



Career Support for Childcare Workers in the Age of Child-and-Family Social Work: Aspiring Childcare Workers' Attitudes and Issues Related to the Use and Composition of Panel Theater Plays

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Abstract

This study aims to understand the attitudes of students aspiring to be childcare workers toward using and composing panel theater plays, as well as the potential effects of institutional changes in childcare in Japan, particularly the upcoming daycare system for all children. Based on the results of a questionnaire survey and with reference to the teaching practices of one of the authors, it also discusses issues and strategies related to career support for childcare workers. This study finds that all but one of the 52 respondents expressed an interest in using and composing panel theater plays, suggesting that progress has been made in resolving issues indicated in a prior report wherein respondents reported this technique as laborious, time consuming, and tricky. The current survey revealed fresh concerns about accommodating the needs of children in settings other than regular daycare centers (children in the community in institutional care, in after-school programs, and those with special needs) and the broader range of needs once the daycare system for all children is introduced. To address these challenges, it is necessary to further refine teaching practices for aspiring childcare workers.

Keywords: Child-and-family social work, childcare worker, career support, panel theater, daycare system for all children

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I. Introduction

We are conducting research into an aspect of career support for childcare workers, namely the use and composition of panel theater plays among students aspiring to be childcare workers. In our previous study (Asano & Yamamoto, 2022), some respondents expressed interest in using panel theater, but a reluctance for panel theater plays. When asked the reason for this reluctance, respondents said that they perceived making panel theater plays as “time consuming,” “laborious,” and “tricky.” We concluded that there was a need to address these issues by focusing on teaching practices in childcare career support that will instill confidence among the aspirants toward using and composing panel theater plays¹⁾. In the same study, we found that career awareness and career-development practices could be affected by changes in the circumstances surrounding childcare (particularly the spread of COVID-19 infection) and by changes in the Japanese system of childcare. With the establishment of the Children and Families Agency in 2023, child-and-family social work in the country has undergone some development, leading to a transition in the system of childcare and in circumstances related to child-and-family social care. Exemplifying this transition is the government’s policy to widen access to daycare centers by introducing the “daycare system for all children” (kodomo dare dem tsuen seido).

Several studies have been conducted on

childcare career support programs that involve the use and composition of panel theater plays. The literature has revealed insights into awareness of panel theater as a teaching tool,²⁾ its use in lessons,³⁾ its relationship with artistic expression in preschool content,⁴⁾ and verbal language in preschool content.⁵⁾ In the current study, we conduct a questionnaire survey wherein we enquire about students’ attitudes toward using and composing panel theater plays, including how they feel this would be affected by the introduction of the daycare system for all children and related developments. In this report, we discuss issues and strategies related to career support for childcare workers gleaned from the survey responses and with reference to the teaching practices of one of the authors.

II. Purpose and Methods

The purpose of the present study was to obtain insights into strategies to help aspiring childcare workers develop their expertise in using and composing panel theater plays, considering the changes in the system of childcare and in child-and-family social care in Japan.

Presented below are the results of a questionnaire survey that we conducted among 56 third-year students (11 males, 41 females) taking a childcare course taught by one of the study authors at a four-year university, in AY 2023-24. The survey was conducted after the students had attended practical

training wherein they used panel theater plays composed by the author. In the survey, the students wrote their thoughts about using and composing panel theater plays, about how they compare with other teaching materials (such as picture books and paper theater), and about the effects of institutional changes due to the introduction of the daycare system for all children. The study was approved by the ethics committee of the Kunitachi College of Music in AY 2023-24 (approval no. 2338).

III. Results

1. Panel Theater plays Used by the Author

The study author taught a 25-minute section of the 90-minute class. In light of the results of the previous study, the following three theater plays, along with music, were used to stimulate the students' interest in using and composing panel theater plays.

- 1) Hallelujah⁶⁾
- 2) Barbecue⁷⁾
- 3) Waiting For The Bus⁸⁾

2. Author's Previous Experience in Using and Composing Panel Theater Plays

The panel theater plays were designed not just as enjoyable to watch, but to show how easy it is to perform them and express oneself in drama.

