Insights from the Survey

Suggestion from this Survey for Developing Children's "Attitudes of Learning to Learn"

Takashi Muto
Professor at Shiraume Gakuen University

We have collected data through paper-based questionnaires sent to parents with children from the age of three years old once a year until the children reached the first year of elementary school. Redefining the term "non-cognitive skill (social-emotional skill)," which is frequently being discussed these days in the ECEC field, as "attitudes of learning to learn," we are conducting research on the relationship between these attitudes and language and literacy skills, and parental involvement, etc. As this study is based on longitudinal surveys involving the same people, it implicates causation, more than just correlation. Naturally, as the results are based on the opinions of the parents, they therefore have certain limitations, and the possibility exists that there are certain factors not included in the survey that affect the end results. It is therefore necessary to interpret the results by taking into account these biases.

The most significant contribution of this study was that we were able to suggest the process in which children's learning develops. The importance of "daily habits" is often emphasized, but from the survey it is noteworthy that these habits in K1 influence the "attitudes of learning to learn" in K2, and the "daily habits" in K3 affect their learning attitude in first grade. "Attitudes of learning to learn" include "collaborative skills," "perseverance," "curiosity" and "self-restraint," but the "collaborative skills" in K2 determine their attitude in the subsequent year, while "self-restraint" and "perseverance" in K3 affect the "attitudes of learning to learn" and their learning attitude in first grade. "Hiragana/numeracy/logical thinking" skills are developed in children from three years old; and the "language" skills in K3 are influenced by the level of "collaborative skills" in K2. Also, the "language" skills of K3 play an extremely important role in not only the "hiragana/numeracy/logical thinking" skills of first graders, but also in their "attitudes of learning to learn" and learning attitude in first grade.

These results indicate several tendencies that make up the "attitudes of learning to learn" in children, and it is clear just how important this is in learning in elementary school, particularly in forming the learning attitude. The results also indicate apparent differences in what is important depending on age. However, in addition to this, "hiragana/numeracy/logical thinking" show unique processes in their developments, and all of these elements have a mutual effect on "attitudes of learning to learn." "Daily habits" also develop in children, influencing their learning attitude.

As for the purely intellectual perspective of children's reading and writing, and thinking skills, some tend to be good at these from an early age, and the "attitudes of learning to learn" partially affect them to further develop to a certain extent. "Attitudes of learning to learn" are mutually interactive with the learning attitude, and they are extremely important skills in the first year of elementary school and will probably act as a foundation that governs learning throughout elementary school in the future. The reason for this is that the foundation for learning during elementary school links the motivation to learn with concentration skills and helps children accept difficult challenges.

Understanding Child's Growth and Providing Support for Them

Kiyomi Akita
Professor at The University of Tokyo

Longitudinal research over the course of four years on the growth of young children has revealed three major findings. The first is the fact that some attitudes develop more than other skills in early childhood, while there are attitudes that weaken once they enter elementary school. This indicates the aspects we should be aware of related to children's development and not expect them to improve in every area in line with their age. "Hiragana/numeracy/logical thinking," showed steady growth but as for "daily habits," the rate of picky eaters and not tidying up does not show sufficient decreasing results. As for "perseverance" as part of the "attitude of learning to learn" the ability to take on challenges, complete activities once they have been started, try different ways to achieve goals, etc., weakened in elementary school first grade. Areas linked directly with schoolwork showed growth, while it is difficult to categorically state that growth in non-cognitive skills in "daily habits" and for achieving targets is sufficient. I wonder if this was something which parents have failed to focus on until now. Children develop within an environment of daily life, playing and learning. Providing support from multi-faceted viewpoints is important.

The second finding is that thanks to the longitudinal survey, it revealed the sequence in which the three skills develop. This

revealed certain relationships between all elements involved in growth, such as "daily habits" up until the age of three that help children develop "collaborative skills" and "perseverance" as "attitudes of learning to learn" when they are four years old. Furthermore, these "attitudes of learning to learn" help children develop "hiragana/numeracy/logical thinking" skills when they are five years old, and that the "perseverance" as part of the "attitudes of learning to learn" skills, and "hiragana/numeracy/logical thinking skills" help children develop their learning attitude. In order to acquire the skills and attitude required for learning from elementary school onward, "daily habits" must be established before anything, and then the "attitudes of learning to learn" cultivated through play. The results suggest that rather than focusing only on teaching hiragana, numeracy and logical thinking from an early age, it is more important to place the emphasis on cultivating the "attitude of learning to learn" through lifestyles and play that are appropriate for young children by following the sequence revealed in this survey. I am sure that this sequence is something of which parents will be confidently convinced.

And the third finding is the relationship between parent involvement and child's growth. Although not mentioned in this report, the survey clearly indicated that the attitude toward childrearing and the interaction parents have with their children have a significant effect on their development regardless of the academic background or income of the parents and the kind of childcare facility, such as day-care center or kindergarten, the children are placed in. Respecting what children want to do, accepting their feelings, cultivating their motivations and sense of identity, and encouraging them to think helps to develop language skills. The results indicate that the best way to support child development to ensure they have the learning skills and attitude required for the 21st century is to provide them with a culturally rich learning environment, and guarantee opportunities for them to think actively for themselves.

Implications of the Analysis from Early Childhood to Elementary Childhood

Misako Aramaki
Full-Time Lecturer at Mejiro University

The results of the four-year longitudinal survey reveal the transformation in the skills of children from early childhood through to elementary childhood. With regard to "hiragana/numeracy/logical thinking," the skills required for reading and writing kana characters and performing simple calculations improve as children grow older. However, with regard to the skills/abilities of explaining things in order in their own words to other people and explaining reasons, no significant change was found in children around the time they entered elementary school. This consequently suggests that acquiring these skills depends on each individual.

With regard to the "attitudes of learning to learn," no significant changes were found as age increased, although some skills had reached a high level in K1. For example, 94.8% of K1 showed curiosity toward new things. Consequently, all children have high curiosity in early childhood, but the key may be how long they are able to maintain it. Although certain discrepancies were seen in the items of "perseverance" and "self-restraint," not all first graders had sufficiently mastered these skills, which indicates individual differences in children's development. The skills required for children to stop something they are absorbed in to engage in a subsequent activity, or to complete something even when they are experiencing difficulties are closely related to whether children are able to perform tasks on their own initiative even when they do not feel up to it. The activities that children have to take part in once they have entered elementary school are more clearly defined than in kindergarten or day-care, and they must perform these activities within predetermined periods of time. This requires a certain amount of persistence. It is consequently important to further research how children can learn "perseverance" and "self-restraint" from early childhood through to elementary childhood.

The survey also revealed that the establishment of "daily habits" is related to the "attitudes of learning to learn" and "hiragana/numeracy/logical thinking." This means that once learned during early childhood, these skills have a mutual effect on each other, which is thought to provide the foundation for the attitude to learning developed during elementary childhood. Based on the above findings, when considering what parents should pay attention to during early childhood, it is difficult to conclude what kind of special education or involvement will make a difference in development. If anything, it seems that the accumulation of daily interaction, such as placing the emphasis on shared reading and the daily interaction with them, may lead to children acquiring these skills. In other words, instead of simply providing children with what we think they need, it is essential to support them until they can run on their own according to their developmental stage, giving them attention without over-worrying.