

# A study of the involvement of Japanese early childhood teachers in Clean-up Time

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine actual individual situations involving Japanese early childhood teachers during Clean-up Time. In this study, we utilized the method of video analysis. This is a useful study method as it can examine the interaction between teachers and children in detail and allows in depth discussion using videos as cues for arriving at discourse. The research findings were as follows: (1) The teachers adopt strategies appropriate to the children's different ages and levels of development. (2) Even as the teachers try to get the children to change their behaviors in line with their wishes, they sympathize with the feelings and values in the children's world of play. (3) As the teachers persuade young children to finish playing and move on to Clean-up Time, they underscore a group mindset and sense of companionship.

**Key words:** *professionalism in early childhood education, Clean-up Time, video analysis, Japanese teachers*

## Introduction

### ***The Purpose of This Study***

In recent years, professionalism in early childhood education and care has taken on greater significance as a field of study (e.g., OECD, 2006; Urban, 2008). Many

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studies have shown that the ways in which early childhood teachers interact with children affect not only the quality of education but also the development of the child (e.g., Harris, Thompson, & Norris, 2007; Iram & Kathy, 2004). We found three tendencies when we reviewed literature related to the study of the interactions of Japanese early childhood teachers and young children: (1) The involvement of early childhood teachers varies according to their beliefs and teaching-styles. (2) The type of involvement by early childhood teachers changes with the problem and the situation experienced with the children. (3) The involvement of the early childhood teachers differs by the type of activity.

The characteristics of professionalism of early childhood teachers are strongly affected by both national and cultural influences. According to the indication of Holloway (2000) and Peak (1991) has likened teachers to “an army of friendly shadows” who appear to yield to the child’s desire but eventually win by prolonged, good-natured cajoling (Holloway, 2000, p. 72). In Japanese schools, as Holloway (2000) pointed out again, many preschool teachers avoid overt expressions of their authority, being more likely to ignore misbehavior or to rely on peers to sanction a classmate. On the other hand, Lewis (1995) examined the interaction between early childhood teachers and children in Japan, and noted that teachers are able to make almost instantaneous decisions while responding to children’s actions. For example, decisions such as whether to say something to children or to leave them be, and what to say, are determined by ascertaining the stages of children’s development and the circumstances behind particular situations. This swift improvisation in thought and action, as exhibited in these early childhood teachers, is an important and effective skill (Sawyer, 1997) and is a significant area of focus in studies on professionalism in early childhood education and care.

These characteristics of Japanese early childhood teachers are a reflection of kindergarten education in Japan, which attaches great importance to daily “life” with “play”. For example, Kurahashi (1953), one of the leading researchers in Japanese preschool education, stated that “the education of the kindergarten attaches great importance to the life of young children, and to make it true life”. Moreover, national guidelines enacted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Tech-

nology of Japan (2008) indicate that “the elements of the kindergarten education promote the independent activity of young children and the appropriate life for the development of young children.”

In a Japanese kindergarten, Clean-up Time is one of the everyday life activities. Generally speaking, Clean-up Time is when playground equipment is returned to its original location in preparation for the next activity, such as lunchtime or group time.

Based on the above, the question of interest is how Japanese early childhood teachers interact with children in Clean-up Time. The purpose of this study is to examine three points about actual individual situations involving Japanese early childhood teachers during Clean-up Time. (1) The characteristic of the involvement of the teacher based on the examination of her words. (2) The characteristic of the involvement of the teacher based on the examination of her physical action. (3) Conflicts between teachers and young children.

### ***Why Do We Examine Clean-up Time?***

In this study, the reasons why we chose to examine Clean-up Time are as follows: (1) the importance of Clean-up Time as an everyday routine is clearly expressed in the National Guidelines of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan (2008). (2) When teachers and young children move from a certain activity to the next activity, it is important that the area be cleared, particularly in the case of a Japanese kindergarten, because the number of the children in the class is 35, and the size of the classroom area is only 53 square meters, as a general rule. (3) Clean-up Time is not only an everyday life activity but also helps with intellectual, technical and social development. (4) Clean-up Time is a situation in which conflicts are likely to occur between young children and teachers, because Clean-up Time is an indispensable activity for teachers but is an unpleasant activity for young children, who would prefer to continue playing. (5) The role of teachers in Clean-up Time is often very difficult because they have to promote a voluntary end to play by children playing happily. Therefore, teachers will use both linguistic and non-linguistic information in communication with the children. In view of this, we considered that the words and actions of Japanese teachers at Clean-up Time would be an

important aspect of their professionalism in early childhood education that warranted further study.

