

Early Childhood Education and Care During Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) Pandemic in Japan

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to clarify the actual state of practice of early childhood education in Japan under the pandemic of the new coronavirus. In this paper, I focused on the practice of fostering the attitude of young children to "try to maintain keeping distance from others." As a method, I classified the practices of early childhood education in Japan based on the four systems of Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory. As a result, Japanese children are oriented to maintain the distance from governmental background, and kindergarten teachers have the actual experience of maintaining the distance by utilizing online, while children are having fun. It became clear that the educational environment was prepared to foster children's attitude of "trying to maintain keeping distance from others" through their play.

Keywords: *Ecological System Theory, Covid-19, Educational Practice of Japanese Early Childhood Education*

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

U. Bronfenbrenner (1979) ¹ presented four type systems of environment around children, Micro, Meso, Exo, and Macro systems. Micro system has children’s direct experience of activities, roles, and social relationships in centers, home, and playground. Meso system has experience of Several behavioral scenes in which child are directly involved. Exo system has experience of Behavioral scene that child does not directly participate in, but it influences the child experience. Macro system has Consistent pattern in a society, belief system and idealism.

Children’s Voluntary Activity

Voluntary activity is an essential concept in Japanese ECEC. Japanese National Association of Day Nursery Teachers (NADNT) ² showed that the teachers of day Nursery ensured children’s voluntary activity under the situation of pandemic. About voluntary activities, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology: MEXT (2018) ³ said Teachers should create a learning environment with the intention of ensuring that children participate in voluntary activities, based on an understanding and anticipation of the individual actions of each child. Course of study for kindergarten is a national legal guideline. Japanese ECEC teacher should obey it even under the pandemic situation. MEXT explain about voluntary activities, “this does not mean that the child will be able to carry out each activity efficiently, but that the child will work around himself and repeat trial and error as the child, trying to acquire what is necessary for his/her own development. In other words, Japanese ECEC teachers value children’s independence.

Independence is an important concept in education. OECD noted INDEPENDENCE is one of compound skills in Social and emotional skill ⁴. According to Table 1, Independence is compound with critical thinking. These skills are the ability to evaluate information and interpret it through independent and unconstrained analysis. As a Children’ behavioral example, Good at solving problems, at ease in new and unknown situations. OECD showed opposite example. Children are dependent on others’ guidance. The reason why OECD focused on independence is shown in the descriptions.

Table1 Social and emotional skill

“BIG FIVE” DOMAINS	SKILLS	DESCRIPTION	BEHAVIOURAL EXAMPLES
COMPOUND SKILLS	SELF EFFICACY	The strength of individuals’ beliefs in their ability to execute tasks and achieve goals.	Remains calm when facing unexpected events. Opposite: avoids challenging situations.
	CRITICAL THINKING/ INDEPENDENCE	The ability to evaluate information and interpret it through independent and unconstrained analysis.	Good at solving problems, at ease in new and unknown situations. Opposite: dependent on others’ guidance.
	SELF-REFLECTION/ META-COGNITION	Awareness of inner processes and subjective experiences, such as thoughts and feelings, and the ability to reflect on and articulate such experiences.	Good exam preparation strategies, able to master skills more effectively. Opposite: over- or under-estimates time needed for exam preparation or project completion.

OECD noted that “we know that preparing students with technical or academic skills alone will not be enough for them to achieve success, connectedness and well-being whatever endeavors they wish to pursue. Social and emotional skills, such as perseverance, empathy, mindfulness, courage or leadership are central to this.” Therefore, OECD said “Over the last years, social and emotional skills have been rising on the education policy agenda and in the public debate.” In consideration of these description, Japanese ECEC teachers value children’s independence under the pandemic situation. Keeping distance from others

There are many independent activities, but I want to focus in “Keeping distance from others”. Children should distance themselves from others, even if the teachers and parents do not direct them. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services recommend that Staying at least 6 feet (about 2 arm lengths) from other people ⁵. Keeping distance from others is especially important for people who are at higher risk of getting very sick.

2. RESEARCH PURPOSE

What Japanese ECEC teachers do educational practices in Micro, Meso, Exo, and Macro systems during Corona virus pandemic to make children “Keeping distance from others” as their voluntary activities? The recent researches in Japan doesn’t show the answer about this question.

