

The Potential of Arts-based Early Childhood Citizenship Education: In View of the Trends in Japan and Abroad

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This presentation will consider how citizenship education in early childhood and expressive activities through art are related. The presentation will be based mainly on a review of previous research on the current situation in Japan and trends in the world.

Since the Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the UN in 1989, there have been various discussions on children's rights. The Convention emphasizes the importance of adults recognizing young children not only as objects to be protected but also as individuals with rights, but the current Japanese kindergarten education guidelines do not explicitly mention such recognition as an individual. It has been pointed out that awareness of democracy is weak in Japanese early childhood education. On the other hand, in recent years, ECE practices focusing on citizenship have been conducted in Europe or North America. In studies mainly in North America, the practice of teaching various issues that current citizenship includes, such as issues of racism, indigenous peoples, gender, and environmental issues, was also taught in early childhood education. In Europe, democratic perspectives are relatively deeply rooted, particularly in Reggio Emilia, and in Sweden and other countries, initiatives are being undertaken to make use of the advantages of local autonomy. In Japan, such practices are also taking place, but they are not yet sufficient.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child guarantees that young children can express their thoughts and what they have learned not only orally but also through various means, such as drawing pictures, expressing their opinions on matters that concern them, and participating in their own communities (UNICEF, 1989). These perspectives can be seen as a foundation for early childhood citizenship. On the other hand, one of the difficulties in capturing early childhood citizenship is that it manifests itself in different forms than adult citizenship (Phillips, 2011). Therefore, a research platform is needed to understand children's knowledge and ideas in a multimodal way. In this regard, arts activities provide an arena for assisting children to raise their own ideas and voices to a greater extent (Barton, 2015). It is therefore useful to use activities through the arts to better understand children's citizenship.

Efforts to capture young children's citizenship using the arts as a basis have so far been centered on Reggio Emilia. However, it has been noted that in Japan and North America, the important perspective of citizenship has been overlooked and attention tends to focus solely on young children's artistic expression (Henward et al., 2023). It is necessary in the future to develop practices that fully demonstrate the advantages of the multimodal mode of expression of the arts and empower young children's citizenship through the arts. In doing so, local characteristics should also be fully considered. Other findings include the importance of an attitude of young children and adults to think together about citizenship, and the importance of efforts to ensure that knowledge about citizenship is transmitted from young children to society.

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Bio

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