

Values, Risks, and the Shaping of Kindergarten Rules in Japan

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Abstract

The relationship between values, risks and rules is of the central interest in this study. Through engagement with values and risks, this paper seeks to obtain an understanding of rules in the context of Japanese kindergartens, one that is underpinned by teachers' and children's perspectives of desirable and undesirable learning behaviours and outcomes. Values education and risk society theory are employed as the theoretical basis to conceptualize the topic. The analysis from teachers' interviews, teachers' questionnaires and children's interviews shows how values, risks and rules are foregrounded in teachers' and children's perspectives, building a case for the idea that rules reinforce values and prevent risks in children's learning.

Keywords: value, risk, rule, Japan

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'Rule' is a well-used term in early childhood education and it is believed to guide children's development of acceptable behaviours (Carter, 2016; Johansson, Cobb-Moore, Lunn-Brownlee, Walker, Boulton-Lewis & Ailwood, 2014). This study discusses the perspectives of Japanese kindergarten teachers and children on values, risks and rules in children's learning by developing a value-risk-rule relationship. The study emerged in response to an increasing feeling that the complexities of what constitutes and underpins rules in young children's learning did not seem to be adequately discussed in current literature. Rules include notions of 'limits', 'guidelines', 'norms' and 'regulations' (Gartrell, 2012; Johansson et al., 2014), yet none of these terms capture the essence of rules that lie at the heart of early childhood teaching and learning. The study calls for a move away from viewing rules in a functional sense to considering the underpinning ideas revolving around them. Instead of positioning rules as a mechanical product of classroom management, the aim of this study is to consider them as shaped by teachers' and children's values and their perceived risks, and to seek empirical evidence in Japanese early childhood contexts for the understanding of classroom rules. The interest in this study in Japan is influenced by the realization that Japan has distinctive value systems in education (Burke, 2008; Scahill, 2013) and it gives special importance to risks in education (Aspinall, 2016; Takayama, 2007).

What I mean by 'rule' is what Johansson et al. (2014) refer to as "the idea about doing the right things" (p.12). The complex relationship between rules, values and risks is at the very centre of my deliberation. Through a value-risk-rule perspective, I not only refer to Japanese teachers' and children's expressions of what are the right things to do but also involve the reasons for them to do these right things. The study is exploring the practical and discursive positioning of rules in relation to the discourses of values and risks. I take the view that early childhood programs are value embedded (Yim, Lee & Ebbeck, 2013) but add to this by claiming that children's learning is also associated with their and their teachers' risk perceptions. Exploring risks adds an important dimension to my exploration of the topic beyond what values can offer because values are "the ideals that a person aspires to" (Rinaldi, 2006, p.138), while risks, on the other hand, and for the reason of this study with young children, are defined as "undesirable future outcomes to avoid" (Aspinall, 2016, p.144). In a sense, value and risk each provides a distinctive lens for understanding desirable and undesirable aspects of children's learning, therefore complementing each

other and providing essential ideas revolving around rules.

Figure one portrays the relationships of the three concepts and shows how the study is driven by the concepts of values and risks to understand the right things to do in Japanese kindergartens.