3. METHOD

I Reviewed Information and resources on ECEC in the midst of COVID-19 by National Institute for Educational Policy Research ⁶. Because in Japan, there are certified centers for ECEC, and non-certified one. They have much practices, therefore, it is not possible to grasp all the practices in Japan. National information and resources represent a prototype of educational practices under the pandemic. I think that method is suitable for an international conference like today.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

First, I show photo 1 of keeping distance from the others as children’s voluntary activity in the environment of micro system. This photo shows children playing in colored water on the terrace of a kindergarten. The terrace is breezy and the air does not stagnate. Therefore, it helps prevent coronavirus infection. The children worked in a space where they could see each other at intervals, so they could enjoy together, be inspired by how to make friends, and notice the difference in color. In addition, this picture shows that the children are wearing masks. And children are facing the same direction without facing each other.



Figure 1 the children are wearing masks same direction without facing each other.

I want to show photo 2 of keeping distance from the others as children’s voluntary activity in the environment of micro system. This is a photo show that Teachers put animal footprints in line so that children could enjoy themselves and wait in line. The teacher reported the number of children who are interested in animal footprints has increased. When the child stands on the footprints of these animals, they can automatically line up at a distance from the other children like this. Children will voluntarily move away from others in every aspect of their daily lives.



Figure 2. animal foot prints

Next, I show photo 3 of keeping distance from the others as children’s voluntary activity in the environment of meso system. This picture was taken last year when the children were spending time at home without going to kindergarten. At this time,

the kindergarten was closed, but teachers record a video, and send the video by email to every child’s parents. The video showed animal puppets play with blocks. They talked “How can we combine these blocks?” in the video. The children watched this video in each home. After kindergarten opening, children play with the blocks that the animal puppets used in the video. The teacher reported children play in the same way with the puppets.



Figure 3 play animal

As I mentioned about Meso system, it has experience of Several behavioral scenes in which child are directly involved. As introduced the case in the previous slide, The children watched the video in their homes. After opening kindergarten, the children played in kindergarten in same way of the video. In this way, several behavior scenes in Meso system influenced each other. Children develop in these various behavioral scenes, so under the pandemic situation, home and kindergarten should share information of children’s play, and try to connect children’s experience in each situation.

I want to show photo 4 of keeping distance from the others as children’s voluntary activity in the environment of meso system. This photo shows one teacher playing Pianica and another teacher shooting a video on a mobile phone. This teacher has a board that shows the keyboard to play. These teachers give the video to every child using kindergarten network. The children who watched this video in their homes have practice to play pianica. After opening the kindergarten, children enjoy playing pianica with friends. As I mentioned earlier, under the pandemic situation, home and kindergarten should share information of children’s play, and try to connect children’s experience in each situation. In this case, the children were able to demonstrate the results of their home practice of playing pianica in kindergarten.



Figure 4. activity in the environment

Next, I show a photo of keeping distance from the others as children’s voluntary activity in the environment of Exo system. As I explained before, exo system has Behavioral scene that child does not directly participate in, but it influences the child experience. The photo 5 shows teachers training online with teachers in other kindergartens. What the teachers learn through the online training affects the quality and quantity of children's voluntary activities. Online tool they use are Zoom and G Suite for Education. The online training, that is, training while keeping a distance from others, indirectly leads to the development of children’s “keeping distance from others”.



Figure 5 Online Training

Lastly, Macro system. Like exo system, macro system also doesn’t have Behavioral scene that child directly participate in, but it influences the child experience. This system has consistent pattern in a society, belief system and idealism. To be specific, this system has Law, National guideline, National notice and information.



Figure 6. National notice and information.

MEXT share 6 national guideline, manual information ⁸ . Guidelines for sustainable school management in response to Covid 19 infection Measures related to "guarantee of learning" Situation survey on schools, examples of efforts Hygiene management manual for new coronavirus infections in schools Q & A regarding the implementation of educational activities Employment information for work at school Today I will briefly explain Guidelines for sustainable school management in response to Covid 19 infection and Policy of “maintaining of children’s learning” from these six.

In this policy, the MEXT stated teachers must maintain children’s learning. In “maintaining of children’s learning” is a principle that teachers thoroughly prevent infection while ensuring children’s deep learning. In this guideline, the noted descriptions about “keeping distance from others” are these three. Enrichment of home study; Dividing children into multiple groups and each go to school for a limited time and day, Environmental arrangement for ICT. That means in addition to improving the online learning environment at home, teachers give children environment in schools that can make distance with others easily.

5. CONCLUSION

Japanese children’s learning of “keeping distance from others” is based on the government policy, the learning of teachers who implement it, and the support of the family. To maintain children’s learning about “keeping distance from

others”, It is necessary for Japanese government and teachers to use online devices. Covid 19 pandemic is a common problem in the world, but each countries have different four systems, and create learning environment for children. It is important for researchers to compare the environments of the four systems of children around the world and propose better learning environments for children.

6. REFERENCES

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