(1) Hallelujah

The Hallelujah play involves the basic

operations of affixing characters to the panel and flipping them over in time with the music. During class, the author emphasized one of the main characteristics of Hallelujah: affixing and flipping. The author also tried to ensure that the students, as they progressively told the story by affixing the character models to panel in time with the music, would gain an appreciation of how improvisational and flexible the play is. The play also involved word play so that the students would experience the fun of verbal expression.

The author used Hallelujah as an introductory play because it is approachable, with its use of singalong, and because it allows the use of basic panel theater techniques (affixing and flipping).

(2) Barbecue

The Barbecue is a fun play wherein one performs music and movement with participants. To ensure that the students experience the key characteristic of the play (communication with participants through music and movement), the author focused on providing a fun communal experience to the students wherein they would complete the panel by affixing barbecue skewer models to it. The author also tried to familiarize the students with the improvisational, made-in-the-moment nature of the play, wherein the panel is developed in response to the students' music and movement.

(3) Waiting For The Bus

Waiting For The Bus is a panel theater

play developed by the author and Megumi Kitagawa. The author tried to ensure that, as the character models were progressively affixed to the panel, the students would get a sense of the hooks (certain repeated phrases and riffs) in the music. The author also tried to ensure that each student discovers the various enjoyable aspects of the play, such as encountering surprises and thrills in the acts of the character models and predicting how the story will develop.

3. Post-Intervention Survey: Students' Attitudes Toward the Use and Composition of Panel Theater

When asked how they came to know about panel theater, 45 (11 of whom were male) of the 52 respondents replied that they first learned about panel theater at the university class (the question allowed multiple answers). Some respondents said that they first learned about panel theater at their daycare center, during extra-curricular activities at junior high school, or during a high school class, and some said that they had designed panel theater plays during high school.

All but one of the 52 respondents (the exception being a female respondent) said that they had composed a panel theater play in the past; about where they composed the play, 49 said, "university" while the others said, "during a high school class".

(1) Attitudes Toward Using Panel Theater

After the author's class, 51 of the 52

respondents (11 men, 40 women) expressed a willingness to use panel theater.

The uninterested respondent cited, 'panel theater seems laborious,' as the reason. The remaining respondents cited the following reasons for wanting to use panel theater, including reasons related to children, to themselves, and to panel theater.

1) Males

① Reasons related to children:

- Children enjoy it
- Children and adults enjoy it together
- Children can join in

② Reasons related to themselves:

- I enjoy it: 3
- I can perform as I wish
- I enjoy communicating with children
- It will likely create a buzz

③ Reasons related to panel theater

- The dramatic mechanisms are interesting: 2
- It is interesting how each actor enjoys in a different way
- You can make a play

2) Females

① Reasons related to children:

- Children can enjoy it: 4
- Children and adults can enjoy it together: 4

② Reasons related to themselves:

- I enjoy it: 8
- I like to have fun with children: 3
- I want to create a play that uses a blacklight: 3
- I have always wanted to use panel theater since learning about it at high school
- I want to use my own play

③ Reasons related to panel theater

- Panel theater is fun: 4
- You can have all kinds of creative ideas: 3
- It is accessible to all children: 2
- The dramatic mechanisms are interesting: 2
- You can perform freely: 2
- It is fun for the performers and the audience

(2) Attitudes Toward Composing Panel Theater

After the author's class, 51 of the 52 respondents (11 men, 40 women) expressed a willingness to compose panel theater plays. The respondent who was uninterested in composing panel theater plays (a woman) cited, as the reasons, that it was hard work, that she was clumsy at it, that it was time consuming, and that the materials are expensive.

Among the remaining respondents, the respondents cited the following reasons for their willingness to compose panel theater plays.

1) Reasons related to children:

① Males

- It would be fun to enjoy, together with children, the play I made.
- It will help in communicating with children

② Females

- I like to have fun with children: 2

2) Reasons related to themselves:

① Males

- I want to use my own play in practical training and teaching practice
- I like making things
- I am interested in creating original works

② Females

- I want to create diverse kinds of works: 9

- I want to create diverse kinds of dramatic devices: 4
- I want to enjoy making something: 3
- I want to use a play that I composed: 3
- It seems enjoyable: 2
- It is charming: 2
- I want to increase the number of works that I made: 2
- It seems interesting
- I want a sense of accomplishment
- I want to know about the composition method and how long it takes
- I want the play I compose to have long-term use
- I want to make a play based on a story
- I have been thinking about it since I was at high school

