Generating Values in Young Children: Based on the National Kindergarten Curriculum of Korea

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The process of developing a personal value system begins early in life. And having a positive and self-confident feeling toward oneself is a springboard for being a member of a democratic citizenship. Fostering values emerge from a working knowledge of child development and the children themselves. Awareness of and respect for the whole child are imperative issues for teachers who are concerned about children's abilities for making right decisions, building autonomy and competence. In order to provide interpersonal relations to young children, teachers need to prepare a classroom environment characterized as a sociomoral atmosphere. The present Korean kindergarten curriculum was also established to meet the needs of children, and to educate children in a healthy, independent and creative way. This curriculum might be characterized as a "given curriculum." In order to transfer to a "practical curriculum", teachers need to consider appropriate strategies in practical tasks.

Introduction

Values are imperative to the pursuit of happiness in a free society because they serve as decision-making bases for behavior. They are one of the most important processes in maturation and are essential to developing a personal value system.

This process begins early in life and continues into adulthood. As Riley (1984) pointed out, children who enter without enough experience in developing this process are, as a matter of fact, retarded. Naturally, having positive and honest feelings toward oneself is a springboard for effective living. If having positive feelings is one of the effective ways for children to live successfully as a human species, the early years become an imperative time for laying the ground work in developing a personal value system.

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While most agree that young children should gain values in kindergarten, there is much disagreement concerning how children gain values. Fortunately, the one conclusion which seems to be shared by the majority of those who are interested in the issue of values for young children, is that early childhood is the most critical period in which to acquire them. Furthermore, most of the research up to date points to the conclusion that it is imperative to have values as part of a kindergarten curriculum (Amundson, 1991: Grant, 1991).

Then, the problem is the matter of "how?" It is this issue which the present study will discuss, as it investigates the perspectives of children and teachers for generating values based on the Korean National Kindergarten Curriculum.

**Values We Are Talking About**

As we approach the twenty-first century, the increasing recognition of social diversity within our society poses a significant issue on values education. That is, how to generate values for young children to live in our society and in a global context as well. Even though the pedagogical problem of "how to?" still remains, the teacher is instrumental in developing self-awareness and appreciation of the values diversity.

The working knowledge of child development rests on a foundation laid by Piaget, Dewey and other pioneers in "whole child" or "developmentally appropriate practice" education. Kohlberg also built six stages of moral judgment upon Piaget's theory. Those relevant to the young children's values development are the first three stages. According to the definitions of these pioneers, values can be defined as building trust and acceptance with children and teachers, enhancing competence in achieving sociomoral development, and finally, assisting children to work toward equity in human relationships.

Awareness of and respect for the whole child are very important issues for teachers who are concerned about children's value development. They notice and encourage activities created from children's interests and needs, and believe that a curriculum originating from the children, their interests, and their needs has a greater chance of being meaningful for young children.

In keeping with this philosophy, it is clear that children need and want to engage in a variety of activities relevant to their daily