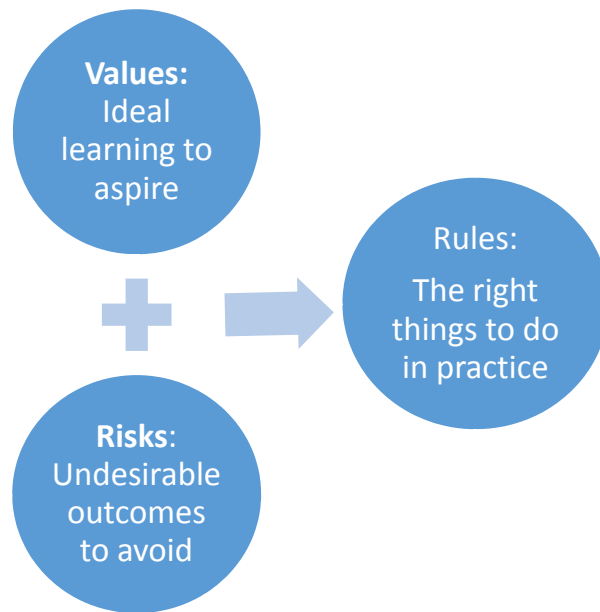


Figure 1. Relationship between Values, Risks and Rules

The aim of this study thus transcends rules from a practical sense to a more discursive level of giving teachers and children opportunities to articulate their perspectives in matters that concern learning and teaching in the kindergartens. Overall, the purpose of the study is to explore rules in Japanese kindergartens and desirable and undesirable learning behaviours and outcomes that shape rules. Whatever their specific connotations, the terms ‘values’, ‘risks’ and ‘rules’ in this study speak to one question: how do teachers and children perceive desirable, undesirable learning behaviours and the right things to do in Japanese kindergartens? Specifically, the study addresses the following questions:

- What do teachers and children aspire as ideal learning in Japanese kindergartens?
- What do teachers and children perceive as undesirable learning in Japanese kindergartens?

- What rules are described and how are they underpinned by the teachers' and children's perceptions of ideal and undesirable learning?

Japanese Kindergarten Education

Kindergarten, referred to as *yochien* in Japanese caters for children aged from three to six. Since its commencement in 1876, Japanese kindergarten education has been profoundly shaped by a series of philosophical values, including initially Frobel's play and activity, and subsequently the child-centred education from Europe, Dewey's hands-on approach, the Soviet Union ideal of working together and being productive from a young age, and recently the Reggio Emilia approach that emphasizes children's capability and creativity (Nanakida, 2015). As a result, play, physical and social development, outdoor education, everyday life skills and a balance between child-initiated and teacher-directed learning activities became the major themes of early childhood education (Hegde, Sugita, Crane-Mitchell & Averett, 2014).

Despite the influence of foreign philosophies, it is still the Japanese culture and situation that kindergartens prioritize in children's learning. In Nanakida's (2015) words, "in any case, they/foreign philosophies have been digested and adapted to conform with the Japanese climate and context" (p.30) because Japanese early childhood settings are important sites in which traditional values are maintained (Burke, 2008).

Above all else, early childhood education in Japan involves socialization of children (Hedge et al., 2014). Such an emphasis has its origins in the social milieu of Japan which is considered to be "increasingly anomic and lacking opportunities for children to interact spontaneously with each other or with adults other than their parents. [Therefore], the core curriculum of the Japanese preschool is to provide children with the opportunity to experience a social complexity that is lacking at home and in the community" (Burke, 2008, p.137). This is not just a matter of teaching children social skills, but, more fundamentally, of teachers setting up group-oriented learning environments, establishing harmonious and cooperative relationships with and for children, and assigning roles and tasks to children in the light of "individual capacities that could complement one another towards reciprocal growth" (Burke, 2008, p.152).

The way in which I see a play-based approach to child socialization can be also clarified by reference to the work of Izumi-Taylor and Rogers (2016). In a discussion of how Japanese teachers delegate roles and authority to children, they described the influence of Japanese beliefs in “the divine nature of children” which view children “as possessing a natural tendency to play; thus, adults need not control this inherent tendency (p.212).

An essential aspect closely associated with children’s learning in Japan is therefore the role of teachers in the form of “guiding children to acquire the habits necessary for life” (Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology Japan, 2008, p.6). This guiding approach rests on the belief in the importance of children’s self-regulation, and in adults to transmit to children the accumulated wisdom of the Japanese culture (Izumi-Taylor & Rogers, 2016), such as making efforts because “Japanese individuals tend to believe that effort is an important explanation of outcomes” (Mizokawa, 2015, p.200). Teachers are also expected to build relationships with children which are “characterized by long-lasting emotional attachment and understanding” (Lassila and Uitto, 2016, p.214).