3) Reasons related to panel theater

① Males

- The dramatic mechanisms are interesting
- You get a lot of freedom

② Females

- It seems easier than I thought

Shown below are responses expressing interest in teaching tools other than panel theater:

1) Picture books

① Males

- They are close to hand and easy to get into: 2
- They are fun
- There are many kinds of them
- Children themselves enjoy them
- They help children develop a fondness of

reading

- It is easy to envisage the scenes
- They are impactful
- They are portable

② Females

- They are relatable: 5
- There are many kinds of picture books: 4
- They are fun
- You can add creative touches like enacting the story with hand games
- They are close to hand and relatable
- They help children develop a fondness of reading
- They help children develop a fondness of reading
- You get a lot of freedom

2) Paper theater

① Males

- They have vivid illustrations

② Females

- You can add creative touches like enacting the story with hand games: 2
- There are many kinds of them: 2
- They are easy to use
- They are easy to get into
- It's easy to envisage the scenes
- You do not have to learn lines

3) Apron theater

① Males

- It is easy
- One can touch it
- It is easy to pack and unpack the apron set

② Females

- It is easy to use: 4
- It is versatile: 3

- One can enjoy it three-dimensionally: 3
- It can be performed in a small space: 2
- It comes in many kinds
- It is versatile
- You can add creative touches like enacting the story with hand games

4) Paper puppetry

① Males

- It is easy

② Females

- It can be performed in limited space: 2
- They are easy to use

5) Paper-plate theater

① Men

- No responses

② Women

- It is easy to use: 2
- It can be performed in limited space

The respondents also highlighted things to be aware of when using panel theater with local children or those in institutional care, or after-school programs. They also highlighted the potential impacts of the daycare system for all children and the measures they might take.

1) Local children

- I would choose plays that are relatable to a wide range of children: 4
- I would choose content and methods that are accessible to the children: 2
- I would put in extra efforts in PR: 2
- I would perform the play in the community
- I would remember the children's names

2) Children in institutional care

- I would choose content and methods that

the children can easily participate in: 2

- I would choose plays that children would enjoy
- I would create a relaxed environment
- I would use it as introductory teaching

3) Children in after-school programs

- I would choose plays that the children would enjoy: 3
- I would choose plays that all the children can participate in

4) Other

- I would adapt the play to accommodate children with special needs
- I would choose plays that can be enjoyed visually
- I would adapt the performance to the children's needs

5) Potential impacts of the daycare system for all children and strategies to take

① Impacts

- Some children might go home part way
- There will be a broader range of developmental levels among the children

② Strategies

- Try to make the plays as fun as possible: 2
- Ensure that the children have fun
- Choose content and methods commensurate with the children's developmental level
- Adapt the plays to the children's needs
- Choose plays that encourage the children to communicate with each other
- Choose shorter plays
- Choose non-participatory plays
- Try to develop content and methods that will make the children look forward to next

time

IV. Discussion

In the survey, all but one of the 52 respondents expressed an interest in using and composing panel theater plays. In a prior survey conducted in AY 2020–21, 98% of the respondents had expressed an interest in using panel theater, but when asked whether they were interested in composing panel theater plays, the percentage of affirmative responses was 5 points lesser among male respondents and 15 points lesser among female respondents. The participants cited reasons, such as 'it seems like hard work,' 'seems time consuming,' and 'seems tricky.' Thus, the results of the present study suggest that the intervention has contributed to the resolution of these issues. The high percentage of responses indicating an interest in using and composing panel theater plays suggests that the author's intervention was successful in conveying to the students the joy of panel theater and in instilling in them the confidence to compose panel theater plays themselves. However, considering that one of the students said that she was "clumsy" at panel theater, and that it is "time consuming," and "costly," it is necessary to continue working on a strategy to address the issues. Assuming that considering panel theater a laborious exercise contributed to an unwillingness to compose panel theater plays, it is necessary to ponder teaching content and methods tailored to the characteristics of the students taking the

course.

The second finding concerns teaching tools other than panel theater (picture books, paper theater, apron theater, paper puppetry, and paper-plate theater). The students said that these tools are easy to participate in and use, especially in combination with hand games, that picture books help build a fondness for reading, and that children themselves enjoy the tools. In light of the attitudes toward these tools, they have potential for use. We will therefore consider the use of these other tools as part of the career support.

