

Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP) in Community-based Child-rearing Support Centers (CCSCs): Focusing on LPP Developing Process through Multiple Interactions among Parents in CCSCs

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Abstract

Legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) represents how newcomers become experienced members and eventually experts of a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The purpose of this study is to investigate the developing LPP process in Community-based Child-rearing Support Centers (CCSCs) through qualitative research on the process that the participants (parents) experience mutual communications and acquiring knowledges and skills. The Japanese government has expanded child-rearing support via the CCSCs in recent twenty years. They are open spaces for infants and parents in the community, where they can gather freely, communicate with each other, and share their anxieties and worries related to child rearing. We observed that various types of social exchanges are prevalent among the participants including intern students and senior citizens in CCSCs. These kinds of practices embody the idea of the “socialization of childcare” by sharing it among families and people in the community. A community of practice is evolving naturally because it is through the process of sharing information and experiences with the group that parents learn from each other, and have an opportunity to observe the practices of volunteers and expert workers, and thereby to understand their own worries from another point of view. As the results of these interactions, some parents become the full time workers of CCSCs later. The results of this study show that these LPP empowering processes are important functions of CCSCs and CCSCs require to foster community of practice and involve broader community people in CCSCs.

Keywords: Legitimate Peripheral Participation, Community of Practice, Situated Learning, Community-based Child-rearing Support Centers

Introduction

Trends in Birthrate in Japan

The annual number of live births in Japan was about 2.7 million in the first baby boom, about 2.1 million in the second baby boom, and in 1975, it fell below 2 million, and has continued to decrease every year since then. The number of births in 2016, which was 976,978, fell below 1 million for the first time since records began in 1899. The total fertility rate, which exceeded 4.3 during the first baby boom period, has rapidly fallen since 1950. In 1989, the rate was 1.57. Yet, in 2005, the rate fell to 1.26, the lowest on record. Although the total fertility rate has shown slight increase in recent years, in 2016 it decreased by 0.01 point from 1.45 of the previous year. The total fertility rate in some countries (France, Sweden, the US, the UK, Germany and Italy) declined from 1970 to around 1980 as a whole. In some countries, however, the rate has recovered since around 1990. Looking at the transition of the total fertility rate in Singapore, Republic of Korea, Hong Kong, and Taiwan among the countries and regions in Asia, all maintained a level higher than Japan as of the year 1970. However, they have shown a declining trend, and today the total fertility rate in these countries and regions falls below the replacement-level fertility rate (Cabinet Office, 2019).

The reasons for low birthrate in Japan

In the late 1970s, the rate of unmarried women in their twenties increased sharply, and late marriage began, as the age of marriage increased, and in the 1980s, the rate of unmarried women in their 30s and older also increased. As a result, she became unmarried along with her late marriage. Furthermore, as deflation has become chronic, the economic base has been high, with the unmarried rate of men with low income and unstable employment being high, and the rate of unmarried women working in workplaces where non-regular employment and childcare leave are not available is high. The rise in low-wage non-regular employees due to deflation may be accelerating unmarriage, as future prospects and stability of employment and career will affect marriage (Cabinet Office, 2019).

The Equal Employment Opportunity Law was enacted in 1985, and while women have advanced into the society, there is a difficulty in balancing work with the lack of a childcare support system. Higher incomes (opportunity costs) may also influence the choice of having children. Although the majority of infants are cared for by mothers at home, the double-income and one-parent households have been remarkably increasing in Japan. Among the households with children under 6 years of age, nuclear families with a working father and a non-working mother account for 43.4% and reach 49.1% among households with children under 3 years of age (Japan's national census, 2010).

On the other hand, it is pointed out that long-hour work practices keep Japanese fathers away from childcare. Fathers in families with children under 6 years of age spend 39 minutes a day for childcare on an average while mothers spend about 3 hours. Also, there is a considerable gap in the take-up rate of childcare leave between women (81. 5%) and men (2. 65%) in 2015. These facts imply the unequal distribution of childcare responsibilities by gender as well as the existence of a

constant number of mothers who are taking care of their young children at home. Meanwhile, mothers who are devoted to child rearing lose their social networks and become isolated, and the “child-rearing anxiety” such as being seized with the vague anxiety about child rearing and sometimes maltreating a child, has become a social problem (Kudo, 2017). Although “child-rearing anxiety” and “isolated child rearing” had been recognized as problems among full-time mothers, the support for these parents was not established immediately. Therefore, it becomes an important policy issue in Japan to develop a support system necessary for child-rearing and to create a social environment where children and their families can interact with neighborhoods and local communities.

