

CREATION OF TEACHING MATERIALS OF HEALTH AND SAFETY EDUCATION FOR PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

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Abstract

To identify what we should teach for health and safety in early childhood education, we asked preschool teachers to create teaching materials for preschool children. Preschool teachers selected the themes that they considered the most important for children to protect their health and life by themselves. Most preschool teachers' handmade materials were about play actively. Playing actively was considered to be the most important. The second-best theme was safety education. Preschool teachers who watched over and cared for children daily thought that the necessary teaching materials for children should include caring, playing, and preventing injury to children during their healthy upbringing, whether with or without COVID-19. Protecting children's health and life should be done in the spirit of "children first" and "children at the center." Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, taking care of children's health and safety is biased. However, protecting children's health and life should be done in the spirit of "children first," while health and safety education for children should place "children at the centre."

Keywords: Health & Safety Education, Children First, Children Center.

1. Introduction

Studying health and safety in both preschools and schools is among the most important educational contents (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, Japan, 2011). The COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted early childhood education. Preschools were closed because preschool teachers were either infected or became close contact persons. Children were forced to refrain from going to preschools because they themselves or their parents were infected. Under these circumstances, preschools were also requested to more effectively manage the prevention of infection (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, Japan, 2020). However, there were almost no fatal or severe cases of children infected with the disease (Japan Pediatric Society 2021). Even during the COVID-19 pandemic in Japan, the main causes of children's deaths were freak accidents and congenital diseases, and not COVID-19 infections (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, Japan, 2022). This study aims to clarify health and safety education contents to support children's healthy growth during the COVID-19 period by analyzing preschool teachers' handmade teaching materials and the themes currently considered by preschool teachers to be the most important for protecting children's health and lives.

2. Method

The collaborators in this study comprised 93 preschool teachers (we asked 93 preschool teachers and 90 of them cooperated) in and around Tokyo in Japan. They were each asked to produce one teaching material. They were asked to select one theme of health and safety they currently considered to be the most important for preschool children in the national early-childhood education curriculum. The format of the teaching material used one A3 size (297 x 420 mm) hard paper. On the front side, which would be shown to children, teachers wrote letters and drew pictures or illustrations (Fig.1). On the back side, there were references such as the corresponding parts of the national curriculum, what the teachers would say when they showed it to children, or something helpful (Fig.2). All 93 teaching materials were converted to a

pdf format. The data to analyze were on the front pages. A qualitative, interpretive, descriptive design was used. Data analysis was performed using Braun and Clarke's framework for thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). After the conversion to the pdf format, the original teaching materials were returned to each preschool teacher to use in their preschool.



Figure 1: A sample of the teaching material shown to children : Playing actively

3. Results

Table 1 shows a breakdown of the themes of 90 teaching materials produced by the preschool teachers.

The theme selected by most preschool teachers was “Play actively” (Fig.1). The theme selected by the second-highest number of teachers was “Safety education.” There were three subdivisions in “Safety education:” “life safety” which aims to prevent injury in daily-life (Fig. 3-1), “traffic safety” (Fig.3-2), and “disaster safety,” of which the main purpose was an evacuation drill. Evacuation for an earthquake and fire was selected. Fig.3-3 (3-3-1 and 3-3-2) shows the evacuation drill for an earthquake. Every teaching material was designed for children to be interested in and to concentrate on. For example, the evacuation-drill teaching material has four small pieces in the lower part (Fig.3-3-1). The symbols for four principles for evacuation (common to both earthquakes and fires) were drawn on each small piece. When the small pieces were flipped over, an explanation of each symbol could be read (Fig.3-3-2). By not only talking but also manipulating devices ensured children's attention. The theme selected by the third-highest number of teachers was “Dietary education,” while the one selected by the fourth-highest number was “Healthy lifestyle.” In a subdivision of “healthy lifestyle,” sleep (Fig.5-1) had the most interest, while “go to bed early, wake up early, and have breakfast,” which were concerned with sleep, were also selected (Fig.5-2). Washing hands, which was directly concerned with infection prevention, was the theme selected by the fifth-highest number, which were few (Fig.6). Fig.6 shows the teaching materials for washing hands, whose illustrations were almost the same as those for the traditional health-education teaching materials and governmental PR. The point of the design of this material was to use child-friendly examples for hand shapes and motions during washing: turtle, wolf, mountain, bike, and watch.

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Fig.3-1: Safety education – life safety



Fig.3-2: Safety education – traffic safety



Fig.3-3-1: Safety education – disaster safety



Fig.3-3-2: Safety education – disaster safety, flips over to show the explanation

4. Discussion

Support for the healthy growth of children should be based on “children first” and place “children at the center,” with an understanding of children’s current situation. It is not only COVID-19 infection and its prevention that are the health and safety issues that children are facing. Through this study, we discovered that the more serious and important current issues in child health and safety are the negative effects on children’s minds and bodies due to restricted or prohibited activities.

