

Expression and Arts Activities in Early Childhood Education

— Based on Revision of Guidelines
for Kindergarten Education —

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Introduction

The first time in twenty-five years, the Kindergarten Educational Guidelines have been revised in March, 1989, and also Day Nursery Educational Guidelines have been revised in 1990. I will compare the content “Music and Rhythm” in old Guidelines and “Expression (Music)” in new Guidelines and pick up some points and study about the arts education.

I: Revision of Guidelines for Kindergarten Education

1. Revision of Guidelines for Kindergarten Education

At the beginning they insist that teachers help children grow through positive contact with their environments. Then they show three basic fundamentals of the kindergarten education as follows⁽¹⁾:

- (1) Providing the living proper to the early childhood.
- (2) Achievement of the aims under a comprehensive guidance through plays.
- (3) Guidance corresponding to individual development of children.

Based upon these fundamentals, they offer fifteen aims expecting children to develop their feeling, will and attitude throughout the kindergarten education and forty-seven contents of activities for children to perform⁽²⁾.

Different from the former Guidelines which divided children's activities into six fields such as “health”, “society”, “nature”, “language”, “music and rhythm” and “art and craft”, the new Guidelines divided them into five, standing upon the side of kindergarteners, so as to correct the teachers' tendency to make kindergarten activities preparatory to some of the subjects to be studied at elementary school.

New five fields are as follow:

- (1) *Health* dealing with physical and mental health—building up the basic habits and

manners for healthy and secure life and cultivating sound mind and body.

- (2) *Human relations* dealing with relations between people—fostering the love for and the sense of reliance in other people and cultivating the attitude of independence and cooperation and the germ of morality.
- (3) *Environment* dealing with the interest and concern with a close environment—arousing the interest in phenomena around children like nature and society and cultivating the faculty to having to do with and the germ of the sense of feeling and thinking.
- (4) *Language* dealing with acquisition of language—developing the interest and concern with language and cultivating the sense of language.
- (5) *Expressions* dealing with sensitivity and expressions—nurturing sensitivity and creativity through various expressive experiences.

This change not only shows the fact that the number of the field has diminished but also that the understanding of the growth and development of children has deepened: Children receive various kinds of stimuli from their environments and develop interrelating abilities repeating the process of spontaneous reacting to them.

Kindergarten teachers should keep these aims and contents in mind when they educate children. A teacher her/himself is one of the important factors forming environments and takes an important role to create proper surroundings with children.

2. Comparison of the Aims and the Contents in Music Education Between the Old and New Guidelines for Kindergarten Education

(A) Difference of the aims between the old and new Guidelines for kindergarten education

“Music and Rhythm” in the old Guidelines

- (1) Experiencing the joy of expression by singing and playing the musical instrument
- (2) Enjoying free musical movement and experiencing the joy of expression
- (3) Listening to and being interested in music
- (4) Trying to express what are felt and thought with sound and movement

“Expression” in the new Guidelines

- (1) Developing sensitivity to what is beautiful
- (2) Trying to express what are felt and thought in different ways
- (3) Exercising imagination in life and enjoying expressing in various ways

It is apparent that in “Expression” the priority is given to cultivating sensitivity and developing the will and attitude to express, while in “Music and Rhythm” it was given to experiencing the joy of expressing. The introduction of the new conception of “cultivating sensitivity” seems to be due to the fact that people think it important to appreciate sensitivity to develop humanity.

(B) Difference of the contents between the old and new Guidelines for kindergarten education

“Music and Rhythm” in the old Guidelines

- (1) Singing in a natural voice and with clear words and correct tune and rhythm
- (2) Playing the castanets, tambourin and other musical instruments
- (3) Playing the musical instruments with care to tempi and dynamics of music
- (4) Enjoying playing the musical instruments in company with other children

“Expression” in the new Guidelines

- (1) Finding and enjoying different and various sounds, colors, shapes, feels, movements, etc. in everyday life.
- (2) Experiencing what is beautiful and moving and developing imagination in everyday life.
- (3) Experiencing the joy of sharing impressions with others
- (4) Expressing what are thought and felt with sound, movement and art and craft
- (5) Using and applying various materials
- (6) Listening to music and enjoying singing and playing the simple rhythmic instruments
- (7) Enjoying painting and handcrafting, and using what are made for play and decoration
- (8) Expressing and playing what are imagined with movement and words

These aims of the new Guidelines intend to cultivate sensitivity of children and develop their will and attitude that they will learn by experiences in the preschool period⁽³⁾. All of eight contents are interrelated to children’s music activities, especially (1) and (6) seem to have a close relation with music. However, we don’t find any clear intention of teaching the basic skills of music, for example, pitch of singing or clapping the hands in time to the music, or ways of playing musical instruments, as was shown in the “music and rhythm” of the old Guidelines. The new Guidelines seem to suggest that teachers themselves should choose and practice music activities, taking into account the proper stage of growth of individual children and basic skills.

