

## Chapter 2

# Early Childhood Education and Care Curriculum in Japan

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### 2.1 Definition of Curriculum

As people exist together in a certain collective environment, their actions and judgments should comply with certain standards. The usual *frame of reference* has become the yardstick for judgments on actions or for the actions themselves. In social life, culture plays the role of frame of reference. Culture refers to the generalized and standardized mode of action in social life, including religion or philosophy in the spiritual realm, daily props, and mechanical appliances in the material realm, as well as institutional regulations and provisions. Frame of reference specifically refers to systems and regulations, laws and customs, and other social norms. Frame of reference refers to, so to speak, the framework of life and learning widely accepted by society.

In the realm of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) practice, we highly emphasize the role played by frame of reference; this helps form ECEC curriculums. As a matter of course, this frame of reference includes the systems as well as the above-mentioned cultural and spiritual realms in terms of content, and in particular, the ECEC ideologies and child nursing norms advanced by older generations. Nowadays, the role played by ECEC is directly related to cultivating children for healthy growth and parents (guardians) for shouldering the responsibility of child-care. In recent years, increased importance and attention have been placed on the support of child rearing. Curricula designed for childhood education are related to this role of childcare, as society shows increased expectations of kindergartens and nurseries while determining the contents, methods, and technologies for putting

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such curricula into practice. First, let us look at the compositions of the education curricula of ECEC institutions of countries other than Japan.

In recent years, early childhood education curriculums and childcare have attracted increasing attention in all countries in Europe. Specifically, most efforts have focused on the improvement of quality and the expansion of quantity, and thus, early childhood education curriculums have needed to be amended or modified accordingly. These countries attach great importance to early childhood education and childcare partly due to current demand, so as to guarantee the sound growth of children and at the same time enhance the quality of early childhood education and childcare because it is directly connected with the quality improvement of education results following compulsory education; moreover, the results may benefit increasing numbers of people in society because of the investment value of such efforts.

The OECD's *Starting Strong II: ECEC* policy specifies the integration of competent educational authorities and the adaptation of the conceived actions. These countries illustrate examples of the orientation this policy highlights by paying more attention to kindergarten education and childcare (OECD 2006).

Let us look at Sweden as an example. It incorporated the jurisdiction of nurseries from stoical sectors to educational sectors in 1996, and this is now defined as the public preschool educational system. Primary schools began conducting preschool classes for 6-year-old children from 1997. In 1998, the relevant childcare regulations were transformed into educational laws from social service laws, and thus, the preschool education curriculum was formulated, achieving childcare integration based on education (Ohno and Nanakida 2011). The education curriculum clearly communicates the idea of "cultivating the democratic values of Swedish society (Swedish National Agency for Education 2010)."

As for kindergartens and nurseries in UK, they are under the administration of different authorities, which were incorporated into a single educational authority in 1998 for actual integration. Currently, nurseries, family care programs, and preschool playgroups, which are institutions operated by guardian volunteers (with nursing services thus provided within a short period of time), must undergo an evaluation from "Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED)" by a government party before they are identified as kindergarten educational institutions (Sylva and Paugh 2008). In 2000, this evaluation focused on what forms or models through which children progress through the kindergartens and nurseries. Newly introduced preschool programs are referred to as foundation stage preschool education programs, catering to 3 to 5-year-old preschool children for obligatory education. Although the contents of such programs are not compulsorily required, the Department for Education and Skills requires that such contents should be part of the national education curriculum, particularly including guides for studies so that the first compulsory education phase, Key Phase 1: KS1, can be conducted smoothly. The guides serve as early learning goals, including "individuals, society, emotional development," "communication, language, reading, and writing," "math development," "knowledge and understanding of the surrounding world," "physical development," and "creative development." The

Qualifications Curriculum Authority (QCA) has the power of decision over the contents and preparation of national education curriculums, and at the same time, QCA conducts its assessment by pointing out that information about children's school growth and progress will be provided to teachers, parents, and students. Generally speaking, testing and evaluation shall not be implemented in the basic phase after KS1.