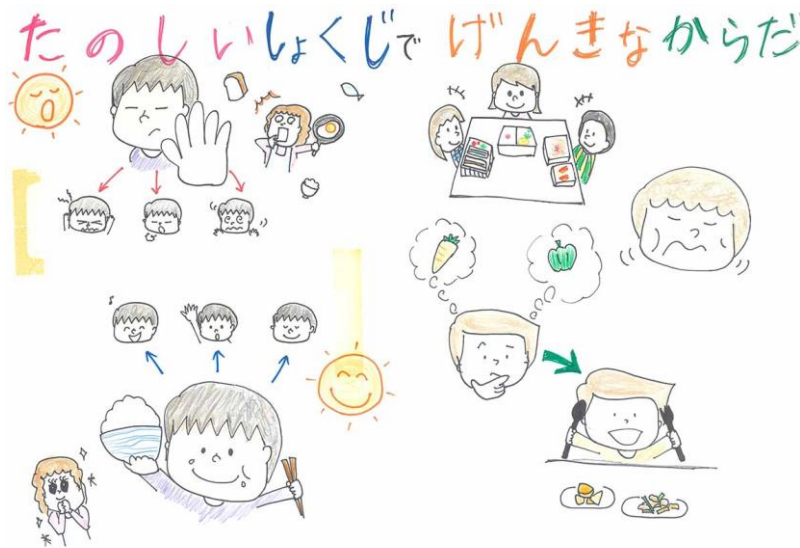


Fig.4: Dietary education – enjoy eating

The reason that “Play actively” was selected by most preschool teachers as a health and safety education theme for children is anxiety about preschool children’s decreased exercise and activity due to COVID-19 (Naito, et. Al., 2020). The government declared a state of emergency. For a long period, children were also restricted from going out, going to preschools, and playing outside. As of 2022, strict attention to infection prevention remained necessary, while children could go to preschools and play outside. Preschool teachers thought that it was most important to make children aware of the necessity of playing actively and energetically.

The second-best selected theme was “Safety education.” There are three categories in this theme. Among them, “life safety” was the most common. The reason could be that the leading cause of children’s death was freak accidents, which happened in daily life (Japan Sports Council, 2021). The main part of “disaster safety” was evacuation drills. Four principles of evacuation common to both earthquakes and fires were taught: never push, never run, never chat, and never return. In Japanese, never push is OSANAI, never run is KAKENAI, never chat is SHYABERANAI, and never return is MODORANAI. Connecting the first letters of the four principles in Japanese letters (O, Ka, Shy, Mo) means “sweets” in Japanese. It is easy for children or the elderly to remember, and therefore it is disseminated as a slogan for evacuation.

The third major theme was “Dietary education.” The main content was “enjoy eating.” Conventional dietary education emphasized nutrition balance and not being picky. However, the emphasis changed to “enjoy eating” because the government asked citizens to eat silently as part of infection prevention, and even children could not enjoy eating with chatting friends sharing a table. Consequently, meal-time became unhappy time, and children felt down during eating and had poor appetite. Therefore, preschool teachers thought that “enjoy eating” was the utmost important. For a growing child, a good appetite is very important, and the advantages of “enjoy eating” would outweigh the disadvantage of “not-silent-eating.” Additionally, adults had already abolished silent eating; thus, forcing “silent eating” on children would have a negative impact on them.



Fig.5-1: Healthy lifestyle – sleep



Fig.5-2: Healthy lifestyle – go to bed early, wake up early, and have breakfast

The fourth major theme was “Healthy lifestyle,” with an especial focus on sleep. The COVID-19 pandemic caused sleep disorder not only in adults but also in children (Sharma, et.al., 2021). Sleep is necessary for healthy growth, while good sleep is an important component of a well-regulated life. In Japan, “go to bed early, wake up early, and have breakfast” has become a slogan. It is easy to remember, and therefore using this slogan when teaching children would be helpful and effective.

Teaching materials for “washing hands” concerning infection prevention were not produced by many. It was not because preschool teachers underestimated washing. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, washing had often been taught in preschool: returning from outside, after toilet, before eating lunch, and snack time; thus, children have been well educated about washing hands. Moreover, during the pandemic, government publicity on washing hands has been

pervasive, while children have watched it in several places. Therefore, there would be no need to create new teaching materials for washing hands.



Fig.6: Washing hands

The infection-prevention effects of COVID-19 cannot be well anticipated, whereas the effect of preventing aggravation can be anticipated, to some extent. However, in the first place, preschool age children rarely become aggravated (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare: FORTH, 2021). It is said that the vaccination of young children is necessary to prevent infection in the elderly. However, is it necessary to expose young children to risks such as side effects for the sake of the elderly?

Through this analysis of teaching materials produced by preschool teachers, we confirmed that protecting children's health and safety should be based on the notions of "children first" and "children at the center," and health and safety education for children should be considered and done in a spirit of "children first" and "children at the center."

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