

# Supporting Early Childhood Education in Developing Countries

There is a tendency in developing countries to turn their focus to pre-primary education when primary school education has become widespread to a certain degree. Until then, early childhood education was for children of the privileged classes, but recently, there are more and improved educational facilities for the pre-primary education of children of the common classes and the poor. It is believed that what lies behind this phenomenon is the increased global interest in early childhood education, and the need for literacy education, which is a pressing challenge for developing countries.

At the World Education Forum held in Senegal in 2000, one of the concrete objectives presented in the Dakar Framework for Action was “the expansion and improvement of pre-primary education.” A global current was presented in support of the pre-primary education of developing countries, and a pledge was made for industrialized and developing countries to take action together. While Japan’s support for the early childhood education in developing countries has been carried out little by little in past years, there will be increased calls for Japanese support into the future.

As mentioned above, developing countries are increasingly striving to make early childhood education available to more children, with a heightened sense of need to improve the content and methods. In response, Japanese aid organizations with a focus on early childhood education have reinvigorated their activities, while requests for early childhood education support from developing countries to organizations such as the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers increases yearly.

In Parts 1 and 2, I introduced the theoretical and practical aspects of Japanese early childhood care and education, and described how the information can be interpreted and utilized in the actual early childhood care and education setting. Here We will touch upon the considerations and attitude expected of the provider of support, describe the content of the early childhood education support from the perspective of the support provided so far (experiences of Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers and other support organizations), and will present these matters as the information available at this point in time.

## 1 Attitude and considerations expected of early childhood education supporters

- The supporter should take in the circumstances surrounding early childhood education in developing countries, and strive for understanding through a flexible approach.
- The supporter should never forget that he or she has come here of his or her own free will.
- The supporter should understand the country’s educational policies and social situation, and respect its views on education and child-rearing.
- The supporter should not compare and criticize the country’s views and methods against their Japanese

counterparts. There should be opportunities for sharing of ideas.

- The supporter should not impose the Japanese way of doing things, instead observing what the other party is doing, and maximizing on their strengths to foster autonomy.
- Waiting too much for the other party's autonomy, and presenting nothing, may make the supporter seem inept. The supporter should present effective content upon request.
- Through actually observing, or listening, or moving the body, the supporter should start from content that can be understood in concrete terms, and activities that are useful in actual practice.
- The supporter should maximize on his or her experience in early childhood care and education to offer early childhood care and education methods that are suited to the circumstances and views of the local community.
- The supporter should devise teaching methods that are appropriate for the children in that country, and convey the significance of these methods while gaining the approval of the other party.

## **2 Content provided through early childhood education support**

- Human development in developing countries: The supporter actually provides early childhood care and education, shows the results, and nurtures small children that are healthy and sound.
- Assisting the growth of local teachers: The supporter practices together with the local teachers, and conveys teaching methods and techniques.
- Providing visiting guidance to the local communities: The supporter provides advice and guidance for the local early childhood care and education setting, and assists in the local community's efforts at coordination and collaboration.
- Hosting of lectures: Topics may include early childhood care and education content (making educational materials, early childhood care and education practice, teaching methods for babies and small children), sanitation, nutrition, safety, lifestyle improvement, and childrearing in the home.
- Support for facilities and equipment: The supporter provides advice and cooperation in the installation, upgrading, and maintenance of the building, play tool, and health facilities.
- Cooperation and coordination with the teachers in developing countries: The supporter participates in training and professional development courses for active teachers, or in exhibitions.
- Fostering of teachers: The supporter teaches in teacher-training schools to support the fostering of teachers and research in early childhood care and education.
- Operation of kindergartens and daycare centers: The supporter provides advice and assistance in regards to cooperating in coordination with the children's guardians.
- Coordination and cooperation with the community and government bodies: The supporter deepens understanding for early childhood education by building a trust relationship through such means as participating in local cultural projects or events.

- Training in Japan: The supporter provides assistance for the teachers in developing countries to come and train in Japan.
- Deepening understanding for supporting developing countries, and establishing a system of support: The supporter builds a network in contact and collaboration with kindergarten personnel and supporters in Japan.

### **3 The circumstances around early childhood care and education in developing countries and challenges for providing support**

The early childhood education in developing countries has a short history, and the reality is that there are many points that require further development. We will mention three points that require particular support.

- Generally speaking, there are almost no teacher-training schools for early childhood care and education teachers, or there are few teachers with early childhood care and education experience. For this reason, many teachers are forced into early childhood care and education settings without the opportunity to receive adequate training. There is a need for lecturers to be dispatched to teacher-training schools, and support provided to upgrade teacher-training programs.
- In many cases, there is a lack of knowledge about young children's development and understanding of appropriate teaching methods. There is room for improvement, including situations where the instruction is given in primary-school classroom style, or there are too many children per teacher, or the teacher takes the lead unilaterally. It is critically important to work together with the people in developing countries to improve the buildings, facilities, and equipment, resolve the lack of educational materials, and develop teaching methods that are suited to small children's development.
- Because of the low adult literacy rate in many developing countries, there is a strong emphasis on the "reading, writing, and counting" literacy in early childhood. In response to such tasks, the early childhood education support from Japan needs to cooperate with the people in developing countries to engage in developing teaching methods and materials for "literacy education."



