

From the Voices in the Narratives of After-School Support Advisors: Support for Children's After-School Support Advisors in Japan^{*}

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This paper examines how advisors perceive the voices made by Mr. A (pseudonym), the founder of after-school support for children (Initiative Z: pseudonym) in Japan, to advisors who support children. Furthermore, the purpose of this study is to find out how advisors think about the voices and that the voices have led or not advisors to support children, if to do so, what points are key to continuing support for children. Therefore, in Initiative Z, I conducted a survey of two advisors who were approached by Mr. A, who is involved in supporting children as an advisor. As a result of analyzing the narratives obtained from interviews with the two advisors, it was found that the advisor had a sense of being recognized by Mr. A because Mr. A acknowledged the advisor's way of life. This feeling on the part of the advisor led to trust in Mr. A, and the advisor was in tune with Mr. A's thoughts on after-school support, suggesting that the advisor was providing support to the child.

Keyword: children's after-school support, advisor, voice, trust

Background and Purpose

Purpose of the Study

In Japan, currently (2023), there are two main government projects that support after-school support for children, targeting elementary school students. One is the "after-school children's club" under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, which secures a place for children from working families. The other is the "After School Children's Classroom" run by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, which provides learning and experiential exchange activities for all children with the cooperation of local residents. After various backgrounds, these two projects are currently being integrated into a five-year dimensional plan called the "New Comprehensive Plan for After-School Children". Integration means that all children can participate in the after-school children's classroom, regardless of whether they use the after-school children's club or not (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2018).

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Saruwatari and Sanzo Sato (2011) recommend securing advisors to support children (in order to avoid duplication of words for support, people who provide support to children will be referred to as advisors in this paper), and advisors' support for children in Japan. It is pointed out that continuing support is an issue. It has also been pointed out that the key to continued support from advisors to children is not only the physical adjustment of the place and time that advisors provide support to children, but also the emotional support that advisors provide to children (Kitahara, Sato, Hasumi, Ikoma, & Kawashima, 2015; Kazama, Fuse, Yasuda, Nagata, Kato, & Hirata, 2018). However, in order to resolve the operational issues of "after-school children's classrooms", there are questions about what kind of psychological support should be provided, how advisors should continue to support children, and what the advisors were like when they started providing support. It is not known whether willpower can be maintained or improved (Shigeno, 2021).

To state the conclusion first, the after-school support initiative in Japan discussed in this article (hereinafter referred to as Initiative Z: a pseudonym) has its founder, Mr. A (pseudonym), providing psychological support to an advisor. This support consists of the voices of the comments from Mr. A regarding the individual advisor's approach to support, the content of the support, and the situation of the advisor providing support. Mr. A strives to ensure that the advisor continues to provide support to the child, acknowledges the advisor's way of life and values, and speaks to the advisor so that the advisor can provide support to the child with confidence. Currently (2023), Initiative Z has expanded its support content, increased the number of advisors, and is providing support to children.

How does the advisor perceive Mr. A's voices to the advisors, which is based on the premise of support for the advisors? Furthermore, the purpose of this study is to find out how advisors think about the voices and that the voices have led or not advisors to support children, if to do so, what points are key to continuing support for children.

Previous Research

Current status and challenges of advisors in after-school support for children. Kitahara et al. (2015) found that many advisors participate in after-school support for children with the intention of helping the child, but in reality they often have difficulty realizing their dreams, which is a factor that prevents advisors from continuing to provide support. They point out that the key to continuing support is for advisors to improve the program's situation, find positive aspects of support, take various measures such as rebuilding their feelings, and maintain their mental health. Furthermore, an analysis of one advisor's narrative revealed that in order for advisors to be able to deal with such things, they can do so with support from peers who have the same values as the advisor and people they can talk to. In addition to increasing the number of advisors, future issues for consideration include how to support the continued support of advisors.

Support is the key to continued support for advisors. Kazama et al. (2018) point out the need for support that motivates advisors who support children to provide support in order to promote understanding of children and good relationships with them. In order to promote understanding of children and good relationships with them, it is pointed out that advisors who support children need psychological support. On the other hand, it is not clear what kind of support will be provided to advisors and how support for advisors. If advisors are motivated and maintain their mental health through support from people who understand them, they will be able to deal with difficulties in providing support, and it is possible that they will continue providing support.