The goal of this new Guidelines is to develop all-round personality of children. That is to say, at the basis of these aims and contents lies the conception that it is important to regard children as whole personality and make them express what they think and feel according to the stage of growth. Having the future growth of children in mind teachers should help them experience things comprehensively that are fundamental for them. The field of “Expression” in the new Guidelines does not separate children’s activities from each other, but try to make children experience activities comprehensively in the framework of “Expression activities”. Accordingly, teachers are required to find out the germs of expression in children and look for the way to develop them. Teachers should practice kindergarten education toward definite aims. Therefore, it may be said that the new “Expression” furnishes teachers with greater opportunities to make the most of their individuality and ability.

A questionnaire conducted on twenty-nine teachers of kindergarten out of ninety-nine teachers whom had been taught for over seven years, and also eighteen teachers of day

nursery out of thirty-three teachers whom had been taught for over five years before new Guidelines publishing to know whether the aims and contents of the new Guidelines have brought on a change in the consciousness of them shows that 8.5 per cent don't think so at all, 42.67 per cent don't think so much, 31.2 per cent admit a small change, 14.9 per cent admit a change and 2.1 per cent admit a big change, out of forty-seven who answered it.

The reasons they adduce are (1) that they feel free from a kind of restraint that they should teach, (2) that they can enjoy music with children rather than teach them how to express music, (3) that they can play music with children rather than make them play music, (4) that children can express freely what they want, (5) that they have become able to grasp expressive activities comprehensively and (6) that they don't teach but help children learn how to express what they want with their interest for a start. Some answerers say that they have been practicing the same idea of the new Guidelines since before that.

II: Tendency of Music Education in Kindergarten

(1) The Real Situation and the Problems of Music Education in Kindergarten

We don't neglect a tendency of intention that many music education in kindergarten must aim to achieve the level as high as the one of professionals. We don't find there any consideration that teachers should leave children as they are and recognize their tune value. The notion that children must be able to express the same way as adults has been deeply rooted at the bottom of consciousness of teachers. They are apt to neglect children's natural desire to play and try to guide them into the direction they expect. There is a case shown in the paper, "Studies of Human Education through Music Education at Kindergarten I" ⁽⁴⁾. It is the follow-up survey on what children have received from the practice of the marching band with fifes and drums and what influence it had on their character several years after they left kindergarten. The objects of the marching band were to develop musical ability, to stimulate interest to music and to cultivate aesthetic sentiments of children, 42.6 per cent of the children questioned say that it was hard. Out of them 52.6 per cent boys and 73.6 per cent girls admit they enjoyed it looking back several years later. The teachers who conducted the questionnaire concluded that the children have accepted the practice because they achieved the expected result in spite of the hard practice. However, is it appropriate to conclude this way? Is it more important for teachers to think of and reflect the hard time children had during the practice than to take it successful simply judging from what children have recollected?

Here is an example of kindergarten where eurhythmics is used in children's education. Rhythmic activity shows that children act like an animal all at once when the teacher calls out, "Let us become an animal." That means the teacher forces them to follow what he/she directs. The bodily reaction to music is aroused by the unique sentiments and ideas children entertain toward synthetic sound caused by rhythm, pitch, melody, tone color,

dynamics and other factors of music. It is natural that children have different sentiments and different ways of expression from each other. Children react because sound impresses them, not because they understand the meaning of what teacher instructs. We should know these two are quite different from each other. That is to say, children move according to the instructions by a teacher from that they move naturally stimulated by sound given by the teacher. We cannot expect the progress of bodily expression activities of children unless we notice and understand well this fundamental differences.

Next we look at what way of music is used in daily kindergarten education. Irrespective of private, public or national kindergarten, songs are sung as the means to finish activities. For example, as the signal to start class, put away toys, line up, eat lunch or snack, go home, etc.. It seems that they are sung not to enjoy. Songs which are related to the events of the kindergarten or the season are usually chosen. Not only songs but the instrumental ensembles are practiced as if assigned tasks to be fulfilled. It seems that teachers neither think of what individual children like to express and perform nor have any intention to take them into consideration, but that they think they have to inculcate music upon children.

Teachers seem to be imbued with the idea that they have to have children do or teach them something and not to be able to afford to understand what children want to do. Such a tendency seems to be due to the misunderstanding that the kindergarten education is the preparatory stage to primary school education.

On the other hand, in many of the national and public kindergartens the guiding idea of which is main activity is play freely (Jiyu-Hoiku), teachers have regard to children's spontaneity in singing activities, taking up songs children sing to themselves incidentally while they are playing or doing something or communing with nature in and out of the kindergarten. Then is this the way sufficient enough to develop children's sensitivity? Is not it necessary to find other ways to fill up children's artistic activities without neglecting the spontaneity of children?

