

# Unlearning-Based Professional Development for Early Childhood Care and Education: Survey of the ECCELL Program at Ochanomizu University, Japan

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## Abstract

Since the end of World War II, Ochanomizu University has been making advanced efforts to provide recurrent (re-learning) education for in-service childcare workers, and from 2005 to 2010, endowed courses funded by corporate donations were established. In this paper, we have divided the period of the education and research project "Early Childhood Care/Education and Lifelong Learning" (ECCELL) into two periods since 2010 and explained the contents and concepts of each project. The content of the questionnaire for the students from 2017 to 2020 was analyzed, and the students' learning and future issues and prospects were discussed.

**Keywords:** unlearning, professional development, ECCE collaborators

## Current Issues and the Objective of This Article

Currently in Japan, there are a variety of settings and services for early childhood education and day care, such as kindergartens, daycare centers and integrated centers for early childhood education and care. ECCE (Early Childhood Care and Education) professionals work in these facilities as personnel who specialize in offering both childhood care and education. The role of ECCE professionals is to support development of children in collaboration with various specialists and communities to ensure an environment where children can have emotional wellbeing and become involved in various activities (Leavers,1994).

Because there is a growing demand for high quality childcare for children in early childhood, ECCE professionals must further enhance their specialty. To cultivate ECCE professionals' expertise, lifelong professional development is necessary over a long period of time from pre-service education for new graduates to on-going training for managers and practitioners, which is why the Japanese

government began to focus on it in-service training for teachers. At Ochanomizu University, a lifelong learning program called Early Childhood Care/Education and Lifelong Learning (ECCELL) has been implemented since 2010 for working people and undergraduate students to learn early childhood education together. This program is founded on the concept of unlearning. We hereby introduce the concept and the characteristics of the curriculum, and then analyze and report evaluations by the participants of the program.

## Prehistory of the ECCELL Project

Ochanomizu University has been undertaking innovative efforts to provide recurrent education for childcare professionals. Tokyo Women's Normal School (present-day Ochanomizu University) was the first national institution of higher education for women in Japan. The Attached Kindergarten of Tokyo Women's Normal School established in 1876 as part of Tokyo Women's Normal School was the first national kindergarten in Japan. The

childcare professionals and stakeholders back then created while exploring all the policies, including the kindergarten's objectives, guidelines, methods of operation and childcare curricula, by referring to the translated version of the commentaries for "The Gift," educational toys developed by F. Froebel. Along with the opening of the kindergarten, it was necessary to develop childcare professionals. As there were no government-established systems at the time, two female students were sent as trainees from Osaka, and were taught by Clara Matsuno, Fuyu Toyoda and Hama Kondo of the Tokyo Women's Normal School's kindergarten who created the textbooks, lectures, and practical training. Following this, the school became Tokyo Women's Higher Normal School, and contributed to the spread of the institutional development of childcare professionals nationwide. Goroku Nakamura, Minoru Wada and Sozo Kurahashi, who laid the foundation for the early childhood education in Japan, developed the Japanese-style childcare theory using the school's kindergarten as their research site, while they were influenced by Froebel's theory for ECCE and New Education. This led to the development of the pre-service training curriculum.

After the war, the number of kindergartens and daycare centers drastically increased. In 1970, when the enrollment rate of 5-year-old children reached 53.7%, Ochanomizu University began to offer an evening course called "The Society of ECCE Study for Practitioners" (also called "Genshoku-ken"), mainly led by the Department of Child Study of the Faculty of Home Economics. This course consisted of "lectures, group discussions and on-site seminars," which attracted over 70 people annually from all over Japan at its peak. However, the number of people taking this course began to drop when the tuition was raised in 1976 (tuition was collected as research students), resulting in the termination of the course in 1978. However, this Genshoku-

ken was the pioneer of the official recurrent education for ECCE provided by a university in Japan (Naka,2000).

From 2005 to 2010, the university provided a course called "Childcare and Education," using the funds donated by Aprica Kassai (Aprica Children's Products Co.). During these years, a total of 370 working people took the course along with a total of 364 undergraduate students (Anji,Hamaguchi,&Kikuchi,2013). This course was the beginning of the style of education for working professionals in which working people learn with undergraduate students. Working people took this course as non-degree students and were able to choose a curriculum that utilized evening hours, weekends, and holidays (the guidelines for non-degree students were revised so that men could take the course). The university made it a course that can give official credits so that working people who graduated from a two-year college could apply to the National Institution for Academic Degrees and Quality Enhancement of Higher Education with the number of credits necessary for the awarding of a bachelor's degree (Many childcare professionals graduate from two-year colleges in Japan; there are two types of kindergarten teachers' qualifications, Type I and Type II, depending on whether the degree is a bachelor's degree or a two-year college associate's degree).