All countries in Asia are concerned about the childcare reforms implemented in Korea (Niwa and Kim 2012), whose preschool education institutions, including competent administrative authorities, implement a dualistic system. Korea conducts extensive discussions of a centralized proposal to incorporate kindergartens and nurseries into "nursery schools." Likewise, Japan has an ongoing discussion on the future development orientation of preschool education institutions, while still maintaining a dualistic system. From March 2012, the "5 Year-Old Child NURI Curriculum (free compulsory early childhood education)," which caters to 5-year-old children, began, thus introducing an assistance system for childcare fees which was easily acceptable to both high- and low-income parents in Korea. In 2013, this initiative will expand to cover children aged 3–4. This plan will conclude in 2016, when all children aged 0–5 will be completely exempt from childcare fees; further, it is also proposed that 5-year-old children will be completely incorporated into the unified education curriculum, and thus, this initiative in Korea will continue to draw attention with respect to its future development orientation.

In view of such ECEC curricula, particularly those including the social expectations of the national culture, childcare, and views related to human nature, education curricula are thus established on the basis of various comprehensive factors. From this perspective, this paper will focus on the Japanese ECEC curriculum.

## **2.2 Changes in Japanese Early Childhood Education and Care Curriculums**

### ***2.2.1 Meiji Period (1868–1912)***

In 1871, Japan established the Ministry of Education (later the Ministry of Culture and Education). In 1872, it promulgated the Educational System Decree, which signaled the initial establishment of the modern Japanese educational system, particularly by incorporating kindergartens into the decree as a branch of primary school education. At that time, kindergartens still remained at the regulatory stage and had not been highly accentuated. It is thus understandable to have incorporated kindergartens into primary school education during this initial stage of the modern Japanese education system (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture 1981).

In 1875, Japan set up its earliest public preschool education institution, at a small part of schoolyard of Kyoto Ryuchi Primary School, which accepted children under the required age for schooling with a view to "cultivate gifted kids to lay

a solid foundation for their future diligent study,” a goal modeled upon Germany standard education (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture 1979, 1981).

The decree further specified that attention should be given to the capacity of children, particularly in using daily toys such as solid figure wood blocks and the drawing of animals, food, and letters or words on such wood blocks, or using painting books as basic tools.

In November 1876, the earliest kindergarten to exist in Tokyo, Japan, was started and was affiliated with Tokyo Women’s Higher Normal School (Yukawa 2001). According to regulations at the time, any 3 to 6-year-old child should be admitted into the kindergarten. According to grade scheduling, the teaching time for the children was four hours a day. From the very start, it strictly complied with the prevalent thinking of the time advanced by Friedrich Froebel (1782–1852), which included subjects such as the teaching of the names of various objects and materials and subjects related to knowledge and natural beauty, with Froebel Gifts at the centerpiece of the educational materials; these included 25 detailed sub-subjects, such as arithmetic, singing, speaking, games, and gymnastics (Yukawa 2001). This adherence to the Friedrich Froebel system was set forth by this first kindergarten and most subsequent kindergartens followed suit (Ministry of Education 1876).

In 1894 (the 23rd year of the Meiji period), the Ministry of Education formulated the earliest Japanese Kindergarten Education Decree, “Regulations Concerning Kindergarten Childcare and Equipment,” which detailed clear regulations concerning facilities, equipment, childcare contents, and operation times for nurseries in Japan (Yukawa 2001). Under this decree, the purpose of childcare was to “contribute to physical and mental health development, and forming good habits as a supplement to home nursing,” and it emphasized the four childcare skills of “playing,” “singing,” “talking,” and “crafts.” There was a particular emphasis placed on the playing of games, and this was integrated with Froebel Gifts for the children’s physical and mental development while not being excessively related to homework, and as such it required compliance with the children’s lifestyles in all specific activities.

In 1890, Akazawa Atsumi (1864–1937) and his wife jointly set up the first nursery in Japanese preschool education history within Niigata Seisyu School, which played a vital role in taking care of children. In 1894, Japanese Nisshinbo Textile Corporation set up a nursery to help solve the nursing difficulties of women who had to work at this time to cover a shortfall in labor. In 1900, the earliest childcare-based nursery, Futaba Kindergarten (changed the name as “Futaba Nursery School” in 1916) in Tokyo, opened with the purpose of “rendering it possible for the children of poor families to attend kindergarten and to help children with bad habits form good ones,” as well as “relieving parents of the burden of nursing their children.”

