

TOOLS : Grasp, Choose, Use



Foreword

Starting last year, our kindergarten began research with the theme : Children's inquiring mind and usability in life. This is the second annual publication in this series.

In order to accomplish this research and to further a more specific investigation, last year we concentrated on the role of transparency in the everyday life of children. This year we've concentrated on the ways that children relate to tools. We observed how the children's curiosity and sensibilities are expressed and developed through this relationship.

There are many kinds and varieties of tools in the kindergarten space. Sometimes the children use these various tools according to their intended use, and sometimes they use them in completely new and different ways. Sometimes they also create new tools that resemble others that exist in reality. The mind of each child is enriched by all these various ways of relating to tools, and the relationships between the children themselves are also broadened at the same time.

Our investigation extends from the many examples compiled in this bulletin. Each and every example is of deep interest to us. Each one represents a lively thumbnail sketch of a given moment in the everyday life of the children. The teaching staff tries to draw out the children's ambitions and promote their growth by carefully observing their specific activities, responding to their needs with a resolute acceptance of each child's behaviour and emotions, and answering a given situation with whatever assistance or direction is appropriate.

Those reading this research bulletin will surely see how the teachers endeavour to inspire and promote showing an inquiring mind and resourcefulness in daily life. Our research is further enriched when we receive your opinions, critiques and suggestions.

Nakamura Toshinao, Kindergarten Principal

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Closing words

At last the compilation of our 2013 research bulletin is complete. This is the record of the kindergarten staff, whose hearts were captivated by sight of the children—who we have watched over, supported, and enjoyed our time with—immersed in play.

Throughout our care days with the children we kept the key phrases “exploration” and “utilization” in our minds, and this is how the theme of 2012, “transparency” and this year’s theme, “tools” occurred to us. When tools became a focus topic for us during care hours, instances of children discovering just the thing they wanted sprang into view one after another. Having a focal point changed the way we perceived the children’s play. Daily we experienced that is where the value of research lies.

This year we had extensive renovations going on throughout the kindergarten. We carried on with school life as usual with renovations proceeding a few rooms at a time; day after day as the children played, there was construction going on nearby.

Sometimes the noise and the vibrations startled the children, and although there were many difficult moments, it is also true that it was a priceless experience. I think there is an intimate connection between what we learned in this year’s research through the window of the keyword “tools” and the fact that many parts of the kindergarten were under construction. Construction sites are treasure troves of tools. Seeing the construction workers walking about with lots of tools hanging from their belts, they kind of looked like heroes. I think the children likely saw them that way, too.

There is a topic from our research conferences that still concerns me. That is, when using tools begins to pique the children’s interest and they try out a greater variety of things, it often happens that conversely, the efficacy falls. For example, when a child is having fun gathering leaves with a small rake, they might then start trying to do it with two—a rake in each hand. Even though they could clearly gather far more leaves by using their bare hands, they will continue to use the two rakes to do it. If reflected upon clinically, this may seem like things are moving in a negative direction, but I can’t help but think that there is a really important meaning in the feeling the children seem to exhibit of simply not being able to resist using the rakes. “I want to carry out my idea by using something, not just with my own hands”: It’s exciting to observe the children so engrossed in that. It makes us want to take our time and really think about what it means to the children to have this kind of feeling.

This time also, we introduce images of the children at play through the photographs taken by Ms. Kawabe. By making use of photographs, the entire teaching staff was able to share in the things the children expressed with gestures and expressions as well as the atmosphere that the entirety of the scene emits; this is how our research progressed. By publishing lots of photographs in the bulletin, we hope that the freshness of the children’s play is communicated. Please, by all means, do share your thoughts and opinions with us.

Finally, we want to express our gratitude to Professor Hamaguchi Junko and Professor Gyobu Ikuko of this University’s Department of Child Studies for their leadership, and also to the children who together built such a rich daily experience with us, as well to their guardians.

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