This program was organized mainly by Miyako Ohto who is a researcher specializing in ECCE, and Yoichi Sakakihara, who is a pediatrician. The curriculum consisted of subjects in various fields (early childhood education, pediatrics, developmental impairment theory, media theory, child culture, etc.) This is because they were focused on capturing children's culture from a broad perspective and meeting the latest needs of childcare settings to cultivate the professionalism in ECCE. In addition to teachers of kindergartens and daycare centers, quite a number of general working people, including businesspeople and

housewives, took the course. The program also included off-campus classes, such as on-site visits and workshops.

#### ECCELL Project (Stage 1: 2010-2018)

##### 1. Overview and key concepts

From the academic year 2010 onward, the program was included in the university's educational research project called "Early Childhood Care/Education and Lifelong Learning (ECCELL; Principal researcher is Junko Hamaguchi). ECCELL project was aided by the special expenses of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) from 2010 to 2015, and is managed by the university budget and the Institute for Education and Human Development from 2016 to 2020. As part of this project, "ECCELL Program for Working People" has been offered as specially established courses for undergraduates. Like the "Childcare and Education" course, this program was offered not only to childcare professionals but also to working people who engage with children from various standpoints as well as undergraduate students. The program was founded on the new project concepts of 'collaborative childcare professionals' and 'unlearning'.

The ECCE programs are offered not only to ECCE professionals who work at kindergartens and daycare centers, but also to general people who work in various other fields in society as well as to parents at home. The program encouraged childcare professionals, parents, and colleagues of people with children to rethink childrearing to eradicate anxiety and biases and provide childrearing-friendly environments created through collaboration, ultimately benefiting children and society. The program positioned childcare professionals, doctors, social workers, parents, and people in the community as "childcare providers" who create environments fit to raise children. From this standpoint, those who participate in the ECCE

programs should be called "ECCE collaborators."

Malcolm Shepherd Knowles, an American educator, emphasized the importance of utilizing experiences as an adult as learning resources in andragogy, unlike pedagogy (Knowles, 2013). In the ECCELL course offered to ECCE collaborators, the participants go through surprising experiences as they can hear opinions and encounter various problematic situations backed by the participants' various occupations or social backgrounds. Through this "unexpectedness," they realize that their common sense is not so common. This is a method called "unlearning," which is effective in gaining a whole new perspective by relativizing their own experience. Instead of gaining knowledge, adults take a moment to rethink their perspectives and mindsets backed by their own experience as members of the society and question them. Through such active reflection, the course aims to help participants heighten sensitivity and awareness toward childrearing, actively engage in childrearing support at workplaces, and transform their mindset so that they see childrearing at home as something that energizes their everyday lives (Knowles, 2013).

Unlearning requires the following active thinking activities.

- A. Experience (actually seeing children and childcare settings or getting involved)
- B. Discussion (discussing their own experience and impressions with others)
- C. Reflection (reflecting on their experience and discussions)
- D. Dialogical thinking through visualization (verbalization, schematization)
- E. Positioning of present day within history
- F. Positioning of their thinking within the context of others' (philosophy)

The course uses repetition of these six activities to help participants gradually relativize their values, develop new perspectives toward children and childrearing, and produce a vision for proceeding toward what they can and want to do.

## 2. Curriculum

Due to budget restrictions, the course began with ten subjects carefully selected from the subjects offered in the “Childcare and Education” course, with the following viewpoints in mind:

- (1) To cover areas surrounding children, communities involving children and administrative services,
- (2) To take in the latest data freely from the curricula for obtaining licenses or qualifications,
- (3) To provide practical subjects that can meet the needs of actual childcare settings,
- (4) To provide information on actual childcare provided in other countries,
- (5) To provide subjects that help participants independently work on their individual issues and challenges.

The course offers subjects not included in teacher training courses, such as “Childcare Policies” and “Childcare Management,” and subjects for having discussions in a small-group seminar and for providing research guidance.

The classes were given during evening hours (6:20 - 7:50 p.m.) to suit the needs of working people. The form of an intensive course was adopted in some subjects. In addition to lectures, bidirectional responses among participants were emphasized. Off-campus workshops, field trips and practical work at actual childcare settings, and special lectures by guest speakers were also carried out.

