

The Significance of “Interstitial Practice” in Simultaneous Activity Situations in a Kindergarten

YAMASHITA Megumi

This study focuses on the “interstitial practice” that occur accidentally in simultaneous activity situations in kindergartens. “Interstitial practice” are created by temporary children’s improvisational activities that exceed the intentions of the teachers. The aim of the study was to discover the significance of the events occurring in “interstitial practice” and to examine how new teachers were involved in these activities.

Kindergartens serve as places of daily life for children, where they occasionally spend time in defined groups, such as class groups or other forms of groups of children in the kindergarten. Previous research has found that simultaneous activities function as one of the forms of childcare that is especially effective in nurturing useful abilities in terms of uniformly raising a standard of children’s activity to a certain level and also helping them learn how to live in a group efficiently. It is also characterized by the foregrounding of the expectations of teachers and some research has revealed the detailed process by which the children learn the physical movements demonstrated by the adults. Furthermore, it has been shown that new teachers are more likely to experience difficulty in situations where they spend time in a defined group as their guidance skills are visually compared with those of other teachers or judged by cohesiveness of classes. Thus, research on simultaneous activity situations have traditionally focused on the process of homogenization as a group, such as “socialization” and “adaptation to the group”, for which teachers are required to acquire guidance skills. On the other hand, some research have argued that children are not only obediently adapting to simultaneous activities, but are also found to be deviants while still being part of the community. Such cases, however, have not been adequately examined to date. Therefore, in order to overcome the view of children who deviate from the expected efforts as members of a group as “deviance”, this study drew on Wenger’s (1990) perspective of the “communities of practice” as its analytical framework. In this framework, simultaneous activity situations were viewed from a multilayered perspective. This new perspective that sees a simultaneous activity situation as a place where children’s practice beyond the intentions of teachers are created, enable one to see it not as something that needs to be filled in order to improve productivity, but as something potential from the perspective of life. Thus, this study focused on the creation of “interstitial practice” that are actualized beyond human control and predetermined assumptions.

Using the abovementioned perspective as an analytical framework, this study analyzed data collected through an ethnography at a kindergarten offering three-year care. We reconfigure the image of the child, conventionally viewed as “deviance”, as the creation of a temporary “interstitial” communities of practice that transcends the intentions of the teachers, and illustrated the process by which “interstitial practice” are created by the children. First, based on Wenger’s perspective, the simultaneous activity situations had created not only “official” communities of practice that followed the intentions of the teachers but also “interstitial” communities of practice that did not necessarily coincide with the teachers’ intentions. In the former “official” community of practice, the children uniformly accessed the content presented by the teachers and, hence, in the manner presented by the teachers. Consequently, the way in which the children engaged with the object and their awareness gained through this experience was limited by the

intentions of the teachers. On the other hand, the “interstitial” communities of practice were actualized as the children were going beyond the limitations of the access. Children were interested and engaged in aspects of the content that were different from those presented by the teachers. They factually engaged with the objects presented by the teachers but in different ways of access presented by the teachers. There was emerging awareness toward others and things that children had never encountered in their formal practice. In other words, it became clear that the “interstitial practice” in the simultaneous activity situations are characterized by the fact that the scope of access restricted by the teacher’s presentation is temporarily released by the creation of improvisational practices by the children.

Next, the concept of “participation” in the community of practice by Lave & Wenger (1993) was drawn as a framework for how new teachers might be involved in the seemingly meaningless “interstitial practice” of children. At the beginning of the observation, the new teachers clearly presented “unrelatedness” or “irrelevance” to the children by suppressing the “interstitial practice”. However, they gradually became interested in the children in the “interstitial practice”, and began to positively perceive them as unique practice created by the children, and finally to transform their views into positive ones. This transformation was thought to have been triggered partly by the opportunity for the new teachers to be exposed to the different perspectives of the observers through the sharing of events between the new teachers and the observers. By gradually becoming aware of an interesting perspective of the “interstitial practice”, the new teachers came to understand the children’s activities not only as they intended, but also how the children interacted with others and things from the children’s perspective. It is thought that the new teachers' understanding of the children deepened as they sensed the children’s vitality.

Finally, we discussed the significance for children to experience “interstitial practice”, based on Yano’s (2014) theory of “vitality”. When the value is placed on homogeneity and socialization of groups or the usefulness of developing skills in the future, it becomes difficult to make sense of the events occurring in the “interstitial practice”. However, based on the theory of “vitality”, the children involved in the “interstitial practice” were immersed and merged into the thing itself. In this way, the children transcended the limitations of involvement with the things that were restricted as they were presented by the teachers. We found that the children experienced a “becoming” experience in which the boundary between the self and the world dissolved. From these findings, it was thought that the “interstitial practice” would give rise to a sense of “regaining connection to the world”. It was thought to bring a sense of being alive now and here to the children on a different level than being useful or being able to do something. The significance of respecting “interstitial practice” was also discussed, as well as the significance of accepting the very existence of children, and the significance of recognizing each child’s existence as it is and its value.

In this study, we reconfigured the image of children’s, which had previously been viewed negatively as “deviance”, as the creation of “interstitial practice”, and depicted children's inherent vitality. It was found that discovering and accepting the true nature of the children involved in the “interstitial practice” in simultaneous activity situations has the potential to lead to a deeper understanding of children by teachers. Further issues to be addressed include: (1) further examination from a relational perspective of the opportunities for how teachers participate in “interstitial practice”, (2) examination of the relationship between new teachers’ entry into the

interest to the world of children and their professional development as teachers, and (3) exploration of “child understanding” through sensing the vitality of children.