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Musicking in Early Childhood Education for Nurturing Self-Awareness within a Collective Culture

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Abstract

Relationships between Japanese people are often characterized by a strong element of collectivism. Japanese people tend to follow others and feel safe when they are in a group. As it is a cultural habit, it is not a matter judging it as good or bad. However, in the age of globalism it may be desirable to change this habit in order to develop inclusion and diversity. Music which occurs in a sphere of freedom and equity would promote this change. So, adopting a new music program influenced by Musicking in early childhood education may be a positive step forward.

Musicking is a term created by Christopher Small (1927-2011), which highlights the performative aspect of music. He said that music is not a thing but an activity that people do, including performing, listening, composing, rehearsing or participating, preparing for concerts, dancing, etc. It happens in relationships between individuals, between individuals and society, and between humanity and the natural world, with no concern for evaluating performance.

In collective cultures music is often considered as a 'thing', which should be 'taught' by teachers and children are expected to 'learn' or 'imitate' the teachers' models. Although this way of teaching music may have some good effects for school-age children, for younger children it may decrease the opportunity to draw out their potential and to nurture their self-motivation.

To set such a Musicking program in early childhood education will enable children to act freely and independently in musical environments, without rules and valuations. It can nurture their self-awareness and independence. At the same time, it can encourage a deeper awareness of others, as Musicking requires listening and watching other people. Children can feel that they are both unique and part of a group. Teachers may also feel freer and easier in that program to find children's hidden potentials. Music therapy, especially the Nordoff-Robbins Music Therapy approach will help us to design the program.

As cultural issues are complicated and have profound implications, to introduce new ideas from other countries may need careful consideration. However, we should explore new ways to help us nurture future generations.