## 4 Actual situations of early childhood care and educational content and teaching methods

We will introduce, from practical examples up to the present, what kinds of support we can provide for the children and teachers in developing countries. I believe it is possible to discern how the Japanese views and innovations regarding early childhood education have been put to use, how seriously the teachers in the developing countries have absorbed the concepts and practicalities of early childhood education, how enthusiastically these teachers are growing, and how they are giving thought to improving the early childhood education in their country.

### (1) Methods and forms of teaching

In developing countries, there is not much consideration for methods of teaching that are appropriate for early childhood. Rather, the situation is often one in which the children are educated strictly, in a classroom lecture format. It is conceivable that the local teachers need to be presented with methods of teaching that are appropriate for early childhood, and ways of teaching that make learning interesting and fun. The supporter needs to appeal to the teachers' understanding by capturing the scene of children learning with enthusiasm and interest. The support should be such that allows the teachers themselves to be creative and motivated.



The teacher writes English words, numbers, calculations etc. on the blackboard, and children are required to copy them down or recite them in unison. This kind of teaching method is widespread and considered the norm.

A semicircle desk was brought in, allowing the teacher to face the children and observe each child while teaching.

The cost of the desk was covered by a gift from a Japanese group supportive of early childhood education.





In this small kindergarten, which is private preschool-type, one teacher takes care of all ten or so children. We tried arranging the desks in a U-shape, so that the teacher could face the children and give each child fine-tuned attention.

The letters on the blackboard, and the thick rod (for pointing), stand out.

When the teacher always uses a loud voice to teach, the children bow to authority, but do not seem to develop the attitude for concentrating.

The children gather together on the mat, where they play with words and numbers, and enjoy riddles, while learning to listen to what the teacher is saying.



A suggestion was made to the local teacher to take advantage of the shade in the morning, while it was still cool, for read-aloud of picture books and picture-story shows.

Later, the teacher began to make hand-made books to read aloud.



## (2) Playground, play tool, and play



Old tires are used effectively in every developing country.

In this grassy playground, the tires are half-buried in the ground.

Teachers and guardians worked together to condition the playground so that children could play freely in bare feet.

Although there is a good, solid sandbox, it was not used very much up to now. Only recently, the children began to play together using water. We look forward to more active sand play.



The dry dirt playground is dusty when the sun shines, and extremely muddy when it rains.

To keep out the heat, the windows and doors are made small in this kindergarten building made of stacked concrete blocks.

There is a full range of play tool, including tool made of old tires, a slide, and swings.

It is worrying to see the tire hanging from the worn rope.



The kindergarten building has large openings and no door, to allow the sea breeze to blow right through.

There are trees in the playground that offer shade.

The old tire swing needs attention; its support and ropes are too slender.

The sturdy slide in the foreground is a gift from Japan.

In this kindergarten, winter temperatures dip as low as minus 30 degrees. In summer, the children spend as much time in the sun as possible without their clothes on, to improve their health.



The children love this see-saw. They call out to each other and relate with one another naturally as they play.



### **(3) Play tool and games that take advantage of natural objects**



The low fork in the branches of this tree makes it ideal for climbing and hanging down from.

The green shade that is always available in the playground is a natural place for children to gather and play.

The ground was dug and tires were placed, to plant seedlings about one meter in height.

In countries with high temperatures and humidity, it will take only two or three years for them to spread their roots and grow into sturdy trees.

This is a good example of systematic planning of a playground.



A rich, welcoming natural environment is near at hand.

The children play with grass and wild flowers.

There is a pond beyond the woods, where children can enjoy swimming and catching fish.



The children spontaneously started playing with mud in the playground. They also use flowers and leaves. The teacher also plays together with the children. This teacher received about a year of training in Japan.



Japanese supporters made a bower and a log balance beam out of the abundantly available local timber. Although the creations looked very pleasing, they rotted away in just two years because no preservatives were used. The local people seem to make play tool out of metal and concrete. That is more practical in countries with severe changes in climate.

Empty coconut shells can be used for many purposes. On sports festival, clogs made of coconut shells were used in a race.



#### (4) Materials for teaching letters and numbers

Reading, writing, and counting numbers are considered necessary components of literacy education for early childhood. However, the reality consists of having children mechanically copy down letters written on the blackboard, or do calculations, or use drills, without any further creativity.

In providing support for early childhood education, it is necessary to be active in presenting teaching methods that are suitable for small children. Materials also need to be created, such as letter charts with English and the local language, as well as flash cards with letters and words. It is important to support the creation of teaching materials that maximize on the ideas and drawings of the local teachers.