The purpose of this study and methods

The Community-based Child-rearing Support Centers (CCSCs)

Our studies focus on the processes of parent’s participation in Community-based Child-rearing Support Centers (CCSCs) which constitute a typical childcare support measure for parents especially who look after their young children at home. CCSCs are open spaces where children and parents can gather freely, communicate with each other, and share their anxieties and worries related to child rearing. The prototype of CCSCs was introduced in some nursery centers in the early 1990s aiming to respond to anxieties or worries families in the community. Moreover, in 2002, the “Tsudoi-no-Hiroba” (Gathering Places) programs were established. They were set up in public facilities, community centers, vacant stores, private houses, and apartments etc., to provide places for parents to gather with infants and promote their interactions on child rearing by facilitating the use of volunteers in the community.

Although CCSCs were reorganized and their categorization changed in 2013 and 2014, the fundamental services offered by CCSCs are as follows: (1) to provide spaces for children and parents and promote exchanges, (2) to implement consultation and assistance for child rearing, (3) to offer information related to childcare in local communities, and (4) to provide classes in child rearing and childcare support (Kudo, 2017). Basically, CCSCs are publicly subsidized and open for more than 3 days in a week, and 65% of the CCSCs are open 5 days a week. Its number increased continuously and amounted to 7,431 in FY2018. As the average number of parents using CCSCs per day is 17.3 pairs, the average number of staffs per day is 3.1 (National council of CCSCs, 2018).

Legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) as a theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of our studies is “legitimate peripheral participation” (LPP) which is a model that describes how newcomers become experienced members and eventually old timers of a community of practice or collaborative project. The concept was first proposed by cognitive anthropologist Jean Lave and educational theorist Etienne Wenger in their 1991 book Situated Learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Lave and Wenger proposed the LPP theory through their case studies on apprenticeships. The theory identifies learning as a contextual social phenomenon, achieved through participation in a community of practice, is different from teaching curriculums in schools and is not an individual achievement for acquiring knowledge and skills. Newcomers become members of a community initially by participating in

simple and low-risk tasks that are nonetheless productive and necessary. Through peripheral activities, newcomers can directly observe the practices of community members and become acquainted with the tasks, vocabulary, and organizing principles of the community's members. Membership in a community of practice is mediated by the forms of participation to which newcomers have access, both physically and socially. The old timer has both the power to confer legitimacy to the newcomer, and to control their level of access to experiences and resources.

According to LPP theory, learning is a process of identity-formation towards becoming a full member of a community of practice, or towards full participation from peripheral participation. Thus, learning is part of the participation in the community of practice and at the same time is viewed as relational. Lave and Wenger point out: "In this regard, learning, thinking, and knowing are the relationships of those who engage in activities that are with and arising from the world in a socially and culturally structured world. This world is socially composed." Here, there is criticism of the individualism-based view of learning, which has regarded the process of knowledge internalization as learning (Matsumoto, 2006).

Another key concept is "community of practice" (CoP) which is a group of people who share a craft or a profession. It is through the process of sharing information and experiences with the group that members learn from each other, and have an opportunity to develop personally and professionally (Lave & Wenger 1991). CoP can exist in physical settings, for example, a lunch room at work, a field setting, a factory floor, or elsewhere in the environment, but members of CoP do not have to be co-located.

In Japan, we have some previous studies concerning LPP and CoP, such as, community hall activities (Matsumoto, 2016), lifelong learning (Matsumoto, 2006), disaster education (Yamori, 2015), independent living movement of person with disabilities (Inose, 2008) and so forth.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the developing LPP interactive processes in Community-based Child-rearing Support Centers (CCSCs) as one of the CoPs. We adopt qualitative research method focusing on the processes that the participants (parents) experience mutual communications and acquiring knowledges and skills and we observed that various types of social exchanges are prevalent among the participants and staffs including intern students and senior volunteer citizens in CCSCs.

Results and Discussions

LPP processes in CCSCs through Participant's (Parent's) voices

National Council of CCSCs collected the stories, poems, and episodes from users, staffs, and volunteers in CCSCs (National Council of CCSCs, 2010). We analyzed the content of these submitted works (voices) in order to investigate LPP processes from the following various aspects. We consider that these voices are expressing directly the parent's feelings in the process of coming to and staying in CCSCs. Their anxieties about raising children are gradually resolved by passing through the gates of the open space/center and are gradually able to have a wider view in inter-relations

with other parents and then able to get a feeling of being connected to communities.