An ability to regulate oneself, as promoted in the Japanese early childhood education is seen as an ability to live a collaborative way of living (Izumi-Taylor, 2013). Instead of imposing rules on children, “many kindergarten teachers allow children to regulate themselves” (Izumi-Taylor & Rogers, 2016, p.213). The opportunities of socialization inherent in children’s play and sympathetic relationships are what teachers prefer to do to facilitate children’s self-regulation and often this is done through routines, ritual activities, and everyday life experiences (Hedge et al., 2014). As explained by Burke (2008, p.150), teachers’ trust on children in Japan is driven by a sociocultural belief in the “good child identity”, which assumes that “all children are basically good and should be given ample opportunities to reinforce this positive self-image”.

Key ideas revolving around children’s learning in the Course of Study of Kindergartens (Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology Japan, 2008), the national curriculum policy of Japanese kindergarten education, are “play-centred instruction” (p.1), “balanced development of physical and mental” (p.1), “relationship between the child and other people and things” (p.1), “creative thinking and a desire to participate in voluntary activities” (p.17), and “to learn about dangerous places and things” (p.17). It has been noted

that these beliefs in how and what children learn couched in a group mode of teaching, and the recognition of individual abilities, are the values embraced in Japanese kindergarten education (National Institute for Educational Policy Research Japan, 2016).

Theoretical Framework: Values Education and Risk Society Theory

The study draws on the constructs which inform values and rules in education. Grounded in a values education framework, I emphasize that “education has the responsibility to transfer the values of the society to individuals and help individuals adapt to society” (Cetin, 2016, p.40). It is also recognized that of particular importance in values is both teachers’ beliefs in their social responsibilities and children’s own construction of what they want and wish for (Iscan, 2015).

The values education framework provides a lens for developing a conceptual approach to classroom rules (Lovat & Clement, 2016). Using the term values with rules allows us to see rules as a value-laden product. Implementing rules is a way enacting values. For example, in a society where interpersonal relationship is valued above all else, the aim of education is to provide interpersonal experiences and govern children’s social behaviours.

The postmodern era has seen the development of a systematic way of dealing with “socially manufactured risks” (Bialostok & Whitman, 2012, p.2). This is the basis of what Ulrich Beck calls ‘risk society theory’ (2006). The notion of risk has been given special importance in Japanese education “in response to a perceived rise in Juvenile crime” (Aspinall, 2016, p.142). Therefore, encouraging individuals to understand and manage risks is seen as an effective way of sustaining the type of society in Japan where “children understand their rights and duties correctly” (Aspinall, 2016, p.142). It is this particular focus on the risk society paradigm which provides insights into the educational reform “to strengthen the capacity of individuals to act autonomously and to assume greater individual responsibility for effective lifelong learning in order to succeed in the risk society [of Japan]” (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2012, p.187).

In the context of this study, values and risks are considered to have strong implications for our understanding of rules in children’s learning. As shown in Figure one, value is the ideal that people aspire to, risk is an undesirable future outcome that needs to be avoided,

and rule is the practical way of doing the right things. Their relationship is apparent in a sense that rules are the practical approaches to achieving ideal outcomes and avoiding undesirable consequences. Unlike risk in other interpretations “as something to be embraced and celebrated [in the form of, for example,] risk-taking and physical adventure that makes approximations to acquire new skills, knowledge and concepts” (Aspinall, 2016, p.143), the term risk used in this study is referred to as “undesirable future outcomes to avoid” (p.144). This definition is related to the education system in Japan because it is the country where “there is a much greater consensus about the need to avoid undesirable future outcomes” (p.147). For example, Takayama (2007, p.424) reports:

...the Japanese media, scholars, politicians, and the public continued to perceive their country’s schooling as steeped in a dire crisis, afflicted with such educational problems as bullying, school absenteeism, violence, and, most recently, classroom collapse, or teachers’ loss of control.

In the current study, classroom rules are seen as providing the commitment to values and risks. I argue that values and risks serve as the underpinning basis from which I explore rules. Values and risks have a direct bearing on the construction, understanding and implementation of the kindergarten rules.

