

CONNECTEDkind in Early Childhood Care and Education

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The Trigger: A Field Report

In this column, I'd like to share my thoughts and reflections from the perspective of childcare educator training. These insights stem from activities where university students and childcare professionals played with CONNECTEDkind together. What inspired me to try implementing CONNECTEDkind in childcare training was a practice report by Ms. Yoko Suzuki from Meguro-ku Gohongi Elementary School, presented within our research team. Ms. Suzuki's report on her art class practice conveyed how, through CONNECTEDkind, each child savored the joy of imaginative play, and the richness of their imaginary worlds was shared across the entire class. I was deeply impressed by this wonderful practice. In the lesson, children are shown photographs of natural objects and their shadows while being asked questions like, "What do you see?", "What do you hear?", and "What title would you give it?". The children engage in repeated dialogue, touching not only their own creations but also their friends' works, savoring the imaginative world born from their interpretations together with their peers.

Students and CONNECTEDkind

I work in a faculty of teacher education, where I learn together with students who aim to work in early childhood education and elementary school education. Within several of the courses I teach, I decided to implement CONNECTEDkind practices together with the students.

In CONNECTEDkind, participants observe natural objects and their shadows, draw what they imagine, and then share their work with peers, exchanging their individual impressions. In my practice, drawing on ideas from Mr. Suzuki's classroom practice, I added guiding questions when presenting the photographs, such as "What do you see?" and "What kinds of sounds can you hear?" In reality, I anticipated that some students might find it difficult to form

images, so I offered prompts such as: “Try imagining based on shapes and colors,” “Try rotating it and looking again,” “What do you notice when you move closer to it or farther away?” and “Who or what might be hiding there?” While speaking to them in this way, I tried to create an environment in which each student could freely expand their own imaginative world. Each student approaches the creative work differently. Some quickly generate many ideas and want to produce a large number of pieces, while others prefer to take their time and work carefully. To ensure that all students could enjoy the activity freely at their own pace, I prepared multiple photographs as materials rather than just one.

First, the students enjoyed CONNECTEDkind individually, and once each person had completed their work, they were asked to give it a title. Some students completed their work using a single photograph, while others used multiple photographs to create their pieces. After that, the students shared their works with one another, gave each other new titles, and talked about what they felt and noticed when viewing the pieces. Even when looking at the same photograph, the images that come to mind differ from person to person. By sharing ideas with one another, some students were delighted to discover that they had imagined the same things, while others found it interesting to see how different images emerged. A variety of responses could be observed. Next, the students were divided into groups of two or three and asked to combine their individual works to create a story. Many unique stories were created, featuring imaginary characters going on adventures and worlds that crossed time and space. The stories created by each group were then shared with the entire class.

After the class, students commented that while they enjoyed the pleasure of imagining on their own, they also found it interesting to imagine together with their peers and to create a shared world of stories. At the beginning of the activity, some students appeared hesitant to express themselves; however, through creating works together with their peers, their individual imaginary

worlds became connected, and they were able to experience the enjoyment of new imaginative worlds expanding even further. In addition, students expressed that when they go on to work in early childhood education settings, they would like to try CONNECTEDkind practices with young children, and that they would like to start by taking photographs of natural objects together with the children.

The World Opened Up by CONNECTEDkind

In my everyday interactions with students in university classes, I often feel that they tend to seek predetermined “correct” answers. Therefore, in CONNECTEDkind practice, I encouraged students to move beyond perspectives of evaluation by themselves or by others, and instead to become aware of the generation of many ideas and of exercising creativity together with their peers. Through freely expressing their own thoughts and experiencing the enjoyment of connecting with others through those expressions, I hoped that the students would be able to sense the richness that comes from the expansion of their imaginative worlds. With this in mind, I attempted this practice.

In the process of learning to become early childhood educators, the following aspects are emphasized: understanding the children in front of us and engaging responsively with the environments that surround us. However, even if we intellectually understand the importance of these ideas, it is not so easy to grasp them through bodily experience. Nor is it easy to put them into practice ourselves.