In 1908, the issue of childcare was undertaken and newly defined as “Probation & Charitable Relief Undertaking” by the Ministry of Internal Affairs for the purpose of protecting female laborers and their children and promoting the improvement of nurseries; however, at that time, nurseries were quite different from

kindergartens that were under the direct administration of the Ministry of Health and Welfare and the Ministry of Education (Mutoh 2011). Preschool education in Japan therefore at this time still had both kindergartens and nurseries, and thus, it follows that kindergarten education and childcare would continue to be segregated even at the introductory phase.

### ***2.2.2 Taisho Period (1912–1926)***

During the period from the end of the Meiji Period to the beginning of the Taisho Period, the American kindergarten education reform movement, which included such major figures as Brian Hall, Dewey, and Montessori, was introduced to Japan. Froebelism had started to receive new scrutiny and criticism, and a new education movement was quickly growing. In 1917, Kurahashi Souzou (1882–1955), the father of Japanese kindergarten education, became headmaster of the kindergarten affiliated with Tokyo Women's Higher Normal School. He established new kindergarten education targets, "to cultivate mentally sound and physically strong children." The kindergartens were, first of all, places at which children could be allowed to play in natural environments with an emphasis on outdoor protection; second, the children would be freed from heavy study burdens to focus on physical exercise instead. These features of kindergartens were based in a respect for life, mutual interactions among children, and specific daily activities without concept-based restrictions but rather an emotion-centered emphasis.

Kurahashi traveled to the USA, Germany, and other countries during a 2-year period from February 1919 to inspect actual overseas childcare programs. He was greatly influenced by the European and American neoliberalism educational ideologies that had done away with Froebelism and its emphasis on free play. At the same time, he advocated the "inducement" of childcare with goals of self-achievement based on the daily lives and practices of children. Kurahashi was appointed as a member of the Ministry of Education in 1924 and participated in the formulation of the draft of the kindergarten management decree (Yukawa et al. 2006).

In 1926, the Japanese government promulgated a separate decree called the "Kindergarten Management Decree." Article 1 stipulated that "kindergartens shall be established as a supplement to family education to ensure sound mental and physical growth and to cultivate the excellent temperament and mental qualities of children," a statement that clearly describes the childcare functions of kindergartens. Additionally, Article 6 specified that children admitted into kindergartens should, in principle, be at least 3 years old (up to the age requirement for primary school). Article 7 specified that a headmaster should be appointed for every kindergarten. Article 9 prescribed the qualifications for nursery aides. The times in which childcare would be available were also stipulated according to the principle of providing opportunities to children in lower-income and dual-earner families.

In 1914, following the outbreak of World War I and its concurrent surging prices, people was plunged into poverty, and as a result, the establishment of more

nurseries became difficult for both society and the government. The Ministry of Internal Affairs established the Social Affairs Bureau in 1920 to manage the establishment of public nurseries catering to children from urban poverty-stricken groups. The earliest public nurseries were set up in different locations, including Osaka in 1919, Kyoto in 1920, and Tokyo in 1921 (Mutoh 2011). As stated above, due to the different purposes for setting up kindergartens and nurseries, the jurisdiction for their administration was mutually shared by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Education; however, in actual implementation, nurseries abided by the specific provisions of the Kindergarten Management Decree.

### ***2.2.3 Second World War II Revival Period (1945–1954)***

On August 15, 1945, following the end of the Second World War, Japan abolished the stated tenets of “Militarism and Nationalism” under the command of the occupying forces to construct a country based on “Democratic Culture” and to conduct a revolutionary reform of the society, economy, and education system (Okada et al. 2010). In 1946, the Constitution of Japan, a legal document functioning as the pillar for national restoration, was promulgated, and based on this document, the laws and regulations related to all fields were modified and revised. In the field of education, Japan formulated its “Education Basic Law” and “School Education Law” in 1947 (Japan Society of Research on Early Childhood Care and Education 2010). With respect to public welfare, Japan also instituted its “Child Welfare Act” in 1947. By then, kindergartens were an integral part of the school educational system as stipulated by the “School Education Law.” However, school institutions were prescribed as latecomers. On the other hand, the “Child Welfare Act” defined childcare as the establishment of children’s welfare institutions in which “children without care at home due to the daytime careers of their mothers are placed under care.” This act represented the start of the establishment of the Japanese postwar childcare system.