### ***The Characteristics of a Japanese Kindergarten***

By way of clarification, the main characteristics of the Japanese kindergarten are as follows: (1) The school year runs from April to March. (2) Almost all children enter Kindergarten at the age of 3 or 4 years and they remain it for 2 or 3 years. (3) Most curricula cover 2 or 3 years. (4) The national guidelines established by the Ministry of Education in Japan provide all details for education. (5) These national guidelines regard children's play as important. (6) Children grow through interaction with the things and people within the kindergarten environment, thus this free interaction is viewed as important. This is referred to as "education through environment." (7) The teacher devotes him/herself to supporting the child. Indirect support includes "setting up the environment around the child," while direct support includes "helping out the child." (8) All teachers graduate from junior colleges or universities. (9) Teachers are licensed to practice early childhood education.

## **Methodology**

### ***Video Analysis***

In this study, we utilized the method of video analysis. Video analysis is a study method that can examine interaction between teachers and children in detail and allows in depth discussion by using videos as cues for arriving at discourse. In this study, we collected 10 examples that involved Clean-up Time from video clips made by the Ministry of Education of Japan and from these, chose two cases for further examination with our colleagues. The 10 examples that we selected have been edited to run for about 5-10 minutes. The original purpose of these video clips is for use as teacher training guides and as tools to promote discussion by the viewers about aspects of early childhood education and care.

### ***Why Do We Use the Method of the Video Analysis?***

The reasons why we used the method of the video analysis are as follows: (1) The video clips include not only many words used by the teacher but also a clear depiction of his/her facial expressions and physical actions. (2) We can discover various stories and can generate diverse interpretations by viewing and listening to video clips. (3) This type of footage can be replayed repeatedly to allow a more detailed study of the actions of the teacher. (4) Video viewing also allows the possibility of pausing for discussions. (5) It is possible to examine instances of friction/conflict that would otherwise be difficult to capture on film under ordinary circumstances.

### ***Profile of Two Video Clips***

From the video clips of 10 cases about Clean-up Time that we collected, the profiles of the two video clips that we selected for use are as follows: (1) “Are You Sure You Will Come Back to the Classroom Immediately After You Get Your Shoes?”: This video footage studied recorded the interaction between Kenji, a four-year-old who had recently joined the kindergarten, and a teacher. Kenji is making a “pretend bath” in a puddle of water in the kindergarten playground, and the teacher is trying to get Kenji to finish playtime and to get him to go into the classroom. (2) “Let’s Keep It for Tomorrow” : This video footage studied recorded the interaction between some girls, a three-year-old who had recently joined the kindergarten, and a teacher. The scene is “putting—things-in-order and clean-up” time before parents arrive to pick up their children.

### ***Why Did We Select Two Video Clips?***

The reasons why we selected these two cases from the 10 video clips are as follows: (1) Both cases are scenes of transition from play to the next activity, and some conflicts occur between teachers and young children. (2) In these two cases, both teachers are puzzled about their interactions with the young children. (3) We were interested in the interaction between teachers and young children. (4) The teachers’ words, expressions and physical actions were easiest to examine in these

two particular clips.

### ***Video Analysis Procedure***

We performed video analysis by the following processes: (1) For the two scenarios selected, we analyzed the verbal exchanges of the early childhood teacher and children by repeated viewings. (2) We focused on each teacher's concrete behaviors (words and physical actions). (3) We interpreted these concrete behaviors. (4) For video analysis, we first discussed the videos amongst ourselves (six authors). We then collected the opinions of three early childhood teachers. Lastly, we went to eight kindergartens and carried out interviews with 70 early childhood teachers. (5) In this study about concrete behaviors (words and physical action) of the early childhood teachers, we focused primarily on the characteristics that were interpreted from other teachers, as well as on some characteristics that we found through our own observations.