Let us examine the singing activities of children from another aspect. There is a wrong view that it is an ideal way of music expression for children demonstrate voluntarily melody, rhythm and sound. We often see children singing the way as if shouting at the top of their voice. We cannot accept that as music at all. We do not find them enjoying music or mental interchange with friends or cyclic interchange between their internal and external mentalities or exhalation of their whole energy excited with beautiful melody and rhythm. Such a situation may be ascribed to how teachers deal with music activity of children. It is said teachers are not qualified to educate children if they cannot deal with the situation when needed. The ability and the leadership of teachers as important guide of musical activities should be questioned.

(2) From Voluntary Demonstration to Expression Activities

Here is an example of children whose plays to look for sound around them developed in-

to a performance with musical instruments with the help of a teacher having an aptitude for child care. One day a child uttered at lunch time that he found the sound which occurred in his mouth interesting when he bit an apple. His remark brought about several reactions among other children. They compared sounds and then starting with this they tried to produce different sounds banging and rubbing things near at hand. Their play, then, developed into an activity called "musical band play"⁽⁵⁾.

Another example is that the words children uttered by chance developed into a musical melody: When children were roasting sweet potatoes in burning collected fallen leaves, several children of aged four were calling out, "Be roasted quick, be roasted quick." Their teacher joined them and shouted with melody, "What shall we do with them when roasted?" Children returned words with melody as well, "We'll snap you up." Then they sang in chorus, "Be roasted quick, be roasted quick. Don't smoke too much." Joy of singing seemed to be overflowing them⁽⁶⁾.

The third example is as follows⁽⁷⁾: Children were playing with the percussion instruments. Then they began to try them one after another to distinguish tone quality, tone color and dynamics. One of them conducted the instant band and the rest started to play. The other children who did not join the band began to play a cassette of TV animation and the band corresponded it. Meanwhile another group of children started to dance on the stage what they had presented at the playing party. Both the children who played the percussion instruments and the others who danced enjoyed music and rhythm as much as they liked. There was no intervention of a teacher. Children aged four managed it all by themselves. The happy experiences they had had before seemed to come to flower.

In the creative process of the dance, both the children and the teacher had listened to music together very often. The teacher had given children chances to demonstrate what they had liked, and she had selected basic patterns among from them and to show them back. Children had copied or changed them to conform to their own images. In this process she had not forced them to follow her, but they had cooperated to create a work.

These cases show that naive manifestation of the feeling by children was raised to a definite expression with the help of the teachers.

To develop children's ability of expression, following seems to be first of all, children participate voluntarily in some kind of activity which interests them, because any child has a desire to express him/herself. Teachers should try to find any change in the ways children are playing and should not miss any moment in which they take interest to develop them into expression activities. The feeling of satisfaction and accomplishment which may come from the active participation produces something to motivate them to creative activities which will develop them.

III: *For Better Expression Activities*

(1) To Advance Singing Activities

Most important activities of expression in children are singing and movement. Children's singing and moving activities are appeared in their action, connected with each other. That is to say, "While singing, body is moving naturally and simultaneously." On the basis of the children's music activities, there should be the feeling to be cheerfull, and then children are really stung with desire to move, to sing and to play the percussion instruments.

Here are things to be noted by teachers of kindergartens and nursery schools on condition that both children and teachers try to continue to sing songs children like beautifully altogether. Singing voice we feel beautiful is not a shout. Melodies agreeable to the ear are produced by reiterating singing activities in a class and hearing a lot of good music as well.

First we think about the guiding method of singing for children as follow: (1) What is influential in learning a song is the fact how much the first song a child hears interests him. (2) Seeing his friends or teacher singing songs and getting encouraged by teacher are important. (3) Activities using muscular feeling such as playing with hands or rhythmic movements and visual images are contributive. (4) Spending enough time to become good at singing songs and make them approach to perfection is needed. (5) It is necessary to memorize words and hold the impression of them to sing songs better. (6) Children's initiative is more favorable than teacher's lead⁽⁸⁾⁽⁹⁾. (7) Teachers have to be very attentive to the voice of each child and know the singing range of them. Even in the case of children's singing activities, the quality of voice and the changing point of it should be taken into account to sing songs good enough to be heard beautiful. (8) The form of singing must be considered. Starting from solo, it should be developed into duet, trio and . . . into a small group, or to follow the order conversely. (9) By changing the form in such ways as that teachers sing to children and vice versa, or they sing altogether, children will acquire the habit of listening to other people. Children who have such a varaiety of forms will be more interested in their own voice and try to sing more beautifully.

