

A Study on the Potential Utilization of Portfolio among Coordinators in Kindergartens and Nursery Schools in Japan

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The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of portfolios, developed by coordinators in kindergartens and nursery schools in Japan. The coordinators are early childhood teachers who play various roles in different settings. Their roles are of particular importance when they provide support for children with special needs and childrearing families, as well as support to other early childhood education teachers. Hence, specialised knowledge and the ability to play different support roles are required for the coordinators. It is essential for the coordinators to organize information efficiently in order to keep track with on-going practice and to retrospectively evaluate goals set for the future. In the absence of effective record keeping system for the coordinators in kindergartens and nursery schools in Japan, a potential use of portfolios, that had not been yet well known in Japan, was investigated in this study. As part of a training program for 17 coordinators, they were asked to develop a portfolio for a period of two weeks. Content analysis of the portfolios revealed a wide variety of information about children, parents and teachers in form of written documents, photographs, and newspaper clippings. Large amounts of information were dedicated to the support for childrearing families and children with special needs. Survey was also used to find out the benefits of the portfolio development. Unlike the existing recording system that focuses on the objective descriptions of children, portfolios allow the coordinators to include their perceptions of children into the records, thus increasing their awareness of their own. When asked about the potential usefulness of portfolios in addition to the existing recording system, 94% of the coordinators recommended the adjunct use of portfolios. It is a task of future research to explore exactly how portfolios should be combined with the existing record keeping system.

Key Words : portfolio, coordinator, training program, enhance the qualifications

Introduction

The recent trends in Japan such as low birth rate, an aging society, an increasing female labor force and the increasing number of nuclear families, seem to create rapid changes in the society which eventually affect the very environment surrounding children and lead to a massive transformation of the kind of education needed in these changing times. Along with these transformations, the breadth of roles for those involved not only in child rearing at home but

also in child care at kindergartens and nursery schools seem to be broader than ever before (Takahata, Nakata & Ikeda, 2007, Kiyama, Kikuchi, Mori, Katayama, Hasegawa & Ogata, 2002). Particularly, in addition to childhood education and child care, great importance has been paid towards providing special support for children with special needs, parent support in child nurturing and cooperation with elementary schools. Thus, those involved in child care are recognized to assume diverse roles with an expanded scope of activities in various dimensions of child care. Based on these circumstances, the number of “child care coordinators” seems to increase as their role gains an important recognition in

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the child care business.

Recently, the term “coordinator” has been examined in various fields like education and the medical fields (Shirosaki, 2007). Moreover, a common role “adjustment” is found when roles of the coordinator presented in each theory are compared, and it is thought to be one of the key roles in the child care coordinator. On the basis of these theories, this study places a coordinator with a coordinator in various relations. So, the question of what role a child care coordinator plays in kindergarten and nursery schools becomes a matter of interest. There is no clear position referring to child care coordinators found in the present Fundamental Education Law as to how each child care coordinators in each kindergarten has been assigned when years of experience are piled up. The actual content of the activities and its scope of areas have not been clearly presented as well. In addition, there were hardly any studies in the past which analyzed the role of child care coordinator in kindergartens and nursery schools. Thus, this study aims to focus on child care coordinators in kindergartens and nursery schools to be able to clarify their actual conditions. When this point gets clarified, several suggestions about the placement of new child care coordinators in kindergartens and nursery schools in the future will be proposed.

Methodology

As a method of clarifying the actual conditions among child care coordinators, this study will be analyzing portfolios that were prepared by the child care coordinators. The reason for using these portfolios is that they contain information which can unfold the various roles and activities assumed by child care coordinators. In short, one characteristic of a portfolio is containing a wide range of information that is preserved in a single file (Glathorn, 1996, Tiemey, 1991). What is seen as necessary is that the form of portfolio is flexible enough to be transformed and contain various records that grasp actual conditions.