## Results and Discussions: Case 1

### ***Transcription of the Video Clip: Case 1***

The transcription of the video clip case 1 ("Are You Sure You Will Come Back to the Classroom Immediately After You Get Your Shoes?") was converted into the character as follows.

[The group time is coming soon.]

Teacher : Let's put the tire away... I'll help you take out the water in the tire... It won't come out easy... Here we go~!! (The teacher and Kenji try to throw the water inside the tire away together.)

[Kenji is often reluctant to participate in the group time.]

Kenji : Uh... I want to put the tire here.

Teacher : Where are you going to carry the tire to? Here or there?

Kenji : In the water. (Kenji is trying to put the tire in the water.)

Teacher : (1) It takes time for you to put the tire in the water.

A girl : Don't you do it, Kenji!!!

Teacher : (2) Kenji, it's time to go back to the room, it's group time.

Kenji : Hands off, please... Let it go...! (Kenji is trying to take the tire from the teacher.)

Teacher : (3) If I do not put it away and place it in order, I cannot start the group time and play with everybody. ((a) The teacher won't give the tire to Kenji.)

A girl : You will die if you do not do it as the teacher says.

Teacher : (The teacher looks toward the girl) No, he won't die, but it will be more fun if he will join us.

A girl : (The girl is telling Kenji again.) You will die if you do not do it as the teacher says.

Teacher : (The teacher squats down.) Kenji, let's go back to the room and play with all your friends.

Teacher : (The teacher says toward another boy.) Kenta, you should go into the room too because this pool will not be warm enough until tomorrow.

[Kenji and Kenta already put their feet in the water and play. The teacher comes to call them back.]

Teacher : Let's go into the room.

Teacher : Oh, my goodness, Kenta! You are soaked!!!

Kenji : I am a cat!

Teacher : A cat? Weren't you in the pool?

Teacher : OK, let's go back to the room with me. ((b) The teacher pulls Kenji's hand to make him go with her.)

Teacher : (The teacher talks toward Kenta while catching Kenji.) You need to come with me too, Kenta. You will be alone here. (The teacher tries to bring Kenji back to the room.)

Teacher : Do not worry. Kenta will follow us soon. Here we go. Here we go...

[Kenta walks toward the room.]

Kenji : I want to get my shoes. (Kenji is trying to escape from the teacher.)

Teacher : Then I will go with you.

Kenji : No! No! I will go alone!

Teacher : Are you sure you will come back to the classroom immediately after you get your shoes? Are you sure you will not stop by and play? Are you sure? Can you promise me to come back to the room right after you get your shoes? I cannot let you go if you cannot make the promise. Can you promise? ((c)The teacher kneels down and firmly hold his both hands. Kenji tries to escape from the teacher. Kenji does not want to match his eyes with the teacher and tries to avoid her.)

### ***The Examination of the Teacher's Words***

The teacher's choice of words is noteworthy. For example, rather than directly instructing or ordering Kenji (a boy) to go back to the classroom, she explains to him that he does not have time to have another bath, saying, "(1) It takes time for you to put the tire in the water...", "(2) Kenji, it's time to go back to the room, it's group time." and "(3) If I do not put it away and place it in order, I cannot start the group time and play with everybody." Of course, behind the words of the teacher, a tacit message such as the next is included. (1) You cannot play anymore, Kenji. (2) You must come back to the classroom. (3) I have to begin the group time because the other children are waiting for us.

However, by using indirect expressions designed to get Kenji to realize what he should do on his own, she is also conveying to him how she feels; namely, that she wants him to finish playing and go back to the classroom. Rather than forcefully having to get Kenji to stop playing, she is hoping that he will finish on his own, voluntarily. These actions observed in this teacher suggest that she does not see clean-up at the kindergarten as merely a routine, everyday act, but rather as another opportunity to educate children and behaves in a way that sympathizes with Kenji without showing off authority as the teacher.



### ***The Examination of the Teacher's Physical Actions***

The next point particularly worth noting is the teacher's physical actions. Although she does not issue direct verbal instructions or orders to Kenji, she refuses to give him the tire ((a) The teacher will not give the tire to Kenji.), and she tries to escort him physically back to the classroom ((b) The teacher pulls Kenji's hand to make him go with her.), engaging in direct physical contact ((c) The teacher kneels down and firmly holds his both hands).