Case Study Introduction

Introduction of Initiative Z. Initiative Z integrates the “after-school children’s clubs” and “after-school children’s classrooms” that are developed at each elementary school in Q-ward, which are carried out as part of the welfare project of R-section in Q-ward, P city (all pseudonyms) in Japan. The project is being commissioned by the after-school support project Y (pseudonym) in Q Ward as part of the learning support program. The activities include implementation of study programs, study consultation, and study assistance, and the main purpose of the activities is to increase motivation for learning and establish study habits. Additionally, Initiative Z is part of the operations of General Incorporated Association S (pseudonym), and most of the advisors are former teachers, and are currently unemployed or working part-time outside of school.

Mr. A’s activity status. Mr. A founded Initiative Z because he wanted to support children from people other than teachers and parents. For this reason, during his tenure as a manager in the educational administration, he began after-school support activities (the predecessor of Initiative Z), a form of social education, as a measure to enrich children’s after-school experiences. After retiring from his administrative position in educational administration, Mr. A launched Initiative Z. Mr. A was asked by the government to take on the role of the learning part of after-school support for Mr. A because of Mr. A’s past experience with Initiative Z and his many connections. Many of the people who will become advisors have been acquaintances for a long time, and advisors are gathering under Mr. A’s promotion.

Mr. A also plays the role of a coordinator for the advisor. Its role is to listen to the advisor’s thoughts, connect them with people and places where those thoughts can be put to use, judge the situation of the advisor and the child receiving support, and adjust the program so that the advisor’s will can be realized. In addition, it is necessary to provide psychological support for or related to the advisor, and to convey the significance of the advisor’s efforts (Mega, 2001).

Support for advisors by Mr. A. Mr. A provides some support to the advisor. That support is Mr. A’s voice to the advisor. In order for advisors to recognize the value of their own way of life and engage in support with confidence in different advisors’ situations, Mr. A directly explained to advisors the advisor’s way of life and how they think about support, which is the basis of support. They recognize the value and communicate that value.

The following <Narrative E> (in gothic italics) is a record of an interview with an advisor who tried to interrupt support and what Mr. A was trying to keep in mind while speaking to the advisor. Extracted from an interview I conducted with Mr. A in 20XX. (Words in parentheses were added by me with Mr. A’s consent.)

Question 1 for Mr. A: “What kind of things do you keep in mind when speaking to advisors?”

<Narrative E> (above omitted) Tell someone the way you have lived your life. With confidence, that someone thinks that children are the best. All you have to do is confidently show what you’ve been doing for 60 years here (in front of the children). Both the hardships and the successes. Therefore, I affirm myself until now. (Omitted) By acknowledging the person’s own way of life, that person (advisor) will continue to do so. Even though I was told things like, “I can’t help it, if Mr. A said so”, I was happy because I thought, “Ah, this person will continue”. Me too, So, after all, accept that person for who he/she is, and that means that the person acknowledges himself/herself, and (telling him/her) to value himself/herself.

Mr. A can see that his advisor affirms his life and speaks to him to give him confidence in his way of life. The words from the advisor to Mr. A, “I can’t help it, if Mr. A says so”, suggest that Mr. A’s acceptance of the advisor’s way of life builds trust in Mr. A in the advisor. By having trust in Mr. A, the advisor develops the will to continue providing support even if it is difficult for some reason to continue providing support, and the advisor also understands that this will bring joy to Mr. A.

Method

Research Method

The purpose of this study is to find out how advisors perceive Mr. A's voices to advisors. Furthermore, by listening to the advisor, I can find out how the advisor thinks about support for the child and what points are the key to continuing support for the child. Therefore, it is necessary to understand specifically how the advisor feels about Mr. A's comments. Therefore, the author conducted an interview with the advisor regarding Mr. A's voices, and captured the advisor's narrative. I believe that the advisor's narrative is appropriate as a data collection method that can directly capture the specific content of Mr. A's voice and the advisor's thoughts regarding that voice.

I would also like to interview two new advisors who have joined us over the past two years. The two advisors mentioned below, Ms. B and Ms. C (pseudonyms) decided to provide support because they wanted to pass on their expertise to children and their parents were starting children's after-school experiences after they had finished raising children.