Numerals and real numbers (pictures of animals corresponding to the numeral), how to read numbers, number cards, picture books, and puzzles are placed in a highly visible location for the children.

A supporter on a guidance visit demonstrates a method of learning letters and numbers in a song in front of the children.

Guidance visits are effective for conveying “teaching methods that are suitable for small children” to the local teachers.



Pieces of wood are used as dominos. The local teachers now make teaching materials out of a variety of things they have brought in from the community.

The circle, triangle, and square shapes are arranged for shape recognition. Since there is no paper, the activity is done on the floor.



Ringtoss and number games are there for the children to play with. Supporter and local teachers worked together to create these.

The children become familiar with numbers as they play a game of fishing for numbers.



Developing countries have just begun to publish picture books by local authors and illustrators. However, few kindergartens and households can afford them.

Therefore, Japanese support groups have made a "picture book box" and lend them out in turn. In this way, picture books made by their countrymen have begun to be read in many kindergartens and households, and by many children.



## (5) Plastic arts

In developing countries, supporters are sometimes asked to teach origami. It is a good thing to accept this interest in Japanese origami, and create rapport with the local people through moving the hands and conversing together with them. However, materials from Japan, such as origami paper, are not available in sufficient quantities. Therefore, the basic premise is to use materials that are easily procured locally. It is important to prepare materials with input from local teachers, including how to find, collect, and buy the materials. Japanese arts and crafts are but an introduction, a hint. It is important to nurture teachers who can devise and create things that are suitable for the children of that country.



Local wild flowers were boiled to create locally made paint in this country where crayons and watercolors are hard to come by. The paintbrush is also hand-made, out of coconut.

Teachers devised an organizing system for materials they found themselves: scrap material and natural objects.

The teachers and children have begun to make hand-made toys out of things they find in the organized collection of objects.





Old newspapers are precious household supplies.

The supporter brought in his or her own newspaper to use as teaching material.

Teachers and children experience “playing store” for the first time.

The merchandise and wallets are hand-made. Leaves are used for money.

Goat hide is used to cover the drums.

The people of Africa have an outstanding sense of rhythm.

Gourds and empty cans were made into musical instruments.

With both newly created and traditional musical instruments, it is now even more fun to dance.



## (6) Training sessions for teachers

In training sessions for teachers, the theme and content is decided upon in consideration of what the local teachers want and need. How to conduct such sessions? First, they must be interesting and fun. Seminars are devised which allow participation and shared activity by local teachers and community members.



In countries that rely on tourism as a major industry, English is essential from a young age.

Children have fun learning English through finger rhymes in which the letters and words can be changed freely.

A training session on creating daily and weekly lesson plans.

The session is held in a relaxed atmosphere. The light-bulb mask reminds participants to “shine a light in their heads” to think.



Although paper was hard to come by in this country, the participants were taught origami to accommodate an impassioned request to learn the craft.

As a hint, the participants were informed that origami crafts could be made with materials other than paper.

Practical training session at the Training Center.

Participants seem to have enjoyed *harie* (a Japanese art form using torn pieces of paper or other materials pasted onto a large piece of paper to create a picture) more than drawing. The reason for the popularity seems to have been in the fun of collecting the materials.

The participants commented that they liked the feeling of accomplishment and success that came from using creativity and attention to detail.



An open dance class for children.

Through observing the children having fun dancing, the adults seem to have understood the importance of incorporating lively rhythms and lyrics that children can understand. Of course, Arab dance is also handed down as a cherished legacy.



Newspapers are used to make hats.

The teachers experienced the fun of playing with materials that one comes across unexpectedly in familiar surroundings.

The teachers are gradually changing and broadening their approach toward teaching materials.



Learning about exercise for children.

Everyone feels like a child again as they crawl like babies or pretend to be animals.

Side-splitting fun at this very first training session.

The supporter visited several kindergartens in turn, conducting teaching sessions, study groups, and exchanges with community guardians. In the village square, a drama is performed to inform about health and nutrition.



Teachers from developing countries participate in training sessions in Japan.

Teachers have a high level of interest in Japanese early childhood education, and strongly desire to observe early childhood care and education in progress.

The participants actually experience early childhood care and education as they play with the children.





## (7) Kindergarten life



Birthday party.

Masks are used to liven things up. The children say their names and ages.

Children who cannot yet say their ages hold up their fingers to show how old they are.

Children are given duties to carry out. These are good opportunities to think about numbers in daily life.

Counting people, plates, spoons, and the like offers hands-on experience with numbers.

Before, "learning" was thought to consist solely of writing numbers or doing calculations.



The entire teaching staff, including the kindergarten principal, performed "The Enormous Turnip" for the children.

The support of Japanese teachers has resulted in a variety of changes in the kindergarten's system of cooperation.