It is clear that she hopes that Kenji will finish playing of his own volition, but at the same time, she must begin the next activity, and one can ascertain that other children are waiting for her in the classroom. It can also be gathered that she wants Kenji, who apparently normally refuses to participate in group time, to participate on this particular day. Furthermore, one can gather that she feels quite pressed for time. Kenji has muddied his hands and feet, so she still has several steps to complete, including getting him to finish playing, getting him back inside, washing his hands and feet, and getting him to mentally "switch gears", so to speak, for group time.

### ***Conflicts between Teachers and Young Children***

Clean-up is a transitional event that involves finishing one activity involving play and moving on to the next. This transition is done according to the will of teachers. Accordingly, Clean-up Time is a difficult thing for children to accept obediently, and is a difficult time for teachers who, for their part, must get the children to switch mindsets. The case examined here suggests that during Clean-up Time, in which friction (conflict) between the child and the teacher is particularly prone to occur, there is the possibility that the teacher's physical actions become inconsistent with his/her words, by virtue of the fact that he/she puts excessive stress on Clean-up Time as an educational activity.

## **Results and discussions: Case 2**

### ***Transcription of the Video Clip: Case 2***

The transcription of the video clip case 2 ("Let's Keep It for Tomorrow") was

converted into the character as follows.

Teacher : (1) Listen, Everyone. It's time mother is coming to pick up you. Let's go back our room to watch video of Mickey-mouse.

Ayane : Yes.

Teacher : So, here, plates.

Fumi : (Fumi says something.)

Teacher : What? Everyone, let's go home. Let's put things in order.

Fumi : I wanna play once more.

Teacher : (2) Once more? But, it's time your mother comes. Let's play tomorrow again.

Fumi : No!

Teacher : No? Why don't you watch video of Mickey-mouse?

Fumi : No.

Taka : I don't watch it either.

Teacher : I don't know what to do... Wow, Good job, Taka-chan. Where should this be put? Oh, this is here. ((a) The teacher was accompanied by while putting some playground equipments in a box.) Let's go home. Let's put things in order.

Fumi : No!

Teacher : No? Fumi-chan, Are you still playing to make something?

Taka : Me, too.

Teacher : Really? What are you making?

Taka : Well, Cookies

Teacher : (3) Really? So, why don't you put things in order, after you make one more cookie.

Fumi : No!

Teacher : (4) No? Well..., I'll go back room and wait for you. ((b) The teacher puts some playground equipments in a box.)

Ayane : I'm washing plates.

Teacher : Oh, you're washing plates. Yes.

Teacher : (5) Wow, that's great! Video has started.

Miya : No! I want to play more!

Teacher : Wow, that's great! It's like chocolates.

Miya : Yes, chocolates.

Teacher : (6) Why don't you keep your chocolates for tomorrow?

Miya : But this is iced coffee.

Teacher : Iced coffee? Oh, I'm sorry. I thought it's a chocolate. Miya-chan, let's keep it on the shoes box for tomorrow.

Teacher : Though I had been waiting for you, you didn't come. So, I'm coming here for you to go back our room. Let's go back.

Aisa : No, because I wanna go back with Miya-chan.

Teacher : Oh, so let's go back our room with me and Miya-chan.

Miya : No.

Teacher : Do you want still play?

Miya : Yes.

Teacher : I don't know what to do.

Teacher : Let's go back our room.

Miya : No.

Teacher : (7) Video is going to be finished soon. ((c) The teacher looks her watch.) I'll also tell you a rabbits' story with picture cards.

Miya : Rabbits?

Teacher : Yes, a rabbit. Rabbit's story with picture cards.

Miya : I think the rabbit is crying because you aren't in our room.

Teacher : Is the rabbit crying? So let's go back our room to see the rabbit.

Miya : No.

Teacher : No?

Miya : I'll go back our room, if the sand dissolves with water.

Teacher : Has it been dissolved? Does it dissolve soon?

Miya : No.