In 1947, the establishment of the Childcare Content Investigation Committee facilitated the clear interpretation of the contents of kindergarten childcare. Kurahashi Souzou participated in the drafting of “Childcare Guidelines” as the chairman of the committee. In 1948, the Ministry of Internal Affairs published “Childcare Guidelines-Kindergarten Education Guidelines,” which clarified the orientation of kindergarten education. In the preamble of these guidelines, Kurahashi noted that “what we should not forget is that this approach represents the starting point for the interests of children, their demands, and their actual lives.” Specific content related to childcare was prescribed in 12 separate items: study time, daily routines, rest, free play, music, talking, drawing, creating, natural observation, imitation games and drama games (i.e., puppet shows), health services, and annual regular activities and events as required by the management. The subtitle of the guidelines included the phrase “happy experiences of children,” indicating an orientation to the values of happy childhood experiences. The section titled of the

Guideline “One Day in a Kindergarten” emphasized the point that the daily schedule of a kindergarten should not be limited to separate, individual frames, but rather should be integrated well with children’s lives. This clearly shows that it is better to arrange activities in accordance with children’s lives. The “Childcare Essentials” sections show that Kurahashi Souzou respected child education theories that took into consideration the lives of children, the ways in which they play, and the central emphasis on children and life empiricism advanced by Dewey et al., which represented the American mainstream. Not only did kindergartens adopt the content of “Childcare Essentials,” but nurseries and family nursing providers also adopted these essentials as a type of guide for childcare which reflected the new liberalism, which was very popular among nurses. Compared with the previous emphasis on free activities, these new efforts based on “Childcare Essentials” were criticized by professionals engaged in primary school education for “being rather difficult to connect with the primary school curriculum,” and thus, critical voices appeared in the care and nursing debate voicing concerns about “the lack of systematic organization in terms of care and nursing content, which is unfavorable to the preparation of curriculums” and “offering no hint as to how to prepare curriculum development methods (Early Childhood Education Association of Japan 1979).”

In 1956, the Ministry of Internal Affairs promulgated “Kindergarten Education Guidelines,” a revised version of “Childcare Essentials,” which was thus raised up to the national standard level. Particularly, when we examine and review the critical parts of “Childcare Essentials,” we can clearly identify the purpose of kindergarten education, but we also see that relevant content should be directly connected with primary school education to maintain consistency. Further, it is clear that childcare content should involve “the contents of kindergarten education,” which are divided into the six aspects of health—society, nature, language, music and rhythm, and drawing (Early Childhood Education Association of Japan 1979).

### ***2.2.4 Period of Rapid Economic Growth (1954–1973)***

Beginning in 1965, Japan experienced a period of rapid economic growth coupled with drastic social changes, and yet the pace of change in childcare policy slowed down along with social changes in interpersonal relationships in regions with increased urbanization. Core families lost environments for sharing a common life with their parents and grandparents. Moreover, with the declining birthrate, children often did not have a sibling to share the same living space with and play together for recreation. Most females started working outside of the home, and the “insufficient supporting capacity” of the family and regional communities became major issues. However, at the same time, people made even higher demands for childcare quality and availability due to their various lifestyles.

In 1964, “Kindergarten Education Essentials” was modified for the first time. This revision took into account the legally binding aspects of the national standard, “the Curriculum of Study for Elementary School” modified in 1958. The



Ministry of Internal Affairs then promulgated “Kindergarten Education Essentials” in the form of a “public announcement” to emphasize the fact that the guiding roles and contents it contained complied with national standards (Early Childhood Education Association of Japan 1979).

It was not until 1965 that the “Nursery Childcare Policy” was formulated. Previously, the “Lowest Standards for Child Welfare Facilities” (1948) and “Nursery Operation Essentials” (1950) were the two documents that prescribed the necessary facilities, equipment, and nurse staffing for nursery operations, all of which were subject to the kindergarten “Childcare Essentials” and “Kindergarten Education Essentials” as guidelines for childcare content. The nurseries at the time were described as functioning differently from kindergartens and that all functions of nurseries should comply with the kindergarten education essentials. For these reasons, “Nursery Childcare Guidelines” was modified before it was released based on “Kindergarten Education Essentials.” “Nursery Childcare Guidelines” clearly specified “the basic nature of nursery childcare representing the integration of nursing and education to cultivate children with rich human experiences.” Furthermore, “Kindergarten Education Essentials” emphasized its “difference from primary school education,” “close connection with family,” and its “combination with family education for a better overall educational effect.” In contrast, “Nursery Childcare Guidelines” emphasized the “promotion of active play and work to cultivate social attitudes of self-coordination.” With respect to childcare contents, it is necessary to describe the “optimal major activities at all ages” according to the different historical periods of recent Japanese society (Early Childhood Education Association of Japan 1979).