For those who have had difficulty attending the course on a regular basis, an open lecture titled “Childcare Forum” was launched. From the academic year 2010 onward, the forum has been held annually in Sapporo City and Kumamoto City, and from the academic year 2012 onward on campus as well.

## 3. Overview of the participants

The participants’ occupations were diverse (Table 1); childcare professionals who worked at day care centers and kindergartens or work

as childcare supporters accounted for about 60%. Businesspeople and homemakers account for about 15%, but many of them were looking to become childcare professionals or return to childcare settings.

Table 1. Occupations of course participants (AY2012), people (%)

Occupation (workplace)	1 <sup>st</sup> semester	2 <sup>nd</sup> semester
Daycare center	13 (34.2)	10 (26.3)
Kindergarten	8 (21.1)	9 (23.7)
Childcare support	3 (7.9)	4 (10.5)
Medical care, childcare, and psychology	2 (5.3)	2 (5.3)
Elementary school	2 (5.3)	1 (2.6)
Junior high/high school	0 (0.0)	1 (2.6)
Vocational school	0 (0.0)	1 (2.6)
Child welfare institution	0 (0.0)	1 (2.6)
Company employee	3 (7.9)	2 (5.3)
Freelance (editor, etc.)	4 (10.5)	3 (7.9)
Homemaker	3 (7.9)	4 (10.5)
Total	38 (100.0)	38 (100.0)

## ECCELL Project (Stage 2: 2019-2020)

### 1. Overview

In 2019, the “Childcare and Childcare Support Learning Program” of the ECCELL project was approved by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) as part of the “Brush up Program for professional” (BP). With the acceleration of both the decline in the nation's birthrate and the aging of society, the MEXT encouraged universities to introduce BP so that they not only focus on education and research but also work on lifelong learning projects, in order to achieve Society 5.0. In comparison with other advanced countries, the average age for students in Japan enrolled in undergraduate programs is low at 18 to 19 years old. Few people enroll after being employed. Thus, the awareness of the importance of recurrent education is generally low.

BP is a mechanism that approves recurrent education programs providing bidirectional or multi-directional classes or discussions in cooperation with businesses and organizations. Ochanomizu University, in cooperation with Bunkyo Ward where the university is located, has decided to embark on the developmental

project of "Childcare and Childcare Support Learning Program" in collaboration with the Centre for ECCE of Ochanomizu University. The program consists of 12 subjects, and those who completed 120 hours or more within two years will be awarded a completion certificate. The following three are the new pillars of this program.

(1) To plan, provide and evaluate programs for

working people in collaboration with the Centre for ECEC of Ochanomizu University (Ochadai kodomoen) and engage in public relations activities together with Bunkyo Ward.

(2) To incorporate evening subjects of the graduate schools into the curriculum to update academic research methods and new expert knowledge.

(3) To introduce workshops on expression (e.g., drama and dance) and open classes for

Table 2. Subjects offered in Childcare and Childrearing Learning Program (2019-2020)

Subject group	Category	Subject name	Hours	Credit	Timeframe
Basic subject (undergraduate)	Free choice	World of infants and toddlers II	12	1	2019 2 <sup>nd</sup> semester (Saturdays and holidays)
	Free choice	World of infants and toddlers III	12	1	2020 1 <sup>st</sup> semester (Saturdays and holidays)
	Free choice	Studies on early childhood education VI	12	1	2020 2 <sup>nd</sup> semester (Saturdays and holidays)
	Free choice	Seminar on child study VI	12	1	2019 1 <sup>st</sup> semester (Saturdays and holidays)
	Free choice	Research methods of child studies II	12	1	2020 1 <sup>st</sup> semester (Saturdays and holidays)
(Open classes)	Required*	Workshop for physical expression	6	—	AY2020 (Saturdays and holidays)
(Open classes)	Required*	Fieldwork	6	—	2020 2 <sup>nd</sup> semester (Saturdays and holidays)
Advanced subject (graduate)	Free choice	Anthropology of early childhood care and education	22.5	2	2019 2 <sup>nd</sup> semester (Fridays) 6:20-7:50pm
	Free choice	Study on early childhood care and education	22.5	2	2020 2 <sup>nd</sup> semester (Fridays) 6:20-7:50pm
	Free choice	Comparative sociology of childhood	22.5	2	2019 1 <sup>st</sup> semester (Thursdays) 6:20-7:50pm
	Free choice	Comparative study on education and culture	22.5	2	2020 1 <sup>st</sup> semester (Thursdays) 6:20-7:50pm
Research subject	Free choice	Independent study	3	—	AY2019, 2020