Teacher : You put other sand in your bucket. Don't put other sand any more. ((d)  
The teacher is going to take up the bucket from Miya.)

### ***The Examination of the Teachers' Words***

The teacher's choice of words is worth noting. For example, the teacher uses words for three children (Ayane, Fumi and Taka), who are playing with sand, as follows: "(1) Listen, everyone. It's time that your mothers are coming to pick you up. Let's go back to our room to watch a video of Mickey Mouse". What we presume from this teacher's words is that the teacher is promoting the end of playtime (changing the feeling) for some children by using the video of Mickey Mouse. However, Fumi refuses these suggestions (words) of the teacher. The teacher then tries to end the children's play with additional words: "(2) Once more? It's time for your mother to arrive. Let's play again tomorrow", "(3) Really? So, why don't you put things in order, after you make one more cookie" and "(4) No? Well..., I'll go back into the room and wait for you".

Pay attention to the words of the teacher in the latter half of the video clip. For example, the teacher says to two girls (Miya and Aisa) who are playing with sand, as follows: "(5) Wow, that's great! The video has started", "(6) Why don't you keep your chocolates for tomorrow?" and "(7) The video is going to be finished soon. I'll also tell you a rabbit's story with picture cards". What we presume from these teacher's words is that the teacher is also encouraging the end of playtime (changing the feeling) for some children by using both the video of Mickey Mouse and picture cards of rabbits or by suggesting that pretend games being played now can be kept for tomorrow.

The teacher will end playtime of the children with different words in this way. In the feelings of the teacher, there seem to be two types of conflicts, as follows: (1) A conflict in having to change the feeling of children. (2) A conflict in having to end the activity before the mothers arrive to pick up their children.

### ***The Examination of the Teacher's Physical Actions***

The next point particularly noteworthy is the teacher's physical actions. Although

the teacher says certain things to the children, we cannot see any remarkable characteristics regarding her physical actions. For example, in the pretend play, the teacher does not make or eat any cookies or chocolates with children. In the video, the teacher puts some toys away in a box, as follows: “(a) The teacher brushes off sand while putting playground equipment in a box” and “(b) The teacher puts playground equipment in a box.”

These physical actions of the teacher are similar in the latter half of the video clip. Although the teacher suggests “Let’s Keep It for Tomorrow”, we cannot see any unusual characteristics about her physical actions. In the video, the teacher behaves as follows: “(c) The teacher looks her watch” and “(d) The teacher takes a bucket away from Miya.” These physical actions are the outcomes of showing her intention in a definite way to the children and of the two types of conflicts that we described before.

### ***Conflicts between Teachers and Young Children***

The teacher in the video uses a number of different words and quickly suggests several ideas in order to end the children’s sand play, while she frets because the mothers will be arriving soon to pick up their children. On the other hand, for the children, playing in the sand is now important to them; they are not interested in her words or suggestions. They are not interested in keeping their play until tomorrow either. The children resist the teacher in order to continue their playing. Therefore, for this teacher, Clean-up Time is a stressful scene. Clean-up Time appears to be a source of conflicts that occur between teachers and young children.

## **Conclusion**

### ***Professionalism in Teachers Seen through the Differences between Case 1 and Case 2***

In this section, we examine the differences in characteristics in the way in which teachers interact with children, by comparing two video clips (Case 1 and Case 2). The words uttered by the teacher in the Case 1 video are passive expressions. By avoiding the use of direct phrasing to the child, such as imperatives and orders, the teacher adopts a stance in which she does not display her authority over the child.

However, when one looks at the physical actions taken by the teacher, it is clear that she is physically forceful in getting Kenji, who is occupied with making a “pretend bath”, to go back into the classroom. In her attempt to end play-time and get the child to move on to Clean-up Time, one can see an obvious display of will and emotion. As a result, Kenji is forced to stop his “pretend bath” by the teacher, rather than of his own volition.

In contrast, in the Case 2 video, although the teacher is pressed for time because the parents will soon be coming to pick up the children, the teacher desperately calls out to get them to stop playing in the sandbox, in a manner that seems to offer them alternatives, saying such things as “Let’s keep it for tomorrow.” However, unlike the teacher in Case 1, this teacher does not become physical or forceful in getting the children to stop playing and go back to the classroom.