Analysis framework. The purpose of this paper is to explore the advisor's thoughts based on Mr. A's voice. In view of this purpose, in order to specifically explore the advisor's thoughts, it is necessary to analyze the narrative with a view to depicting the advisor's thoughts on Mr. A's voices based on the advisor's thoughts, philosophy, and beliefs regarding after-school support. Therefore, it is necessary to have a framework that specifically describes the advisor's specialty and past practical experience. Therefore, I will adopt Tanaka's method of narrative exploration as the framework for analyzing narratives. Narrative inquiry is a method that understands that practitioners' internal specialized knowledge is reflected in their practice, and reveals the beliefs and ideals that exist inside practitioners from the narratives in interviews (Tanaka, 2011).

Furthermore, in designing the support discussed in this paper, Mr. A's voice is to recognize and communicate the value of the way of life that is the basis of the advisor's support, and to help the advisor recognize that value. In this paper, I aim to find out how advisors perceive and feel about Mr. A's message, which has such a purpose. Considering the purpose of this paper, I believe that analyzing narratives that allow people to reconstruct the meaning of their experiences is a valid method of analysis.

The first step in narrative analysis is to find in the narrative the specific words that the advisor remembers from Mr. A's words. I will explore how advisors perceive these words. Furthermore, in response to Mr. A's words, I will interpret the advisor's narrative about his thoughts on after-school support in light of the way of life and values underlying the advisor's support, and analyze the relationship with continued support.

Ethical considerations. As an ethical consideration, Mr. A, Ms. B, and Ms. C, who were asked to cooperate with the research, were given consent after explaining the purpose of the research and the possibility of withdrawing from research cooperation during the course of the study. In addition, regarding the handling of interview data and its storage, protection and publication of personal information, I requested confirmation of the manuscript and obtained consent for publication.

Results and Discussion

This section reports the advisor's narrative (in italics) and the results of its analysis. The specific "words" spoken by Mr. A included in the advisor's narration in response to the interview are expressed in Gothic font. I will discuss advisors' thoughts and ideas based on their "words" regarding after-school support as interpreted by

me, and report them along with the narratives I have obtained. The parts in parentheses in the narration are the parts that I added based on the context and after checking with the advisor.

Advisor B

Ms. B used to work as a health and physical education teacher at a junior high school, and was good at teaching children how to improve their muscular strength and body balance. After retiring from teaching, she heard about Initiative Z, Ms. B started a “making class”. Mr. A’s words remain in Ms. B’s memory, and I described her memory in which Mr. A’s words are used in the narrations of No. 1 and No. 2 in response to her interview.



Figure 1. Ms. B’s activities.

Question 1-1 for the advisor: “Please tell me if there was anything Mr. A said that left a lasting impression on you.”

<No. 1> (Foreword omitted) I’m really happy that (Mr. A) said to me, “Ah, if you can teach children things like that properly, you can do it.” Simply, that’s what I’ve been studying and what I’ve been doing, so I’m glad that Mr. A recognized it. Everything about my expertise and how I have lived my life up until now have been overlooked, and Mr. A recognizes that it is because I have worked so hard that I am doing what I am doing now. I mean, I have a track record and experience. I’m grateful to be able to support children and make me feel like I’m able to teach children this way because of the way I live my life.

Question 1-2 for the advisor: “Does Mr. A’s voice motivate you to provide support?”

<No. 2> First, I think it’s about acknowledging the other person. (Omitted) Because if he doesn’t do that, that person has no value. After all, there are many people in this world who teach physical education even better than me. There are a lot of professionals out there, so he should go for them. But the first step is to say, “Try what you can do.” Is it reliable? Ah, I don’t think it’s okay if it’s not me. Well, I think I’ll try what I can. It’s a small thing, but it makes a big difference. (Omitted)

Consideration. From the narrative of <No. 1>, it can be said that Ms. B has come to recognizing the value of her own way of life, which is based on the achievements and experiences that Ms. B has worked hard to build up her body. From the narrative of <No. 2>, Ms. B’s way of life, such as what she has practiced and what she has valued, is recognized by Mr. A, and Ms. B becomes the one and only person who is needed by Mr. A for after-school support. It can be said that the person has trust in Mr. A because of the feeling that Mr. A exists. It can be seen that Ms. B’s trust in Mr. A, and recognition of the value of his own way of life led to Ms. B’s intention to continue providing support to the child after school, saying, “I guess I’ll try what I can do”.

For Ms. B, who is thinking of supporting the child, she does not feel like “Please go that way” or “It doesn’t have to be me”, but rather she feels that Mr. A recognizes her existence as “Ms. B”. It can be said that Ms. B can trust him and provide support to the child. In other words, Mr. A’s recognition of herself as a person has led Ms. B to trust Mr. A, and because Mr. A values the initiative Z, Ms. B is well-positioned to continue supporting the child.