The Present Study

Settings and Participants

The study took place in two university-based kindergartens in Japan. One was in Tokyo and the other was in Oita. The kindergartens were both affiliated to a university and served 60 children in two classrooms, with one catering for 30 four to five year olds and the other for 30 five to six year olds. Each classroom was managed by one female teacher with the support of a teacher assistant. The children came from the families near the kindergartens. The majority of the mothers were housewives and fathers were working professionals. The kindergartens were sessional, running from 9am to 1:30pm Monday to Fridays.

My participants included six teachers and nine children. Two teachers and all the children were from Tokyo and the other four teachers were from Oita. The teachers were all

female and had more than ten years of working experiences in kindergartens. The children, four boys and five girls were aged from five to six. In the present paper, teachers and children are all presented in alphabetical order as described in the following section.

Data Collection

The study is informed by a qualitative ontology using teachers' and children's interviews, and teachers' questionnaires to collect data. The two teachers (presented as teacher E and F) in Tokyo and the nine children (presented as A.B.C.D.E.F.G.H and I) participated in the interviews. The interviews with the teachers were individual, semi-structured and sought to gain information pertaining to the kindergarten programs, teachers' values and beliefs in children's learning, teaching practice and any other aspects of learning that featured in the kindergarten. The children's interviews were conducted in the form of three focus groups, three children in each group. The children were provided pens and papers and the interview started from them each drawing a picture of a learning activity in the kindergarten. Based on each child's picture, the children's group sought to explore their thoughts on learning, play, teachers, peers and any other things that happened in the kindergarten.

The other four teachers from Oita (presented as teacher A.B.C and D) answered the questionnaires. They did not have time for the interviews so preferred completing the questionnaires. The reason why these teachers were included was that they provided more information to better help answer the research questions. The questions in the questionnaires also aimed to elicit teachers' perspectives of children's learning, teaching, learning activities and their values and beliefs in early childhood education. In order to obtain rich and elaborate answers from the teachers, all the questions were open ended such as 'what do you think as important in young children's learning?'.

All the interviews were carried out in Japanese by a Japanese educational professor, the researcher and a research assistant. The length of the teacher's interviews ranged from 60 to 90 minutes and the interviews with children were conducted for up to an hour. They were audiotaped and then translated to English by a professional Japanese-English translator. The questionnaires were also presented in Japanese and translated into English by the translator.

Data Analysis

The approach to data analysis drew on the literature definitions of the three concepts: values (ideals and aspirations), rules (the right things to do in practice) and risks (undesirable consequences to avoid). As a matter of fact, categorizing data into the appropriate concepts was not an easy task as the distinction between them had cloudy borders. For example, the point ‘friends help each other’ could be interpreted as a value or a right thing to do. In the course of my effort to understand values and risks as the conceptual basis to the practice of doing the right things, the decision was to categorize data into rules if they were related to children and teachers’ practical experiences. For those provided simply as an idea, I interpreted them as a value or risk.

In order to understand how the participants expressed each concept in children’s learning in the kindergartens, the analysis comprised examination, reflection and re-examination of the interview transcripts and other artefacts (e.g. children’s drawings and documentations that the teachers provided during the interviews) to seek recurring words, phrases and themes. In particular, with regards to the drawings, they were first scrutinized to determine which themes and information were contained, and then coded by formulating concepts that were relevant to the investigation.

Values: Ideal Aspects of Children’s Learning

The teachers’ perspectives highlight two ideals in children’s learning: children being important individuals and their cooperative relationships with peers. Both the interview and questionnaire replies illustrate how the early childhood learning experiences should contribute to children’s learning in that they facilitate connections between children and the peers, and between the fulfilment of children’s own interests and their cooperation with others. For example, teacher A states:

[Children develop] self-esteem, self-affirmation, ability to be considerate of others, social skills which make themselves comfortable by being cooperative with friends.

This perspective is also realized in the reply of another teacher (Teacher B). Through two

words, 'affection' and 'love', teacher B points out the central principle within children's learning:

Growing affections to treasure self, others, family and friends through being raised with love.

Teacher E makes this value very clear in her interview, emphasizing "it is extremely crucial that in early childhood years, children experience knowing themselves as well as doing things with others". "We expect children to fit themselves with others, tackle tasks together and complete their common goals." (Teacher F).