The third finding concerns the use of panel theater in settings other than regular daycare centers. When asked about panel theater with children in the community, the students highlighted the need for content and methods that accommodate the diverse needs of such children; when asked about panel theater with children in institutional care, they highlighted the need for a relaxed environment and play; when asked about panel theater with children in after-school programs, they highlighted the need for participatory content and methods. The students also highlighted the need to create visually intuitive content when using panel theater with children with special needs. In light of these responses, there is a need to consider strategies to help raise the level of expertise in adapting choice of subject matter to match the needs of the children in question.

The fourth finding concerns the impact of new institutional arrangements on panel theater, particularly the introduction of the

daycare system for all children. The students expressed concerns, such as, some children would head home part way and that there would be a wider range of developmental levels to accommodate. These responses suggest the need to provide more opportunities for aspiring childcare workers to experience the entertainment value of panel theater and to gain insights into how panel theater plays, with added acts of verbal and non-verbal expression, can foster interpersonal relationships. In light of the hopes and fears that the aspiring childcare workers expressed about childcare, there is a need to consider content and strategies whereby preschool children can have positive encounters with panel theater that aid their development; for example, the plays should be designed so that, within a limited space of time, the children become communicative with one another and excited to attend the next play.

V. Conclusion

This study used a questionnaire survey to understand students' attitudes toward using and composing panel theater plays and about the potential effects of institutional changes in childcare in Japan, particularly the upcoming introduction of the daycare system for all children. Discussed in this report are issues and strategies related to career support for childcare workers gleaned from the survey responses and with reference to the teaching practices of one of the authors.

All but one of the 52 respondents expressed

an interest in using and composing panel theater plays, suggesting the intervention contributed to the resolution of issues highlighted in the survey conducted by AY2021, in which respondents cited, as reasons for not wanting to use or compose panel theater plays, their perception that it is hard work, time consuming, and tricky. The results also revealed positive views about using other teaching tools (picture books, paper theater, apron theater, paper puppetry, and paper-plate theater), suggesting that these views should be incorporated into the career support. It will be necessary to help childcare workers further develop their expertise in using and composing panel theater plays for preschool children, in order to address the challenges of using and composing such plays for children in settings other than regular daycare centers (children in the community, in institutional care, in after-school programs, and those with special needs) and to ensure that the plays accommodate the broader range of needs that the childcare workers will encounter with daycare system for all children.

To support the aspiring childcare worker, who claimed clumsiness at panel theater and found it to be time consuming, and costly, the author will develop a teaching practice to develop a precise understanding of how to compose a panel theater play; this practice will involve providing more opportunities and time to gain first-hand experience in panel theater and delivering more detailed tuition about the procedures for composing a panel theater play. To address the perception that

panel theater is costly, the author will introduce examples of commonly available inexpensive materials that can substitute panel theater equipment (for example, using yarn or affixing kitchen paper to drawing paper) and examples of panel theater plays that use only a small volume of panel-theater paper. To help aspiring childcare workers meet the needs of children in other settings (children in the community, in institutional care, in after-school programs, and those with special needs) and those under the daycare system for all children, the author will develop teaching practices to further enhance the students' understanding of how they can adapt panel theater to the needs of diverse children; such teaching practices will convey how versatile panel theater is and how the freedom panel theater offers enables one to use it across a wide range of ages, settings, and needs.

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子ども家庭ソーシャルワークに係る保育者のキャリア支援： 保育者志望生のパネルシアターの使用及び製作に係る 意識と課題を基に

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浅 野 俊 幸

概要

本報告では、「こども誰でも通園制度」の影響等を含むパネルシアターの使用及び製作に係る保育者志望生の調査を通じた意識に基づいて、報告者の教育実践をふまえた保育者のキャリア形成支援に係る課題と方策に関して検討した。調査では、1名を除いてパネルシアターを「使いたい」および「作りたい」と回答し、「大変そう」、「難しそう」、「時間がかかりそう」といった教育実践課題が解決される傾向にあることがうかがわれた。新たに、地域、施設入所、学童、特別な支援を必要とする子どもごとの、また、「こども誰でも通園制度」に応じた多様な子ども支援のための課題が見出され、保育におけるパネルシアターの使用および製作に係るキャリア形成に係る教育実践のさらなる発展が求められる。

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