### ***2.2.5 Bubble Economic Period (1986–1991)***

In 1989, “Kindergarten Education Essentials” was revised for the second time. In the same year, in a revised version of “the Curriculum of Study for Elementary School” with a view to cultivate “self-adaptive persons in giving full play to individual education and social changes, and persons with a strong mentality as Japanese citizens living in a national society” and put forth ideas for maintaining an education curriculum from kindergarten to higher education as the mainstream educational track as promulgated. “Kindergarten Education Essentials” was revised under the impact of such an ideology. The first revised version, “teacher-directed style,” was used for 25 years; however, it did not clearly define the “Playing” aspects of kindergarten education when sections such as those related to “teaching language” and “teaching math” were expanded to include the use of game play in actual teaching activities. The second revision returned to the postwar “Childcare Essentials” and the times of Kurahashi Souzou, while the revised “Kindergarten Education Essentials” retained its initial childcare features. Therefore, the second revision reverted to only five aspects instead of six: “health, interpersonal relationships, environment, language, and art.” It was clarified that the targets of kindergarten education were in the “emotions, desires, and attitudes



of the cultivation results as expected by the conclusion of kindergarten” with an intent to demonstrate the features of childhood education. Furthermore, from the perspective of children, kindergarten education can be defined as “environmental care” with an emphasis on the play of children in their self-motivating activities.

In the first revised version of “Nursery Childcare Guidance” (1990), the changes made mainly involved the second revised version of “Kindergarten Education Essentials,” with the major adjustment being related to “childcare contents,” “basic instruction,” and five major sectors directly related to children aged over 3 years old. However, the basic ideologies of “education through environment” and “comprehensive guidance through play” remained. However, childcare prominently featuring the “integration of nursing and education” remained to be emphasized, although a note was added which stated that “assistance or education” should be necessarily given by a nurse (currently called “a childcare teachers”). This note did not provide a full explanation of the concept of childcare, thereby unfavorably contributing to the practice.

### ***2.2.6 The Heisei Period (1989–)***

In 1998, the “Child Welfare Act” was revised to specify that those nurseries with effective measures and the necessary facilities would become facilities institutions. Under such a system, parents could obtain information related to the service contents of the nursery so that they could select an appropriate nursery according based on the information. In 2001, the “Child Welfare Act” was partially revised to specify the qualifications of childcare teachers in legal form, and as a result increasing numbers of people began paying attention to the professional features of childcare teachers. According to 2002 survey data released by the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor, a policy to combat lower birthrates was earnestly implemented; this policy was legally strengthened in 2003. The “Children-Childcare Assistance Plan” was issued in 2004 with a view to achieving the goal of effective implementation of the lower birthrate policy. In 2006, the concept of “licensed child gardens” was highly integrated with existing kindergartens and nurseries.

In 1998, “Kindergarten Education Essentials” was revised for the third time with the purpose of further specifying the main aims of “Kindergarten Education Essentials.” The second revised version had specified that “respect should be given to child activities to implement childcare through environment,” but in actual practice situations in which “childcare teachers were only onlookers” and in which it was “not necessary to the specific environment in advance” were taken into account. Therefore, compared with the previous “Kindergarten Education Essentials,” there were no obvious changes in the overall content. “Nursery Childcare Guidance” (1999) clarified childcare functions as forms of the support of child rearing: “In view of the environmental changes surrounding children, nurseries should be combined in consultation with a discussion of childcare problems for better the support of child rearing so as to meet current social demands

with more guidance” (as prescribed in Chap. 1: General Provisions: Preamble). Additionally, “age distinction” in the section related to childcare was changed to “development process distinction.” The diction of “age distinction” could therefore be understood as the differentiation of the average development of children and the childcare contents, and as such the additional contents could be interpreted as representing the “children’s individual development process.”