Table 3. Number of Respondents per Questionnaire and Course Name

	Number of respondents	Name of subjects offered [Number of working people who registered]	Note
2017 1 <sup>st</sup>	28	Seminar on child study III Studies on early childhood education III Research methods of child studies I	Collected per subject (overlaps included)
2017 2 <sup>nd</sup>	23	Seminar on child study IV Studies on early childhood education IV	Collected per subject (overlaps included)
2018 1 <sup>st</sup>	12	Seminar on child study V Research methods of child studies III	Collected per subject (overlaps included)
2018 2 <sup>nd</sup>	15	Studies on early childhood education V World of infants and toddlers I	Collected per subject (overlaps included)
2019 1 <sup>st</sup>	10	Seminar on child study VI [20] Comparative sociology of childhood [3]	Collected per participant (no overlap)
2019 2 <sup>nd</sup>	9	World of infants and toddlers II [18] Anthropology of early childhood care and education [10] Workshop for physical expression [Approach to molding] [11] Workshop for physical expression [Approach to musical experience] [8] Independent study [8]	Collected per participant (no overlap)
2020 1 <sup>st</sup>	9	World of infants and toddlers III [14] Research methods of child studies II [7] Comparative study on education and culture [5]	Collected per participant (no overlap)

experiencing field research and to create a short-term course that is easy to attend with relatively simple procedures.

## 2. Subjects

The subjects offered were divided into the “basic subject” group (undergraduate level) mainly for unlearning and the explorative graduate-level “advanced subject” group. It did not matter which ones participants took to take first. Working people who only had a two-year college associate degree were allowed to take advanced (graduate-level) subjects depending on how many years of experience and what kind of experience they have had in society. In terms of the research subject, participants were required to attend specified symposiums or forums and submit a research project (Table 2).

### Evaluation of the ECCELL Project (2017-2020)

#### 1. Evaluation using questionnaires

##### (1) Participants of the survey

At the end of each semester, a questionnaire survey was conducted with those who took the course of the ECCELL project Stage 1 & 2 about their objectives for taking the course, how they benefited from the course, the effects of the course, opinions about the management, etc.

The survey was conducted by subject for Stage 1 and by participant for Stage 2. Many students registered for multiple subjects. Table 3 shows the number of respondents of the survey. Very few undergraduate students registered for the subjects in ECCELL Stage 2. Because the number of dialogical classes and active learning classes increased, the differences in experience were noticeably clear compared to working people, and the levels of the subjects might have seemed too high for undergraduate students.

##### (2) Objectives for taking the course

The responses to the free-answer question showed that many cited “to deepen learning,” “personal development,” and “to update knowledge on childcare and improve skills” in

order of frequency. Those who worked in the fields other than childcare also cited “to make use of what I learn in the area of childcare in my profession.” Some also cited “to deepen relationships with others through discussions and exchange of opinions” and “to gain new perspectives.”

##### (3) Benefits of taking the course

5-point scale was used to have the respondents choose their degree of satisfaction. The results showed that the degree of satisfaction with the overall program management was high in general, and it was nearly 100% in Stage 2 (Figure 1).

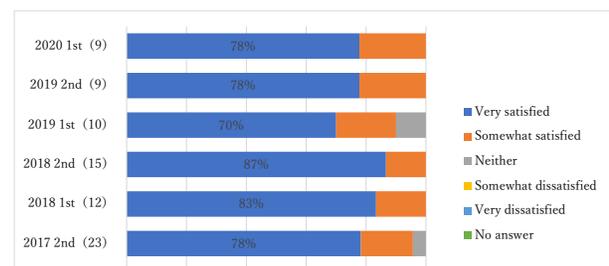
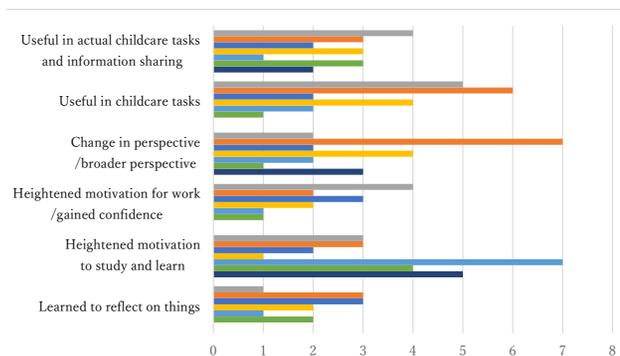


Figure 1. Degree of satisfaction with the program management (Number of respondents in parentheses)