The value of self and friends is also evident in children's data. They expressed a belief that resonated with the teachers' perspectives. For example, child A says:

Doing what I like to do and having good friends are good.

In a similar way, child J also states that "everyone likes having friends." Child E explains that helping friends is important: "Friends help each other". Child H says: "Always playing with friends is too important".

Other values that teachers hold are related to children's learning behaviors and it is a view of "children developing into inquisitive people who are actively working on tasks and want to know more" (Teacher D), "children pursuing their interests" (Teacher B), "when encountering difficulties, feeling 'I want to do it' and 'it looks interesting' and taking up challenges, then growing their motivations" (Teacher C), and "problem solving by thinking and trying" (Teacher D).

Teacher E points out the cultural basis to her values, so that ideal learning of young children is seen as arising out of her own upbringing and life experience.

Japanese culture has probably influenced our values a lot. I grew up like that and thought it was good that children play hard, work with others, take up challenges and solve problems.

Keeping children safe and healthy is also part of the values that Teacher E and teacher C hold for children's learning. Young children are thought of as "growing fast" (Teacher E) and "it is important that they are well cared so to keep safe and healthy" (Teacher C).

In much the same way, the teachers' value of children's safety has been mirrored in some children's expressions. Child B and Child G both indicate that keeping safe is very

important for them:

Safety. I think it is important for us. (Child B).

My mum and teachers always tell us to be safe. I believe they are very right (Child G).

Developing responsible children is also of great value for the teachers. Teacher E and Teacher F's opinions below highlight the importance of developing children's responsibilities:

In Japan, there are some responsibilities that people take. For young children, it is important that they learn to be responsible. (Teacher E)

We value our social roles and responsibilities so children need to know their responsibilities in groups (Teacher F).

Learning to take responsibility, for example tidying up, is also an aspect being valued by children:

Helping tidy up and keeping the classroom tidy is important. (Child I).

Risks: Undesirable Outcomes to Avoid in Children's Learning

The analysis of teachers' data points out some undesirable outcomes in children's learning. Not trying or giving up on learning is mentioned quite frequently as an undesirable learning behaviour and outcome.

Teachers A, C, D and F all suggest that it is undesirable that children give up on their learning:

It is very undesirable to see a child not trying from the start, by showing an attitude such as 'I'm not good at it', 'I cannot', or giving up half way (Teacher A).

We don't encourage children to hesitate to learn and they don't try because they think they cannot do. (Teacher C).

It is an undesirable learning behaviour not to try or give up because of the fear of failure. (Teacher D)

We don't want to see children not to try and they are scared of doing things (Teacher F)

Not trying is also identified in children's data as a learning behaviour they should avoid. As child H points out "when you fail doing something, it is not good that you give up". Child F explains the potential harm of not trying hard on them: "if we don't try this time because we are scared, we also do not want to try next time and we will always be scared. We cannot learn anything if we always do not try".

A number of children felt strongly about the inappropriateness of upsetting teachers and the undesirable consequences they had to face when teachers were upset. As child B noted "you should not upset teachers. It's scary when teachers are upset". Child G said "teachers growl when they are upset. This is scary". "I like the teacher" (Child H and Child E), and "it is not good to see the teacher upset. I am scared of this" (Child F). For those children, it is likely that 'upsetting teachers' was an undesirable outcome that they wanted to avoid.

Children's views that upsetting teachers is undesirable, however, are not shared by the teachers. While some teachers (Teacher A and Teacher F) talked about that they wanted children to listen to teachers, nobody said that upsetting them was an undesirable consequence of children's learning. Instead, the teachers affirmed that "children have their ways of doing things. Unless they deliberately do something inappropriate, we are ok" (Teacher C). Teacher E resonates with this point and states:

We want children to take responsibilities such as taking away their chairs after lunch, but always many chairs are left. Teachers have to put them away. This is not a good thing but we are not upset. What we do is to ask each group [children are grouped up for some class routines and tasks, such as tidy up]: 'what did you forget today?, two things, three things or more?' They all wanted their groups to be good so thought hard: 'we have to tidy up'. We used this way to tell them what they should do. But I do admit that I'm upset sometimes and this could be scary (laugh).

