age Group: 1-2 years old
3-4 years old

Group Size: 12 pax per group

Ratio: 1:6 adult to child ratio

Commitment: All the way until the child graduates

Details:

- Bento (lunch) has to be prepared. It has to be rice and vegetables only.
- Child does not carry a water bottle, just a wooden cup, Sensei will provide the water from a communal source.
- Child doesn't wear underwear, so that they can pee/poo easily when required along the way. No pampers.



YANGCHAO

Parents are required to be rostered into the session as co-leaders. And if the parents rostered has a baby, the other parents will share the responsibility and help to take care of the baby, while the parent goes on duty.

Characteristics of Yangchao

Duration: Mon, Tue, Thu, Fri (4 times a week)

Time: 9am to 3pm

Age Group: 4-5 years old

5-6 years old

Group Size: 12 pax per group

Ratio: 1:4 adult to child ratio

Commitment: All the way until the child goes to elementary school.

Details:

- Bento (lunch) has to be prepared
- Child does not carry a water bottle, just a wooden cup, Parents will provide the water from a communal source.
- Child's attire is flexible
- Parents leading the particular day, has the liberty and rights to decide what they are going to do for the day

HANDS BEHIND, LIPS SEALED



A practice most commonly used in the Japanese Forest School ways.

It encourages parents/teachers to let go of control, and the desire to assist a child all the time, be it by words or action. Allowing the child to explore their own ability and grow in confidence and strength.

- Hold Space
- Be Present
- Supportive
- Silent
- Minimal Adult Initiation (10%)



LIGHT & HEALTHY

Attire

- Bags are packed with only Bento (so that children have the mobility)
- No underwear/diapers (they pull down the pants to poo/pee easily)
- They sew a kangaroo pouch on the top that the child is wearing. Everything is light, even in winter. (So they can put things they collect into it)

Food (Bento Time)

- Only rice balls and vegetables
- No snacks or junk food
- Water bottle is shared in a communal bottle
- Water is carried by Teachers/Parents
- Bento time, is done in circle time together

Walking is a crucial aspect of the Forest School in Japan.

Hiking/Walking gives children the space to exert their physical ability and explore their strength, resilience and stamina.

They stop at certain spaces to play, explore, do crafts, farming, climb trees, climb rocks etc. But it will never last more than 15 minutes. (The sensei/parents will move off after a while, the kids will follow.)
[PS: The adults never puts down the bag unless they are going to stay at a spot for more than 15 minutes.]

The walk also helps to regulate and assimilate social interaction and conflicts. It can also help children “unstuck” themselves from their fears and certain uncomfortable emotions.



THE LONG WALK

From Parents' Learning to Kampung Spirit



Parents' learning is a crucial aspect of the Forest School ways in Japan. It is important that parents grow together with the Forest School community as they get involved in the commitment and communal support for each other.

In the development of these learnings, the kampong spirit / village lifestyle is born. Many of the parents go on to support the Kamakura community developments and programs after their time with the Nagayoshika and Yangchao.

A collective and supportive community is developed from the very source of life, nature, children, parents, family, village.

The land, its geography, history, culture and seasons all play crucial roles to the way the Forest School happens in Japan.

In Summer, the wilderness of the mountain comes alive, with snakes and hornets, so most of the sessions are done at the beach instead.

The geography of the land allows for many hiking trails during the Autumn, Spring and Winter seasons.

There is a deep connection with the Shrines and faith of the land among the leaders of the FS in Japan.



THE LAND OUR HOME



BALANCE

At the very end of the day, the forest school in Japan provides the balance or counter balance to the rapid urbanisation of their current society. As my sensei says, it is not revolutionising the whole system, it is the small steps and inspiration that forest school can give to others to make the changes necessary for themselves. And collectively as a kampong, we may give our children the space to live.