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Exploring the Pedagogical Possibilities of the Idea of Composition Based on Children's Interests and Strengths

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Abstract

Music-making activities in elementary schools in Japan follow the Japanese national curriculum. The current trend of music-making within the curriculum focuses on elements such as timbre, rhythm, tempo, melody, dynamics, and beat. These activities are expected to help children learn the characteristics of the various elements of music and their functions. However, children may not be able to exercise their creativity freely in such activities due to restrictions based on learning content; in some cases, the music they create may all be similar. Recent studies have reported cases in which teachers deliberately set fewer musical elements when children's improvisation activity, thereby reducing restrictions for the children and eliciting a variety of expressions from them. The idea behind this is to create multi-stylistic collage-style music by first focusing on each child's intention—what they want to attempt and what they are good at—and encouraging them to try these expressions. One of the authors of this paper developed a brand-new learning material, based on the idea of “composition based on children's interests and strengths,” in 2017.

This study aims to illustrate the activities carried out using the learning material, taught by the authors of this paper, in two classes of the fifth grade (age range of 10–11 years) in Nara, Japan. It focuses on creative music-making practices and the pedagogical possibilities of the idea, through discussing their music-making and creative process.

As a result, children could make music with a mixture of diverse expressions. Students mobilized everything for their performances, including a variety of instruments, use of rhythmic patterns, singular sounds that had an impact, and quotations from their music repertoire. Furthermore, based on the characteristics of the children in each class, the content of the music for class 1 and class 2 differed.

The pedagogical possibilities of the idea of “composition based on children's interests and strengths” are threefold: first, as we could illustrate from the classes, this idea contributes in eliciting a variety of expressions from the children; second, it facilitates children's realization that they can incorporate these various expressions into their music; and third, it allows children to think of each member's interests and strengths as a starting point of creative activity. Although this is a different approach from the aforementioned current trend in Japan, this need not be limited to music and can be generalized to many other creative projects.