Rules: The Right Things to Do in Practice

Children shared a perspective that in the kindergarten the right thing to do is to listen to teachers. For many of them, a good way to reinforce desirable outcomes and avoid undesirable outcomes is to listen to teachers because "teachers know what is right". (Child G)

Listen to teachers. (Child A; Child C; Child F; Child H; Child I)
If a teacher says you have to come here by this time, we have to do it. (Child B)
We have to keep what they tell us to do. (Child B)
To be careful and to listen to teachers. (Child H)
If teacher says hang the towel there, you should do it. (Child F)
You have to follow teachers' words. Tidy up properly. Sit nicely. You have to eat up without leaving food. If you make a mistake in a paper, you cannot immediately throw it away. You should not break a promise. You should not throw away things you just bought. (Child H)
When teacher talks I am quiet. (Child D)
If teacher tells me to stop playing a game, I immediately stop. (Child E)
Maybe something like this. We are told to come, come fast. (Child C)
You have to pack up fast so you can see the book from the start. Teacher read so you have to be fast. (Child A)

The teachers did not identify themselves as knowing what was right in children's learning. However, a prominent feature of some of their replies is the importance of setting group rules which for them could guide children's learning and behaviours. Teacher F states: "children can follow their own interests but at the same time, kindergarten is the place where they learn group rules. From the rules, they know what to do and not to do". Teacher E explains rules as grounded in the lives of children and it is for children's own benefit that they follow rules. In her words below, teacher E illustrates that rule is a means of reinforcing values and preventing undesirable outcomes:

Rules are actually in children's lives. There are many rules. At this kind of time, get a drink. Going to this activity, you need these things. It's for your own benefit. Rule is something important for yourself. For example, you cannot pee anywhere. Go to the toilet. You can pee comfortably and in a safe environment. Children should know the importance of this for themselves. Rules are learned naturally. If someone pees everywhere it is dirty. It's for their own safety and comfort. If you make others comfortable, you are also comfortable. Having rules makes you feel good so you want to follow them. First of all, it's really for yourself. It's not that you have to do it for others. It is important for children because they are young. When they grow up, what is right and wrong for them gradually become rules. You follow the rules for yourself. Rule is not what we do by force.

Probably for the reason that rules were learned naturally but not implemented by force, the teachers adopted a flexible attitude to the enactment of rules, such as "discussing with

children about what they want”, and “giving choices” (Teacher E and Teacher F) and they were holding a belief that it was not what children should do or should not do that mattered much. Children’s choices and play should be foregrounded within the kindergarten program. Therefore, teacher F stated:

Although we are strong about children’s safety and we say to them ‘cannot go where there is no adult’, we do not want them to think that they cannot play in a place they want, so we explain to them so children understand. Wherever this is a teacher, they can play. Something like backyard where we cannot easily see we restrict it”.

In her questionnaire reply, Teacher C was also concerned with the relations between children’s choices and rules. She noted: “there is no force. We guide children through steps towards a direction. In the case of preschool, the aim is the direction type”. Teacher E shared the same thought through an example: “if a child doesn’t put a bag away, we say ‘you forget, let’s go’, if he says, ‘I don’t want to do it’. We say ‘ok, we take your bag’. Then we wait until he wants to put away his bag. There is no force”.

The talks with children opened up other ideas about rules. In addition to listening to teachers, they shared other right things to do, referring to group experiences and personal safety.

Ask ‘can I borrow it?’ if want to use other’s stuff. (Child D)

In the swimming pool, keep head out of the water. (Child B)

Only going to the backyard if there is a teacher there. (Child H)

Keep promises. Look after other’s stuff. (Child F)

Child F articulates the reason why she needs to keep promises as “they say you lie and you lose friends”.