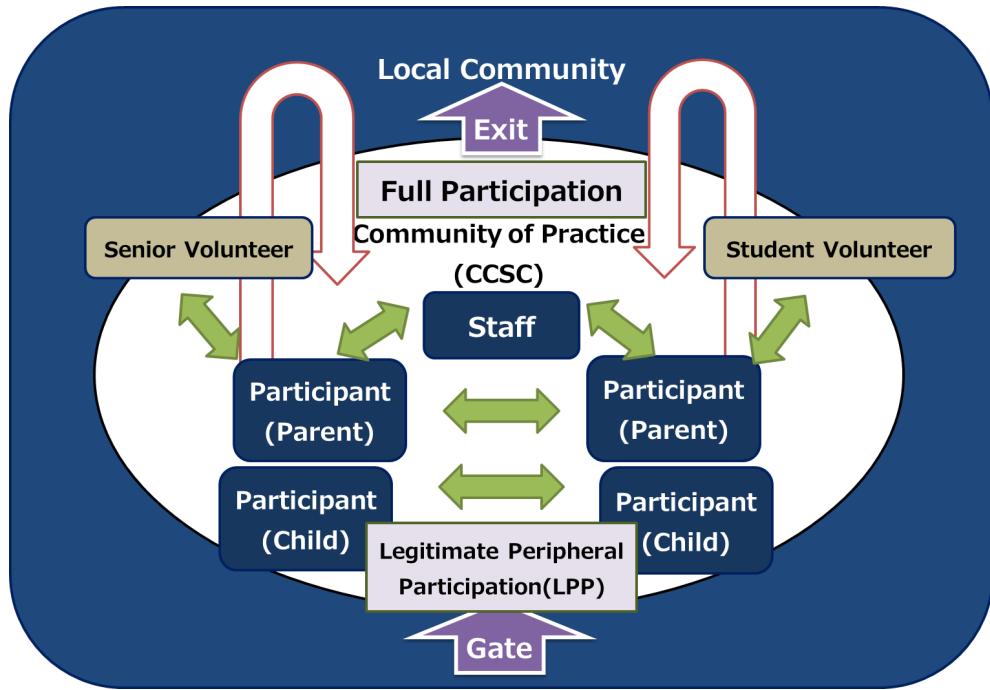


Figure 1: Framework for investigation on LPP in CCSCs

1) Anxiety about raising children before coming to CCSCs

“As a new mom, I couldn’t understand my son’s behavior and was very depressed. Is it because of my nurturing?”

“Every day at home alone with a child. I envy moms with children outside. I and my child want friends.”

“Repeated moves, care for two children, isolation and loss of confidence in unfamiliar town.”

“I couldn’t go out for a while because of postpartum depression.”

There are so many mothers who visit CCSCs after exhausting their physical and mental well-being and struggling for the first time to raise children who do not follow the childcare book.

2) Open the door into CCSCs

“Thanks to mom for calling out at the beginning. How happy was I?”

“I was saved a lot by talking about everyday stories. I had been making a meaningless wall.”

“I’m happy that moms treat me as one of them with respect.”

As even those who use CCSCs as usual almost every day, opening the door of CCSCs for the first time seemed to be very courageous step for them. Therefore, the setting of programs and events can facilitate to visit CCSCs.

“After the baby massage, we can have time to introduce ourselves and talk about our concerns.”

“While experiencing failures and hesitations, my son waited for time at his own pace. I gained courage in the presence and guidance of my friends.”

By planning and running events involving participants (parents), parents can feel that

these events are their own events for themselves.

3) Relationship among participants (peers)

“The voices of peers in the same environment are more helpful than any kind of childcare book, and I feel like I’m not alone.”

“Talking session could deepen the bond with my child. As I realize that I can play a role in CCSC, and also I can help other mothers through talking. I think this confidence lead to my growth.”

There are many cases where not only the staff members do everything but also the involvement of the parents into planning and operating programs can confer them a sense of fulfillment and accomplishment.

4) Relationships between participants and staffs

“With the smiles of the staffs, I was able to laugh little by little. My world has regained its color.”

“As the staffs welcomed me gently with a warm smile at the center, I was able to lessen my anxiety and tension. My heart was filled with peace of mind.”

“At the salon I visited after a long time, the words “welcome home” from a staff. I felt that my frozen heart melted unexpectedly.”

“You can’t raise a child by yourself alone, don’t carry the burden.’ The staff encouraged me without blaming me. The center taught me everything important about raising children.”

There were many voices that clearly expressed the significance of having staffs always there. We can observe a warm exchange of hearts between parents and staffs.