In addition, the arrangement of information collected by child care coordinators becomes of great importance. The present record used in the

kindergarten and the nursery school is analyzed from various viewpoints (Koyama, 2006, Kondo, 2003). However, the utilization of the portfolio in the early childhood education is hardly examined. One of the factors includes the recognition of the portfolio in Japan is low. Such a current state is based, it thinks the examination of the utilization of the portfolio in Kindergartens and Nursery Schools in Japan is great significance.

Based on the above discussion, this paper clarifies child care coordinator's actual conditions though portfolio analysis and to examine the possibility of using portfolios in Japanese kindergartens and nursery schools.

Respondent to a Survey

The training of coordinators in child care was held from November 2007 to January 2008 in Higashihiroshima City in Hiroshima Prefecture for a total of three times. In the second training, aiming to do training that bases each current circumstances, so information on each kindergartens and nursery schools where the child care coordinator is working was collected by using the portfolio.

The total participants were 17 child care coordinators with two head assistants, 11 chair persons and 4 teachers in charge. The participants had an average of 26 years working experience. Moreover, none of them had previously made a portfolio.

The author explained for about 40 minutes during the first training about the preservation method of portfolio and designing for purpose. There were about four weeks between the first and second training, so about two weeks for the making the portfolio period and one week for the collection period were set. Moreover, after the analysis, all collected portfolios were returned respectively in the second training.

Procedures in Preparing a Portfolio

In making a portfolio, a wide A4 the ring file was used to keep records of the day care information and its possible practical use. In this case, various forms of information was preserved with pictures and a special kind of paper that is able to preserve the file

(Figure 1) and other information such as small articles, other involved, etc. (Figure 2 and Figure 3).

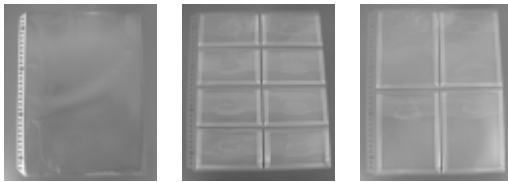


Figure. 1

Figure. 2

Figure. 3

The sheets where information was preserved was made with a record card of a selective type (Figure 4) as a method of preserving awareness of taking care of a child. Moreover, the Focused Portfolio™ that is used in the United States helps in preserving remarks (Figure 5), and these two are seen to be common procedures. In making the sheets, after day care, the card made during day care was pasted within, then the contents were reencountered and remarks were entered in a column.

The course of child care was made to be understood when taking the preservation form along with the time series and looking at it again later to better understand the course of day care. Therefore, when the sheet gets filled in with records on that particular day, another sheet will be used the next day. Furthermore, files under Figure 2 and Figure 3 where date is filled in on the surface of the file, are easy to understand when were the recordings entered and are preserved by tags attached with them.

() Day () Time
 Target ()
 1. Behavior
 () . Anxious behavior
 () . Tiouble/ fight
 () . Behavior to be Notified

 2. The Setting Factor
 () . Among Children
 () . My relation
 () . Colleague's relation
 () . Sunounding

 3. What solution do you want to do next?

Figure.4

[Remarks]

 [Remarks]

Figure.5

Portfolio Analysis and Study

In this analysis, portfolios were analyzed according to two view points. First, in the “Analysis of

preserved contents and preservation method”, the kind of information that was preserved and what kind of preservation method was employed were analyzed. Second, in the “Analysis of a questionnaire-based survey” the results of a questionnaire survey relating to this practice as executed in the second training were analyzed.

1) Analysis of Records in Clear File

In this practice, information was entered by using a clear file in addition to recording information in cards and sheets. As a result, drawings and letters (Figure 6 and Figure 7), and newspapers clippings (Figure 8), were preserved in a clear file as seen in Figure 1. In the pictures of the children, several things such as children silently arranging the toilet slippers, or those two children who usually fight but are now enjoying playing with each other, or a child skillfully using chopsticks exhibit the growth of the children as explained by a simple comment attached to the them. In the newspaper clipping on the other hand, an article about meals related to child nurturing is presented on A4 paper to disseminate information in the kindergarten area where most child care coordinators gather.