	Learned to reflect on things	Heightened motivation to study and learn	Heightened motivation for work /gained confidence	Change in perspective /broader perspective	Useful in childcare tasks	Useful in actual childcare tasks and information sharing
2017 1st	1	3	4	2	5	4
2017 2nd	3	3	2	7	6	3
2018 1st	3	2	3	2	2	2
2018 2nd	2	1	2	4	4	3
2019 1st	1	7	1	2	2	1
2019 2nd	2	4	1	1	1	3

Figure 2. Changes in daily lives by taking the course

In terms of the benefits of taking the course, many cited “being able to talk with other participants,” “self-insight/self-improvement/broader perspective,” and “new knowledge/specialized knowledge/learn new things” in the order of frequency. The number for the answer “I learned new things and was inspired through discussions and exchange of opinions with childcare professionals, students and general working people” was high both in Stage 1 and Stage 2. Some cited unexpected effects, such as “I gained confidence as I was able to keep up with the online lectures.”

(4) Difficulties encountered by the participants

Many participants cited “securing time” and “scheduling” as difficulties throughout the program, likely due to the many research projects in 2017 and 2018. As classes were given online in the first semester of 2020, many reported problems with the online conference system. BP began in AY2019; however, many cited scheduling issues despite wanting to take graduate-level classes as well as issues in securing time for summarizing, preparation, and review.

(5) Changes in daily lives

When asked about what changes were brought to their daily lives and their jobs after taking the classes, the top answer was “motivation to study and learn,” followed by “change in perspective/broader perspective” and “useful in childcare tasks.” After BP began, many participants answered, “motivation to study and learn.” As the first semester of 2020 took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, no answers related to changes in childcare tasks (Figure 2).

(6) Motivation for the future after taking this course

When we asked about how motivated they were in terms of the future after taking the course, the most frequent answer from 2017 to

the 2020 1st semester was “I want to continue to learn.” This was followed by “I want to deep dive into the theme” and “I want to explore new research agendas.” This trend was the same as the overall trend even after BP began.

(7) Satisfaction with the program management

The participants appreciated being able to hear opinions of others through group discussions, reminders sent before the class via email, responses to the questions, and responses to problems during online classes.

(8) Expected improvements in program management

Many participants requested improvements related to class administration in Stage 1 (2017-2018), such as equipment, materials, and time allocation. Others requested improvements related to procedures for taking the classes, indicating that procedures are complicated and notifications about registration are required, and prior notifications in Stage 2 after BP began in 2019.

(9) Preference for course format and timing

Many participants requested non-regular intensive lectures provided on weekends and during summer and winter holidays. After classes were provided online from AY2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, most participants were satisfied and wanted this style to continue.

(10) Interest in enrollment (results of multiple-choice questions)

The percentage of students who responded affirmatively to the question “Are you interested in transferring or enrolling in an undergraduate program?” after taking the course ranged from 38% to 92% between the first semester of 2017 and the first semester of 2020. On the other hand, the percentage of affirmative responses to the question “Do you want to go to graduate school?” ranged from 58% to 92%, indicating a consistently high interest in graduate school. This is partly due to their academic background,

i.e. whether they graduated from a two-year college or a four-year university, and because of those who wished to advance their career and those who did not were at the opposite ends of the scale.

#### Overall Discussion and Challenges

We provided an overview of the history of Ochanomizu University's lifelong learning program for childcare providers (ECCE professionals and general working people), introduced the current ECCELL project (Stage 1 and Stage 2), and discussed the results of the evaluation questionnaire surveys and their analysis.

The ECCELL project was founded with “collaborative childcare providers” and “unlearning” as the key concepts, and has been implemented for working people who want to learn for the purposes of “learning more deeply” and “personal development.” Participants learn a lot from having discussions with other participants who vary in profession or age, which leads to self-evaluation such as deepening of self-insight and broadening one's perspective. We can see the effects of unlearning from the increase of “motivation to study and learn” and the “change in perspective.”

Online classes met the needs of participants with difficulties in securing time and scheduling. This method should be improved to allow students in other prefectures to participate easily, and classes should be further developed to allow participants to experience regional differences.

Complexity of procedures to register for the

classes is a challenge in terms of the course management. When the course was provided with the donations from Aprica Kassai first provided funding for the course, many students used the credits they earned to apply to the National Institution for Academic Degrees and Quality Enhancement of Higher Education to receive bachelor's degrees. However, there is less need for it now and many students instead come to solve practical problems or for personal development. Therefore, we are going to introduce open lectures in the basic subjects and make the procedures for the registration simpler. Also, because many are also looking to explore research methods and theories, we are planning to enrich the graduate-level classes.

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2021年2月15日 受稿