5) Relationships between participants and community people

“A volunteer as old as my father gave a gentle voice to me while taking care of the plants.”

“I feel very happy that the child I’ve been holding has grown and is playing with his mother.” (a volunteer’s voice)

In CCSCs, the parents are given the warms from senior volunteers, but at the same time, senior volunteers also can have the synergistic effect of receiving motivation, enthusiasm, and rewarding from parents and children.

“University student volunteers who were like older sisters came and played with everyone.”

As there are many opportunities that junior and senior high school students volunteers as vocational experiences in CCSCs, the students themselves hold a baby first time. These experiences bring them valuable images of raising children.

6) Building identity

“Anxiety was removed during the encounter to other mom and I was getting confident in childcare. I’m growing up.”

“I changed my life and my feelings about childcare by 180 degrees here in another home-like place.”

“I met a mom holding the same troubles and thought that it was not just me, not just my child, and I really wanted to do my best.”

"I volunteered what I could do for moms and then became a staff member at CCSC."

There is no single correct answer in child-rearing. Parents are getting able to face the irreplaceable life in front of them without comparing other children.

"One mom has set up a circle joining by moms who have twins, created a textbook, formed an OG meeting, and followed up new twins moms."

"At the recommendation of the center's staff, she launched a child rearing circle and created a local childcare information magazine for junior moms."

Moms are able to learn and encourage each other and children also play by watching someone's example among them and with various adults, as if they were a big family.

7) Third place

"I feel like staying in home where big family has so many children and I feel the warmth just like someone is always there".

"I realize that moms are looking for a place to relax and can be themselves".

In community building, "third place" is the social surroundings separate from the two usual social environments of home ("first place") and the workplace ("second place") (Oldenburg, 1989). "Third places" are important fields for civil society and establishing feelings of a sense of place. CCSC can be regarded as one of third places in child rearing.

8) Boundaries between CoP and broader local community

"Elderly people in a passing area come to CCSC and hold babies or talk to babies."

"There is a bus stop near the entrance of CCSC and bus users say something to parents and children."

"Sometimes mother and children visit neighboring day service center for the elderly and have communication with them with handmade gifts."

There are various social resources around CCSC. Shopping streets, neighbors, various local groups, local governments, and so forth. CCSCs can play a role as local childcare support bases only if they are properly open and connected to local communities.

Conclusions

Summary of Results

There are many diverse communities of practice in a local community. We describe the changing process of participants (parents) through LPP within CCSCs as community of practice. Participants can be transformed from new comers to old timers through legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) within the community of practice. An important part of changing participants is the acquisition of identity and the resulting empowerment. The Community-based Child-rearing Support Centers (CCSCs) can be viewed as a child care community of practice, and is a place to encourage change of participants (growth as a parent) and has the power of the place. This kind of "power of third place" is created by the interaction between participants and staffs, and participants and local people and also among participants (parents). Thus, CCSCs need to be open to new parents and widen their entrances and require to foster community of practice. Furthermore, CCSCs should involve broader community people and should have cyclical interrelation with local communities.

Implications for child rearing social policies

In order to alleviate the burden of child-rearing and enhance social support for parents, it is important to ensure parental communication and interaction such as involving parents into planning and managing programs in CCSCs. We find out that these kinds of participating processes regarded as Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP) are key factors for operating programs of CCSCs. CCSCs are institutional communities stipulated by law. They are operated mainly by public sectors and are financed mostly by the governments. There are institutional, legal, and financial grounds, frameworks and standards in managing CCSCs. Nevertheless, for their effective operation, CCSCs should be managed as communities of practice (CoP) including informal interrelations with local communities. As the prototype of the CCSCs was born in non-profit organizational activities by citizens (parents themselves), their viewpoints and user-oriented operations including LPP processes should be in considerations as child rearing social policies.

Implications for creating a child friendly society

The boundaries between communities of practice and local communities are ambiguous because the participants (parents) take part in one community of practice such as a CCSC are also residents in a local community. The boundaries are not clear lines. In one local community, there are a variety of communities of practice. We could say that the CCSCs are one type of community of practice. The interrelations between CCSCs and local communities we described here have some influences on not only the nature of CCSCs but also the character of local community. If the institutional communities like CCSCs have good influences on their society, we could say that the other types of institutional communities (nursery schools, kindergartens, elementary and junior high schools, children's house) must be able to have some good influences on their society by incorporating LPP processes which can be easily participated by parents, children, and residents. We identified that the social role of CCSCs is to transform a local community where CCSCs are belonging to into a child-friendly society.

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