Figure. 6



Figure. 7



Figure. 8

In Figure 9 and Figure 10, fallen leaves or nuts picked by children on the way to school were also preserved in the clear files. Also, letters and pictures taken by the children were also preserved in the clear file as shown in Figure 11. These examples show the various ways used by the child care coordinators in preserving information about the children.



Figure. 9



Figure.10



Figure.11

Writing a date and a simple comment and preserving information on sheets are some of the trends seen in the preservation of information in a clear file. Thus, it is demonstrated here that preserving not only written records but more so, concrete things, reveal more spectacular information about the children. Moreover, looking back at the information contained in the clear files, information from various school years are also preserved so these contribute effectively to understanding the breadth of roles assumed by child care coordinators and extracting information which can be useful in the future.

2) Records and Preservation Methods Analysis

1) Analysis of Card and Sheet Records

Four kinds of contents were seen in the card records such as “Child's Situation”, “Other Child Care People's Appearance”, “Child Support”, and “Special Support”.

i) Child's Situation

In “Child's Situation”, three tendencies are seen, such as the record concerning child's appearance was seen through an objective perspective, a new child side was noticed, and the child's growths were seen.

First, child's appearance was seen through an objective perspective was the description of child's appearance is done from the outside of the class (Entry 1).

Entry 1 ... On the way home, child (A) was heard to have said about snack time “It tastes awful, I can't eat this”. It might have been impulsively said but I want to ask how does he feel about what he said and I want to ask him to think like an adult (excerpted from remarks).

Next, about a new child side's record was taken from two viewpoints like child's good point and the bad point (Entry 2).

Entry 2 ... Child (B) who is violent when playing with a friend suddenly would like to eat. He was watching and waiting beside the slide as the pork and miso soup were being prepared while talking to the child care teachers. Worried about the vegetable, meat and oil worry, “What what?” was heard indicating a dangerous “Fire”. Child (B) still

follows what the teacher says (excerpt from remarks).

Finally, the description about child's growth that caught the child's changes (Entry 3), and it was recorded of the individual child's growth.

Entry 3 ... Two children (C&D) who were both just about 2 years old came to the hand wash station. Child (C) who was able to turn the faucet since autumn did it for Child (D). Then, both of them became able to open the faucet and wash their hands and do it for their friends (excerpt from remarks).

In the “Child Situation” contents, it is common to look at the records of the child not only in a specific school year but in the wider range. It can then be said that the breadth of activities of coordinators in the entire kindergartens suggest that the roles they assume exceed the frame of the school year.

ii) Other Childcare People's Appearance

Next, the recordings on “Other Pre-school Teacher's Situation”, show three tendencies such as the leadership side, supportive side, and receptive side.

First, the leadership side was seen in the records to request improvement (Entry 4) and the advice of other pre-school teachers was seen to be necessary.

Entry 4 ... When building blocks and books have been scattered in the playing space and children hit toys, recognizing the danger if children fall down, a corner space has been thought of. Also, I want to talk to my fellow pre-school teachers and examine once more the movement and positions (excerpted from remarks).

Now from the supportive side, how the head of pre-school teachers felt was recorded (Entry 5), and the records which indicate notifying other pre-school teachers seem to increase after day care.

Entry 5 ... Mother (E) said to me about teacher (F), “Don't hesitate to consult us about anything because you have been a very good nursery teacher”. I want to tell this to teacher (F) (excerpted from remarks).

Finally, in the receptive side, records indicating the need to re-evaluate oneself after seeing other pre-school teachers (Entry 6) were seen and this adoption of essential elements to oneself was also recorded.

Entry 6 ... When coming back from another room to the room where the children were already sleeping, teacher (G) enters a room telling a child. "Let's pretend as a ninja and enter because they are sleeping". The child also entered the room in tiptoe. Other people were also able to quietly enter the room. Child's learning is greatly affected by the adults in his surrounding so next time I want to remember this next time I'm going to take care of a child. (excerpted from remarks).