Discussion

The study has looked at values, risks and rules in Japanese kindergartens, exploring the ways in which they were foregrounded in children and teachers’ perspectives, building a case for the idea that rules reinforced values and prevented risks in children’s learning. The

findings indicate that cooperative relationships, children as autonomous individuals, children's safety and ideal learning behaviours generated the values and risks in children's learning, as well as a flexible attitude towards the kindergarten rules. The relationship between self and group, and play and learning is understood as a laying out and defining characteristic of the kindergarten environment, creating a place, which Izumi-Taylor and Roger (2016) describe as a child-centred and group-oriented community.

Previous studies have documented that learning as a group is crucial to overcoming the increasing anomic situation of Japanese children, providing "children with the opportunity to experience a social complexity that is lacking at home and in the community" (Burke, 2008, p.137). In this study, reported values, risks and rules of the children and teachers all highlighted the importance of group learning of young children and the necessity for children to develop necessary social skills such as "expressing themselves among peers" (Teacher B). This is a common theme in the broader literature on Japanese early childhood education (Hegde, et al., 2014; Izumi-Taylor, 2013).

Previous studies suggest that Japanese kindergarten education has been shaped by a series of philosophical values (Hedge et al., 2014; Nanakida, 2015). It is apparent in this study that Frobel's play, Dewey's hands-on approach and Soviet Union's ideal of productivity have all exerted influences on the reported values and risks of children's learning of the participating teachers and children. Teachers and children spoke of a range of values associated with children's learning and they attached the importance to play, exploration, trying hard and taking up challenges.

For both the teachers and children, giving up on learning was not an issue to be ignored (Hegde et al., 2014). They asserted that "it is an undesirable learning behaviour not to try or giving up because of the fear of failure" (Teacher D), and "If we don't try this time because we are scared, we also do not want to try next time and we will always be scared of doing things. We cannot learn anything if we always do not try" (Child F). This view is supported by the finding of Mizokawa (2015) that it is an undesirable aspect of learning in Japan that children do not make efforts. It is thus evident that undesirable learning outcomes or reported risks in this study lie in their propensity to manifest some Japanese cultural values about learning (Mori, Liu, Otsuki, Mochizuki & Kashiwabara, 2012).

The teachers contemplated children's health and safety as valuable in children's learning

and development. This idea resonated with the children's descriptions of what was important for them and what were the right things to do. It is possible to infer that for all the participants, the kindergarten was a secure feature in the rapid developmental process of young children and this finding is highly consistent with what Hegde et al (2014) reported in their study with Japanese early childhood teachers. Importantly, "kindergarten is a place where children know the rules" (Teacher F), for example, "only going to the backyard if there is a teacher there" (Child H) because "safety. It is important for us" (Child B) and "it is not good to see the teacher upset" (Child F). This is another example that illustrates the interrelated relationship between value, rule and risk. Children and teachers talked about the right things to do against the backdrop of their perspectives of what was ideal and what were undesirable outcomes.

The study also found that listening to teachers comprised the defining feature of the participating children's reported rules. Upsetting teachers is the main term of reference for the children's conception of undesirable learning outcome, therefore listening to teachers became an approach to avoiding undesirable outcomes and in the case of this study, it was an important rule for the children. Obviously, the views that 'teachers know what is right' and 'I like the teachers and don't want teachers to be upset' combined with an idea that 'teachers are scary when they are upset' are the value and risk that underpin the children's thinking that 'listening to teachers' is the right thing to do. Such an example can be found in the description of teacher-student relationship in Lassila and Unitto's (2016) study. They reported the story of a Japanese teacher who said that "in the classroom, I act in a more serious manner, trying not to do any unnecessary things" (p.210). By describing the teacher's serious manner with students, Lassila and Unitto characterized the Japanese teacher as structured and firm.

In contrast, the teachers in the present study did not share such a point but said to have adopted a very flexible attitude towards children and classroom practices. For them, rules were learned naturally but not implemented by force and teachers were neither rules nor rule makers. Our findings do not permit us to settle the issue of the difference between teachers' and children's ideas but they reveal the significance of exploring, in comparative perspectives, how teachers are working with children in Japanese kindergartens. It is our hope that the questions raised here will facilitate the ongoing navigation of this topic.