These differences in how the teachers interacted with the children may be attributed to the age differences of the children involved. In Case 1, Kenji was four years old, whereas in Case 2, the children are three. Put simply, in interacting with the children, the teachers are adopting strategies appropriate to the children’s differing ages and levels of development. In this regard, one can glimpse an example of professionalism on the part of Japanese teachers in early childhood education and care.

### ***Professionalism in Teachers Seen through the Commonalities in Case 1 and Case 2***

Next, we shall look at the common characteristics in the way teachers interact with children. First, as noted above, Clean-up Time does not simply mean the time at which children return their toys to their designated places. It also implies the end of play-time, and a time of transition from one activity to the next. Teachers, accordingly, must get children who still want to play to shift their mindsets. Despite the difficulty of this task, the teachers in both Case 1 and Case 2 demonstrated the ability to empathize with the children and how they feel about playing, and spoke to the children in a manner that reflected this empathy. The teacher in Case 1, for example, said, “This pool will not be warm enough until tomorrow,” and the teacher in Case 2 offered the suggestion, “Why don’t you keep your chocolates for tomorrow?” These are manners of speech indicative of the teachers’ desire to somehow manage to get the

children to finish playing, yet at the same time they place value on the feelings of the children thoroughly absorbed in their forms of play. The demonstration of willingness to empathize with the feelings of the children, even as the teachers try to get the children to change their behavior to follow the teachers' wishes, can be considered another aspect of the professionalism on the part of Japanese teachers.

Second, when the teachers in both Case 1 and Case 2 attempt to get the children to end play-time and move on to Clean-up Time, there is a characteristic emphasis on the group nature or consequences of their actions, or a kind of "gregariousness". For instance, statements like "If I do not put it away and place it in order, I cannot start the group time and play with everybody," and "Kenji, let's go back to the room and play with all your friends," made by the teacher in Case 1, and "What? Everyone, let's go home. Let's put things in order," uttered by the teacher in Case 2, each try to encourage the children in the class to clean up (or go on to the next activity) together. In these actions by the teachers, one can observe an importance placed on the interests of each individual child, yet at the same time an emphasis placed on taking action together, as a group, which is characteristic of early childhood education and care in Japan. Japanese teachers, in no small measure, share the frame of mind (or belief) that it is more fun for children to play with others than by themselves, that food is more enjoyable with others than alone and therefore, it is important for Clean-up Time as well to be done as a group. It can be concluded that this is the reason that, when Japanese teachers persuade young children to finish playing and move on to Clean-up Time, they underscore a group mindset and sense of companionship.

### ***The Prospects of the Involvement of Teachers in Clean-up Time***

From the results of this study, we can find a few specific aspects that are unique in the involvement of the teachers with children at Clean-up Time. First, one of the important things about Clean-up Time is that the children must each stop their play voluntarily, and move to the next activity. Therefore, an important role of teachers is not so much getting the children to do the actual clean-up but to assist the children, depending on the situation at that time.

Second, in order to get the children to move to the next activity voluntarily,

teachers can support following: (1) Teachers support that children want to clear up their play area (2) Teachers support that children have expectation towards the next activity. (3) Teachers support that the children's activity of today continues to tomorrow's pleasure.

### ***Issues that Remain to Be Explored in This Study***

Two specific issues remain to be explored in this study. First, the interpretations in this study were arrived at by multiple researchers working in collaboration to analyze the video footage. In order to study and verify the validity of these interpretations, it is necessary to do field studies consisting of direct observations at settings where early childhood education takes place. Second, it is also necessary to examine in more depth the way in which teacher-child interactions during Clean-up Time differ, depending on the age of the children, the class (year) they belong to, the nature of the activity, and other factors specific to the particular situations.

On the other hand, the limitations of analyzing commercially available videos can be explained as follows: (1) It is impossible that we were able to completely understand an intention and an aim of the early childhood teacher through only video analysis. (2) It is impossible that we were able to understand the human relations between the early childhood teacher and children through only video analysis. (3) The video is edited, and it is impossible that we were able to understand the situation that was edited out.

## **Additional Note**

This study is part of the results in Noma Institute of Educational Research in Japan.

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