So the records on "Other Pre-school teachers' situation" leadership and supportive coordinators provide information to other pre-school teachers while the information provided by coordinators from the receptive side was also recorded. Therefore, coordinators, by gathering information and at the same time sending information can be said to and assume a leading standpoint in the kindergartens.

iii) Child Support

Next, there were two trends of giving importance to support towards mothers on the nature of the child were seen (Entry 7)

Entry 7 ... Child (H) is untidy comes to school with his dirt around his mouth and hands and he has an unpleasant smell. His skin is also dirt and his face seems not washed. I want to do parent support and at the same time observe (excerpted from remarks).

After 12 days ... Child (H) still comes to school untidy. But I can't continue telling her mother to do something about it. I should think of an action for the mother as well then.

As well as getting for support from the mother (Entry 8) were seen and recorded under "Parental Support".

Entry 8 ... Is it good to notice a tired expression in

mother (I)'s face. (The author summarized the content of the card). Even if her youngest child is crying, she wouldn't go to her side immediately. And it doesn't even hold it when it cries out loud. Hearing her child cries seem to make her mentally and physically exhausted. (excerpted from remarks). In the Parent Support, records of the Child's Situation show a breadth of roles assumed by the child care coordinator. Also, in the Parental Support records, a trend to do the same record again later that day shows the flow of the support method.

iv) Special Support

Lastly, two trends were identified in the records in "Special Support". One is the cooperation between organization in the kindergarten and specialized agencies and the other is mother support. The cooperation between organization in the kindergarten and specialized agencies is important in organizing case meetings and conferences. Also, the trend of recording the observations on the same person at the later part of the day was seen not only in the records under "Special Support" but in "Parental Support" as well. For example, the need for cooperation with specialized agencies is seen in Entry 9 where a next step is necessary six days after for child (J).

Entry 9 ... Child (J) cannot move at the same time with everyone. When its attention is called, it starts to lose his temper. It seems like a next step is necessary in the future. (The author summarized the content of the card).

After 6 days ... It moves about on the stage of the symposium and everyone cannot act. When do the geostationary of movement, it roars for loudly (excerpted from remarks).

Next, the relations assumed (Entry 10) and the changes within the mother (Entry 11) are some of the information contained in the records under mother support.

Entry 10 ... The consultation of the child was received from mother (K). It reflects very much why it was not possible to notice because the content is heard. Mother's uneasy feelings are started becoming today, too and it scolds (excerpted from

remarks).

Entry 11 ... How it cost it now recently came to be spoken to mother (L) who had child with special needs very ardently. It came to be able to be opposite to the child, and came for the smile to be shown by the child and mother. I was surprised for the understanding of surrounding one and the family to have changed mother into here (excerpted from remarks).

Thus, it can be said that the child care coordinator played a key role inside the kindergarten in cooperating with specialized agencies and providing parent support in case of problems concerning the child.

II) Analysis by QQuestionnaire-Based Survey

In this section, the question of how child care coordinators recognizes portfolio making is explored. A questionnaire-based survey was administered to the 17 child care coordinators who had made a portfolio during the second training.

The questionnaire is held in the context of two viewpoints towards portfolio, one is from the 'Viewpoint concerning the effect of the portfolio making' and the other is the 'Viewpoint concerning the possibility of utilizing portfolio'. In the viewpoint concerning the effect, the child care coordinators were asked about how they feel on making a portfolio. Further, from the viewpoint concerning the possible usefulness of portfolios, they were asked if it would be possible to use portfolio. The answer must be either Yes or No.

i) Analysis of view point concerning effect

In "Viewpoint concerning the effect of the portfolio making", the effect of portfolio on child care was asked. First, the respondents agreed that portfolio is useful in "tracing" the condition of a person's ability in child care. Next, concerning viewpoints on portfolio, 94% (Figure 12) of the respondents answered that they viewpoints had changed from before, 82% (Figure 13) said that they noticed several trends and 88% (Figure 14) said that they noticed some problems. What these results demonstrate is that using portfolio is a way of tracing and unders

tanding viewpoints towards child care and that it helps in making information on child care last a long time.

ii) Analysis of View Point Concerning Possible Use of Portfolio

In "Analysis of the viewpoint concerning the possible use of portfolio", the method of using the portfolio was asked. First, all the respondents recognize the use of portfolio in research and conference in sharing information. In addition, when discussing its usefulness with other pre-school teachers, they mutually agree on that portfolios are useful in sharing information that is helpful in child care. In fact, 94% of the respondents recognized the usefulness of portfolio and think of using it in the present in addition with other records (Figure 15). Thus, a construction of a new record form becomes a matter of interest for further research on portfolios in the future.