### **2.3 Establishment of the Education Curriculum Over 20 Years in the Heisei Period**

In 2008, “Kindergarten Education Essentials (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology 2008)” was revised for the fourth time, and “Nursery Childcare Guidance (Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare 2008)” was revised for the third time. The purpose of the fourth revision of “Kindergarten Education Essentials” lies in the consideration of the continuity of development and learning to substantiate child education; the consideration of the connection of children lives with those of their families to further substantiate preschool education; and to substantiate the main aspects of the support of child rearing and entrusted childcare (National Institute for Educational Policy Research Curriculum Research Center 2005). It particularly emphasized the smooth continuity of childhood together with family coordination to assist guardians in getting involved with kindergartens as regional child education centers.

“Nursery Childcare Guidance” was revised three separate times, each with considerable changes in both the contents and format, including the following specific changes. Compared with the previous relatively limited guidance document that lacked a legally binding force, the final revision had legally binding language as well as the power to constrain for the purpose of regulatory requirements. At the same time, it was positioned as “the lowest standard for child welfare facilities.” Despite the drastic changes in the newly added contents compared with previous versions, the text still retained the five primary childcare content fields and the “integration of care and education” in terms of childcare and development theory. The term “Childcare Plan” was renamed “Childcare Curriculum.” However, with respect to the education of children aged 0–6, it pointed out that it was necessary to edit and publish consistent curriculums and course materials. All of these changes indicated the emergence of the official regulation of child education in defining nursery childcare integration to promote nursing and education.

In view of the developmental trends of the Japanese socioeconomic mainstream environment directly involving the early childhood education and care, Japan found itself in a whirlwind of social change from a farming society to an industrial society, and now an information society (Government of Japan Cabinet Office Working Team 2012). Along with such changes in social structure, the number of working couples exceeds half of the current employment population, and thus, parents have fewer hours to stay at home and engage in direct communication with

other community members. In such a scenario, it is necessary to reexamine the early childhood education and care, and it goes without saying that previous kindergartens were chiefly institutions of facility-based education. However, the most worrisome problems of the current situation are related to family education capacity and regional social education capacity. It is necessary for us to seek ways to increase birthrates and raise families along with regional social education, because the current state of affairs represents a real danger, namely, it is no longer possible to guarantee the officially stated purpose of education—"the healthy growth of future children."

Under the circumstances of the obvious changes in recent childcare environments, and based on the premise that families and regional society have sufficient education capacity, including the education provided by kindergartens and facilities under construction, it is necessary to fundamentally adjust the entire development orientation of kindergarten education. In light of the above-mentioned situation, the Japanese government is devoted to the reconstruction of integrated childcare and nursing facilities to promote future child education and bring into full play the educational functions of facility-based institutions, families, regional society, and kindergartens. Further, the government will enhance the qualifications of working staff to improve comprehensive kindergarten education and assist in the healthy growth of children.

## 2.4 Reform with Integration of Education and Care

Kindergarten education initially took shape from the Froebel kindergarten in the middle of the nineteenth century. This does not mean that the traditional education contents of the 3Rs (reading, writing, and arithmetic) were simplified to be applicable to children because it instead advocated the individuality of kindergarten education. This kindergarten movement spread to the USA and Japan, but after the end of the war, kindergarten education as a "child-centered ideology" was well established. With the postwar recovery, the functional differences between kindergartens and nurseries were clarified in a notice issued by the two ministers of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Health and Welfare in 1963; the notice specified the educational functions of nurseries while substantiating and developing the dual system related to various competent authorities. Many different attempts were made to eliminate deviations within kindergarten education and nursery childcare, and as a result, the dual system could coexist for more than 50 years.

However, according to the so-called 1.57 Impact of 1988, the increasingly low birthrate attracted much attention as a social problem. It was the "Angel Program" (basic orientation for assistance in future childcare measures) formulated in 1994 that attempted to solve this problem, and as such the childcare measures based on this program included a number of drastic changes. As we entered into the twenty-first century, Japanese family patterns shifted to a standard of working couples, thus triggering the problem of "leftover children," which was not directly related to issues

of nurseries and kindergartens, but rather involved politically oriented policies. The most effective way to solve this problem lies in the integration of education and care, namely the combination of the functions of the nursery and the kindergarten by setting up comprehensive facility-based institutions and recognizing the previously mentioned licensed child garden (Oda and Mori 2006). The resulting new power and authority would give priority to childcare integration as a strategy to aggregate the problems arising from the increasing absence of children, absence of environments, and absence of actionable concepts, while presenting them for modification and review.