Advisor C

Ms. C works as a teacher who arranges hairstyles. Ms. C had finished raising her own children, heard about initiative Z from her acquaintance, and wanted to use her expertise to help children and their parents. Ms. C asked Mr. A through an acquaintance to run an after-school support program called “Hair and Makeup Classes”, and began teaching children and parents how to do their hair. Ms. C met and talked with Mr. A for the first time at her first “Hair and Makeup Classes”. Mr. A’s words at that time left an impression on her, and she appeared using Mr. A’s words in No. 3 and No. 4’s narrations in response to the interview.



Figure 2. Ms. C’s activities.

Question 3-1 for advisor: “Please tell us if there was anything that Mr. A said that left a lasting impression on you.”

<No. 3> My true wish is that if I can be involved in this kind of experience for children and I can make a fortune from it, if I have the financial strength, in short, if I can earn enough to live there, then I would be lucky. It’s like he didn’t deny anything about that. In the story, I was told that I don’t like volunteering (unpaid), so I would like to be compensated for my responsibility. But, I guess that’s a bit strange, because even though I’m pouring out unconditional love for my children, I’ve been shunned by money, as if it were the ghost of money. I was wondering if that was the case, but when we met for the first time, he said, “Well, I’d love to continue working with you,” and he said something along the lines of “Let’s talk about the financial aspects as well.” To be honest, it’s completely fine even if it doesn’t lead to the real amount. However, please don’t deny me.

Question 3-2 for advisor: “Does Mr. A’s voice motivate you to provide support?”

<No. 4> (Omitted) For example, since they can’t pay any more, they are only looking for people to volunteer (free of charge), so they can’t ask for that kind of advice, or they are not that kind of place, so they were shut down. If I do that, I’ll feel a little embarrassed or say I’m sorry, but I’ll be like, “No, I understand that”, and once he accepted it, I’ll be honest, for example, about my salary (After that, I don’t think I’ll get any more money (money), but when I was told that this was all I

had, I was not dissatisfied with it, and I was also happy that he didn't reject me like this. If I were to receive a job from this person (after school support), if I had work at this school or work with children like this, I would have thought that it wasn't money at all.

Consideration. From the narrative of <No. 3>, Mr. A recognizes Ms. C's wish that Ms. C's specialty, hair and make-up, be evaluated fairly in terms of monetary value, her values regarding volunteering, and Ms. C's practice in the field of hair arrangement. It can be seen that Ms. C felt that herself was not denied because of the voice. From the narrative of <No. 4>, Mr. A's voice made Ms. C feel that her way of life was recognized, and that the professional hair arrangement was "not about money at all", and decided to provide support. It can be said that it is suitable for supporting to children.

It can be said that Ms. C has trust in Mr. A, who has accepted his way of life, including the things he has practiced and values, without being rejected. Ms. C's trust in Mr. A can be seen in the after-school support setting, which Mr. A values, and that Ms. C's original way of thinking about after-school support changed as a result of Mr. A's voice. In other words, even though money is a secondary consideration, Ms. C wants to express her trust in Mr. A by providing after-school support because her ideas were not rejected, and to convey to him what she can do with her expertise for children. It can be said that the original idea has been maintained.

Summary

The results of the analysis of the above narratives suggest that Mr. A's voice approving the advisor's way of life makes the advisor feel acknowledged by Mr. A, and provides support to the child. The advisor's sense that Mr. A recognizes what she has dedicated her life to and what she thinks about when providing support to her child after school builds trust in Mr. A. Trust in Mr. A suggests that the advisor feels a sense of connection with Mr. A. Shigeno (2022) points out that when people feel connected to others, this feeling is bidirectional. Following Shigeno's (2022) point, when the advisor feels a sense of connection with Mr. A, the advisor was in tune with value of the after-school support that Mr. A is putting his heart and soul into. It can be said that the advisor has been able to move in the direction of continuing to provide after-school support to the child by doing what she can and wanting to repay Mr. A's trust in herself.

Although this study clarified the factors behind continued support through support for advisors from a single case, there are limits to its generalizability. Future tasks include clarifying the factors that led to the continuation of after-school support in other cases, and investigating in detail the process from these factors to the continuation of after-school support.

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