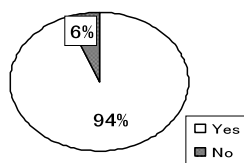


Figure.12

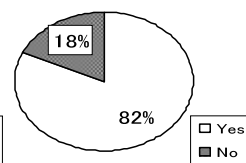


Figure.13

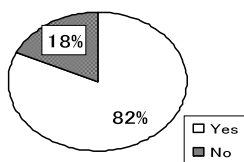


Figure.14

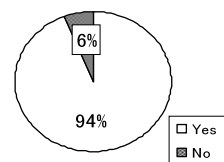


Figure.15

Conclusion

This research aimed to clarify the working conditions amongst child care coordinators through their portfolios and to discuss the possibility of using portfolios among child care coordinators. An analysis of the portfolios used by child care coordinators revealed the various roles or relations that they assume in child care such as guiding, advising, child-nurturing support and special support towards the child. In other words, child care coordinator is requested the role similar to the special support coordinator in the scene like child-nurturing support and other teacher's support. Especially, the key role that they play inside and outside the kindergarten was noted such as in cooperation with specialized

agencies in organizing case meetings and conference.

Moreover, based on this analysis, a Coordinator's Relations Model (Figure 16) was constructed to illustrate the variety of roles and relations that they assume in child care. First, roles in support, guidance, and advice, are being requested from each relation existing among and between the pre-school teachers, the child, and the parent as indicated by the black arrows. In addition, the direction of new relations is shown by the white arrows pulling outside the coordinator circle. Then, the role going beyond outside the school is indicated by the thick white arrow towards connecting the kindergarten with specialized agencies in organizing case meetings and conferences. The black dotted line arrows refer to the contribution of portfolio in preserving and arranging information as shown in a hexagon shape below in Figure 16.

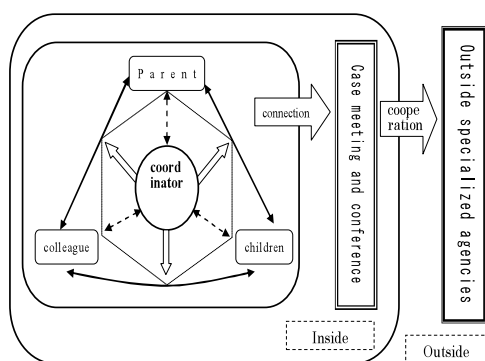


Figure.16 Coordinator's Relation Model

As discussed above, various relations in addition to the role as the special support coordinator are being requested from the child care coordinator and portfolios can possibly used to understand the arrangement and the situation from those relations. This claim is supported by the results of a survey administered among child care coordinators as well. The possible use of portfolio as a method in sharing and extracting information will be further examined in the future.

Finally, the actual conditions among child care coordinators were clarified and various relations were also examined. It thinks this research for the meaning to exist in the point to have shown that the

special support coordinator played the role as the child care coordinator. In the process, the worries of child care coordinators and the conflicts among relations were also preserved in the portfolio. Consequently, the need for an examination of the support system to child care coordinators is seen to be important in the future. In so doing, it is necessary to take cognizance of the request of coordination in various scenes shown by this research in addition to the role as the special support coordinator. Further, assuming a leading standpoint and winning support in each kindergarten is speculated as one of the present difficulties that child care coordinators face. Thus, knowing the important roles of child care coordinators play, a construction of a support system is but necessary to be pursued in the future.

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Additional Statement

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