(2) The Quality of Kindergarten Teachers

Kindergarten teachers must know what children can do or cannot do according to their stage of growth and be able to evaluate what they express. Isn't it forgotten that children actively concern themselves with environments and grow up? And isn't it also forgotten that teachers appreciate what individual children think and feel, and help them to express? What we worry about most is that teachers look over the chance to take for children's "Now and Here", because teachers think they have to have children demonstrate something or they like without offering any support nor having any vision of their expression activities. Education will be meaningless if teachers leave children to themselves to their own devices, with respect to their natural expression and without proper help and

guidance.

When teachers join children in deciding what to do at classroom, of the teachers' sense and intelligence are influential. Suitable guidance and assistance, the selection of the level of expression and the attitude of mind to share music with children, all these things have to do with the personality of teachers. Therefore, it is no exaggeration to say that all that is qualitatively important in kindergarten education are dependent on teachers.

Both music and art are artistic activities appealing to one's sensitivity, but they demand intelligence as well. Simple reaction to music and rhythm doesn't lead to a higher level of expression. Whether it is complex or simple, a piece of music is composed of a lot of factors such as melody, rhythm, dynamics, tone color, etc.. We feel it beautiful only when it observes definite forms of music, for example, moving melodies up or down, connection of phrases, canon, changing dynamics, changing rhythms and sounds, slow or fast tempo, simple meters or compound meters, rhythmic patterns, keys, harmonic progression, etc.. Accordingly, when they work on the teaching materials, kindergarten teachers are required to take the stage of growth of children into consideration and be equipped with faculties of analyzing musical pieces.

What is cultivated in education is all the humanistic abilities through the medium of knowledge. That means in artistic activities it is impossible to fulfill the inherent function of art if we are lacking in the abilities of understanding, thinking and judging⁽¹⁰⁾. Therefore, kindergarten teachers have to cultivate the sensitivity and the abilities of analyzing and understanding in terms of music to become specialized. They always have to try to improve their own intelligence and sensitivity and build up humanity.

Conclusion

As we have seen, we admit it is the quality of teachers that we have to care most about in kindergarten education. Important roles are imposed upon kindergarten teachers, such as finding the germs of the will of expressions, helping them develop, arranging the environments for children to express what they think and feel, and developing their individual interests into the theme of activities for the whole class. The significance of expression activities in kindergarten education lies in that teachers lead children, who simply enjoy expression what they like, to be able to give an artistic expression to it. We have to establish a new method of guidance in line with the ideas of the new Guidelines for Kindergarten Education.

Notes

- (1) The Ministry of Education, *Guidelines for Kindergarten Education, A Supplement*. (Tokyo: Frebelkan. 1989). 175.
- (2) Ibid. 176.
- (3) Shoko Ohhata, *Hoiku-Naiyo Ongaku Hyogen* (Nurturing-Contents in Kindergarten Music Expression),

- (Tokyo: Kenpaku-sha. 1991). 19.
- (4) Atsuko Saito, Hideki Ogisu & Michiko Saito, "Yochien ni okeru Ongaku-Kyoiku wo tositeno Ningen-Kyoiku no Kenkyu I"
(A Study of Human Education through the Music Education in Kindergarten I) *Bulletin of the Forty-first Conference of Japan Society of Research Early Childhood Care and Education, No. 361*. (Tokyo: Nihon-Hoiku-Gakkai. 1988). 722.
- (5) Fumiko Hiraiwa, "Ongaku wa Kodomo no Seikatu no Nan-daro?" (What is Music on Children's Life?). *Study of Music Education Quarterly 54*. (Tokyo: Ongaku no Tomo-sha, 1988). 23-30.
- (6) Ibid.
- (7) Kimie Mori, "Yonenki ni okeru Ongaku-Gakushu no Arikata, Sosaku-Katsudo wo Chusin ni", (A Study of Music Activities in Early Childhood — Through the Creative Activities —). *Bulletin of Faculty of Education, Ehime University, Vol. 39-1* (Ehime: 1992). 80.
- (8) Satoko Nakanishi. "Yoji no Uta no Shutoku-Katei ni kansuru Bunseki-Kenkyu", (A Study of Analysis for Process of Acquisition in Singing Ability). *Bulletin of Faculty of Education, Mie University, Vol. 42*. (Mie: 1991). 208-209.
- (9) Satoko Nakanishi. "Yoji no Uta no Shutoku-Katei ni kansuru Bunseki-Kenkyu 2", (A Study of Analysis for Process of Acquisition in Singing Ability 2). *Bulletin of Faculty of Education, Mie University, Vol. 43*. (Mie: 1992). 164.
- (10) Toshio Sennari. "Ongaku-Kyoiku to Chisei oyobi Kansei", (Music Education and Intelligence and Sensitivity). *Study of Music Education Quarterly 43*. (Tokyo: Ongaku no Tomo-sha, 1985). 9-10.