In CONNECTEDkind practice, participants encounter the objects in front of them—namely, natural objects and their shadows—holistically, without excluding either. By expanding their imagination, they attune themselves to the “voices” spoken by what is before them. Here, these voices are expressed through the world of fantasy. By observing familiar natural objects from various angles and enjoying diverse interpretations, the “voices” of the objects that emerge stimulate imagination. In this space, a horizon unfolds that is free

from predetermined “correct” answers or explanations grounded in natural science. By observing objects with the mind’s eye and listening to their “voices” with the mind’s ear, it can be said that each person forms a unique and special relationship with the objects. Reflecting on the wondrous stories that natural objects—including their shadows—seem to tell offers a way of connecting with the world that is different from a strictly scientific understanding. Perhaps this is the way young children encounter the world. For us, whether it is a natural object or a peer with whom we share imagination, fully understanding the object before us seems almost impossible. Precisely for this reason, engaging our imagination to attend to the other in front of us—to look closely and listen carefully—may be one of the most compelling aspects of CONNECTEDkind practice.

This time, inspired by CONNECTEDkind and Mr. Suzuki’s classroom practices, I introduced my own version of the activity with some personal adaptations. While respecting the intentions of Laura Belevica, who created CONNECTEDkind, I explored ways to develop the activities together with the students before me, cherishing the sense of excitement and curiosity we shared. By carrying out several of these practices, I had the opportunity to once again appreciate the potential and depth of CONNECTEDkind. I hope that everyone will also enjoy creating and experiencing their own CONNECTEDkind in a variety of settings!



Photo 1: A group of students working together on a single work (Untitled)



Photo 2

Student's own title: "Fun Cooking Time"

Peer's suggested title: "What Should We Have for Dinner Today?"



Photo 3

Student's own title: "The Rhino and Its Little Friend"

Peer's suggested title: "A Day in the Savannah"

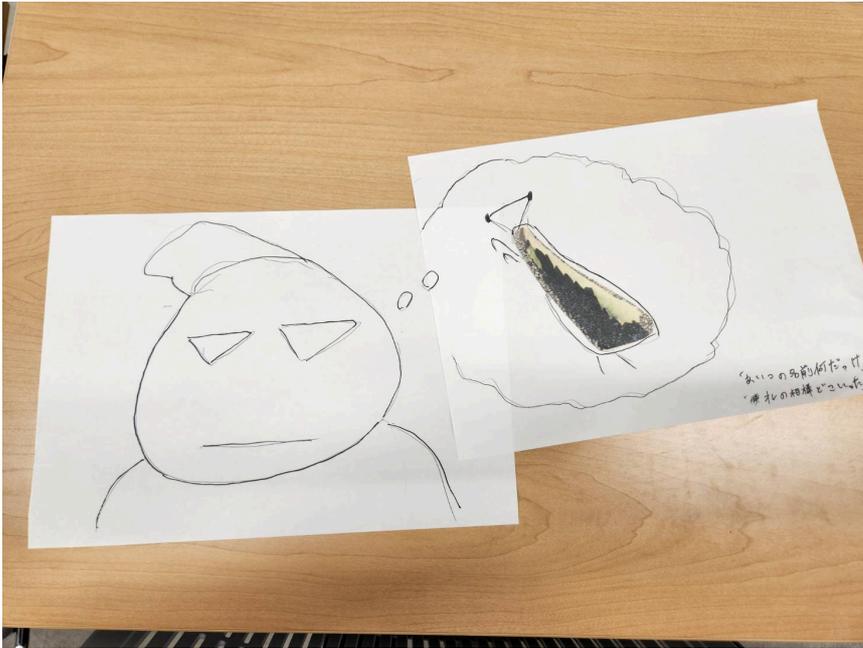


Photo 4

Student's own title: "What's That Guy's Name Again?"

Peer's suggested title: "Where Did My Buddy Go?"