After such comprehensive institutions were introduced in 2006, familial factors such as whether the parents were employed could be used to facilitate the choice of childcare times and to recognize the achievements obtained by the licensed child garden. However, due to facility transfers and shortages in financial assistance for licensed child garden, and the fact that they were controlled by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology (MEXT) and the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, both of which involved complicated procedures for account handling and recognition, the number of licensed child garden remained strictly within the number required by the government without any increase. By the end of April 2011, there were 762 licensed child gardens nationwide. These licensed child gardens deviated from the unified integration of kindergartens and nurseries and remained with third party facility-based institutions that did not include kindergartens or nurseries, and as a result, it was pointed out that the dual childcare system was actually a pure ternary system.

Against such a background, the difference in contents related to kindergartens and nurseries, and that of childcare in general were gradually scaled down, particularly with respect to education curriculums, education, and childcare. With respect to education curriculums, in 2008, kindergarten education essentials and nursery childcare guidelines were very similar in content. As for the main differences between individual education and childcare content, childcare differences rather than differences among the various facility-based institutions were more prominent. However, nursery education became emphasized according to the integration of “Nursery Childcare Guidance” but not according to the School Education Act (1947, Act No. 26). Nurseries were retained within some kindergartens, and guardians only performed their childcare duties without an awareness of the implementation of education. Therefore, it is highly necessary to explore “Child Guide” education curriculum to integrate kindergartens and nurseries.

Even within the same country, from the perspective of child policy-based kindergartens and nursery systems for the “maximal interests for all children” aspired after as required by the children’s constitution concerning protected children, the “Child Guide” should be advocated as the first principle for child protection. This will be of vital significance in terms of the basis for cultivating human characteristics from infancy to kindergarten education, and it will be “a guide formed by humans” from a higher perspective. While current kindergarten education essentials and nursery childcare guidance, and other relevant facility-based childcare policies do have their limitations, policies beneficial to children and which effectively incorporate families

and local areas into the scope of the vision are currently under discussion. The following are the matters currently being discussed by the government:

- The functions for society to assist children and parents have degraded, and under the premises of childcare as the first responsibility for parents, families and local areas have combined the assistance functions of childcare, which will take shape in a new format.
- Assisting in the sound growth of all children as the foundation and future investment to cultivate future pacesetters.
- To center on the child rights treaty and abide by the principle that a child will be well educated from birth. This does not refer to educational cramming, but rather an educational model based on exemplary demonstration.
- Providing the protection of children's maximal benefits and prioritizing child education into the national society to guarantee the self-development of children and the construction of a tangible structure for children's respect.
- Childcare facilities such as kindergartens, based on closer cooperation with families, should improve education capacity and bring the leading roles of child education into full play (and not overall family improvement).
- It is very important to cultivate children's capacity for survival (i.e., social conscientiousness, interpersonal communication capacity, independence, and self-discipline in a collective manner).
- In view of the growth that occurs after elementary education, which will be an important period for the implementation of necessary education methods, it is necessary to provide basic education to stabilize the emotions and maintain one's lifestyle (namely childcare) catering to children aged at 0–8.
- Command the life skills and social relations with others from infancy and have experiences that relate to personal desires and interests; at the same time, it is important to conduct unconscious learning from the age of 3 years as the "initial time for learning" to cultivate a continuous and basic learning capacity after elementary education.

## 2.5 Future Development Orientations

In spite of the many problems still present under the new framework, the inconsistency of the current system and its current requirements remain real problems. All countries earnestly implement education and care reform, and thus, it can be said that Japan's ECEC facility-based institutions are now ushering in a period of change of their own.

This round of ECEC integration reform is expected to develop out of a framework catering to "adults," and as such, this paper provides a full discussion in an effort to enhance countermeasures to protect leftover children, make all services more convenient, effectively mitigate controls and monitoring, and increase commercial opportunities in hopes that we can provide the next generation with more favorable environment.

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