However, the difference in which teachers' attitudes to children are explained in the children's and teachers' perspectives highlights further issues. Understanding the role of teachers in terms of setting rules constructs them as strict instructors but this does not seem to be the case in the participating kindergartens. According to the previous studies, a child-centred and play-oriented early childhood education is promoted in Japanese early childhood education (Hedge et al., 2014) and our data also suggested open-minded and understanding teachers. The reason why the children were scared of teachers when teachers were upset could be explained as children paying high respect to their teachers because they like the teachers and teachers know the right things. The children did not want to break teachers' heart so they were scared of upsetting teachers and chose to listen to teachers.

Even so, it is still arguable that building and maintaining an ideal image of teachers is a significant challenge for the participating teachers. Such an interpretation is highly congruent with Lassila and Uitto's (2016) finding in their study with Japanese elementary school teachers, where they reported a tension between what the teachers were expected from themselves and what they experienced with students. In the current study, teachers' attitudes to children are defined, by teachers, in relation to their own value system and their expectations of ideal learning or teaching, but how they work with children is also defined, by children, in relation to the children's experience with them. The difference between teachers and children's perspectives here is particularly significant in issues of the ideal positioning of teachers to themselves and the realistic image of teachers for children.

There is also evidence of tacit juxtaposition of teachers' rules and children's strategies. As shown in the study, even in a play-based learning environment, it is still the teachers who define what choices are available such as 'where to go' and 'what to do', and what rules and boundaries need to be placed on children's pursuit of interests (Wood, 2014). The children's ideas such as 'being careful', and 'listening to teachers' can help to make visible their strategies to avoid potential risks that result from the teachers' anger. These strategies became the rules. In view of this, the children in the study exerted a remarkable influence on making and implementing the kindergarten rules (Iskan, 2015).

In addition, teacher F's explanation that rules are grounded in children's lives and they make children feel good illustrates the influence of "the good child identity" (Burke, 2008, p.150). I take the view that such theorizing where rules are positioned as motivational and

positive can be very instrumental in framing discussions of early childhood education in Japan to consider how rules support children's learning.

Conclusion

Through sketching a value-risk-rule framework for understanding the conceptual basis of classroom rules in Japanese kindergartens, this study contributes to an understanding of the ways in which the rules are constituted by teachers and children's perspectives of what is valuable and undesirable in children's learning. Viewing teachers and children's values of learning and their perceived risks and rules as relational emphasizes the close interplay of these constructs. The study thus provides insights into the conceptual-practical relationship between what is ideal, what is undesirable and the practical approach to the right things in the kindergartens. While generalizations cannot be made, it is evident that classroom rules could be considered as a cognitive production of teachers and children emergent from the connections between children and teachers' own perspectives and the sociocultural and educational values and risks in children's learning within the wider Japanese context.

Limitations of the Study and Future Research Possibilities

The study was conducted with early childhood teachers and children from two kindergartens in Japan. The findings, therefore, are unlikely to reflect the situation of all Japanese kindergartens. Moreover, given that data were only collected from six teachers and nine children, the scope of the analysis could not include deep explorations of teachers and children's perspectives and detailed accounts of learning and teaching in the kindergarten classrooms.

Questions about what constitutes ideal learning, what are undesirable learning outcomes and what are the right things to do in Japanese kindergartens cannot be answered in this study. Conclusions need to be tentative in view of the fact that the study was contextually bound in time and space. It is argued here that a better understanding of these terms and their relationship could be achieved by further research on early childhood education in

Japan, with reference to children's learning behaviours and teachers' professional engagements in classrooms. The present research is an important step in understanding the kindergarten curriculum in Japan.

The difference between children and teachers' accounts of teachers' attitudes towards children raises an interesting question about the realities and complexities of teaching practice in Japan. Professional practice of Japanese early childhood teachers needs to be studied with reference to children's perspectives. Given the capability of young children to articulate views as shown in this study, and increasing calls to recruit children's voices in research (Johansson et al., 2014), great attention needs to be paid in Japan to focus on what young children think and say about their teachers.

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