A Study of the Effect of Parent Playcentre Participation in Japan and New Zealand

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper was investigate the effect of parents' Playcentre participation in Japan, and to compare the impact of different Japan and New Zealand Playcentre participants. The focus was on social networks, and the formation of trust and norm of reciprocity generating social capitals which operates to empower parents themselves, their families and communities. Japanese parents with preschool aged children in the Picasso Playcentre (Tokyo area) and Eniwa Playcentre (Hokkaido, the northern island of Japan) were interviewed. The findings are interpreted as follows: Japanese parents being involved in adult education and Playcentre activities was significantly associated with positive outcomes with regards to child-rearing attitudes and diverse other contemporary Japanese social problems. These were compared with Satoh's own research in New Zealand and findings from the NZPF commissioned research Powell et al. (2005), *The Effect of Adult Playcentre Participation on the Creation of Social capital in Local Communities.*[1]

Introduction

In contemporary Japanese society, child-rearing is increasingly recognized as a task that may be accomplished only with difficulty. Although there has never been an age in which mothers raised children on their own, ever since mothers assumed the primary responsibility for raising children, social problems such as child-rearing anxiety and child-rearing neurosis have become prominent. At what time did this change in the functions of families begin? Parsons (1955) explains the postwar family system by asserting that the nuclear family arose along with postwar industrialization, and as they assumed responsibility for the socialization

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of children and the stabilization of adult personalities, tasks which had until then been carried out by the extended family, families took on new, fragmented roles.[2]

Certainly, nuclear families as divorced from family networks ease movement at the level of the individual, making them perhaps suited to the structure of industry. On the other hand, the smaller scale and division of roles within families have created a situation in which it is more likely that mothers will experience anxiety or stress regarding child-rearing. Makino (1982, 1988)[3, 4] and Ochiai (1989)[5] are examples of investigative analyses of child-rearing anxiety on the part of mothers. Makino observes that there are two factors which lead to child-rearing anxiety for mothers. The first is "lack of participation by the father in child-rearing and housework"; in households which practice gender-based role division, mothers are unable to receive assistance with child-rearing. The second is "the limitations of mothers' own child-rearing networks." Makino notes that mothers who attend community school experience less child-rearing anxiety, indicating the importance of all types of adult networks, not only those related to child-rearing.[6]

The birth rate in Japan has been declining since 1980, as shown by contemporary surveys conducted by Makino and Ochiai, hitting the low point of 1.57 in 1989. This low point is referred to as "1.57 shock," and the word *shōshika* ("declining birth rate") was first used in the 1992 People's Lifestyle White Paper (Kokumin Seikatsu Hakusyo).[7] From this point forward, the government became involved in earnest in child-rearing support projects as a means of handling the decline in the birth rate. However, in Japan's case, these policies were literally formulated as a means of checking the decline in the number of children, which makes them fundamentally different from New Zealand's family policies emphasizing the right of children to receive education. The first declining birth rate countermeasure in Japan was called the Angel Plan (formally entitled "Regarding the Essential Orientation of Policies for Supporting Future Child-rearing") and was instituted in 1994. It was primarily concerned with child-rearing policies for dual income households, expanding nursery schools with the aim of creating a society in which those who wanted to have children would feel sufficient peace of mind to have them. The later New Angel Plan was also primarily concerned with expanding nursery schools. These policies were prompted by the fact that the "Japanese-style welfare state" in which women assumed the role of providing care without compensation had reached its limits, and the spread of a view on child-rearing which held that it would be beneficial for society if women were able to work as

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well as play the role of mothers.[8] However, it was demonstrated that the sense of anxiety and encumbrance involved in child-rearing are higher for housewife households than dual income households[9, 10], and the Next Generation Nurturing Support Promotion Law which took effect in 2003 declared an involvement in support for child-rearing in housewife households and regional child-rearing support as well. Thus, child-rearing support transitioned with this law from its previous emphasis on support for the coexistence of working life and family life to a policy encompassing all child-rearing households.

Here, I will examine the environment in which child-rearing took place in 1980 and afterward as these "child-rearing difficulties" were becoming widespread. Since the period of rapid economic growth, as families have urbanized, regional communities have vanished, nuclear families have increased, and family networks have declined. As a result, it has become common for mothers to take sole responsibility for child-rearing, with the lower likelihood of receiving support based on blood relationships or regional relationships contributing to changes in child-rearing environments.[11, 12] Mothers' assumption of the sole responsibility for child-rearing has encouraged the isolation of child-rearing, leading to the problem of "child-rearing in a cell." Thus, mothers themselves face a dilemma between "isolated" childcare and their own lifestyles, making it important to have a "child-rearing strategy" that involves connecting with other parents and building networks.[13] The necessity of forming these support networks for young families in the 1980s to the initiation of child-rearing network studies which addressed the realities of the networks mothers form while raising children.[14~16] The results indicated that family networks are important both collectively and emotionally, trends which are especially prevalent trend amongst the mother's kin. However, since there are some regions in which family networks cannot be relied upon at all, attention has been directed recently at social capital studies which point out that links between regional residents and between the parents who actually raise children contribute to community revitalization.[17~21]

Presently, child-rearing support in Japan primarily takes the form of regional child-rearing support projects such as Regional Child-rearing Support Centres[22] and Get-Together Plaza Projects.[23] Other child-raising support projects take diverse forms, including children's houses[24] and private organizations, and there are an increasing number of venues at which parents and the children they are raising may gather freely. Nakatani (2008) praises the development of permanent

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venues at which parents and children may gather.[25] These venues contrast with traditional child-rearing support projects, most of which treated parents and children separately. Nakatani also states that Japanese child-rearing support has at last transitioned from "coping with problems" to "preventing problems." However, it is not necessarily the case that establishing venues for parents and children that is infrastructure reduces stressors related to child-rearing and resolves the various problems surrounding childcare. In recent discourse, promoting the "socialization of childcare" is discussed in terms of its role in constructing a better living environment for both children and their parents. However, despite the existence of venues for parents and their children, many parents do not understand basic child-rearing practices, and such policies do not match well with the needs of parents who are raising children. In more concrete terms, previous methods of child-rearing support focused on top-down policies such as providing facilities for parents and children, holding events, and implementing counseling services, ignoring the questions of what parents as the concerned individuals demanded and how they should approach the raising of their own children. From this point forward, parenting (often translated into Japanese as *oyagyō*), which adjusts the positions of support providers and parents in the context of child-rearing support and allows parents to grow as they raise their children, will play an important role.

In New Zealand, cooperative child-rearing systems conducted amongst parents include "playcentres." Playcentres host activities in which parents assume the role of educators, aiming to allow "Families growing together" as knowledge and techniques related to children and institutional management are learned. Parents follow a shared plan, building confidence in themselves and trust in their peers through cooperative child-rearing activities and constructing strong ties with the local community. This is proven by the research conducted in New Zealand by Powell et al., who have pointed out that the participation of parents in Playcentres brings out their latent abilities and exerts a positive influence upon both attitudes toward childcare and the strength of the community.

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This study is based upon the awareness of the issues described above. To formulate a plan for a new child-rearing support policy based upon cooperative activities by parents at Playcentres, the study aims to clarify the social significance of the parental ties formed at Playcentres through a comparative analysis of Japan and New Zealand.

Research methodology

In this article, I will discuss Playcentre activities in New Zealand as one example of child-rearing support methodology. The method of investigation was a primarily semi-structured interview-based survey, and small-scale questionnaire surveys were conducted as needed. The main subjects of this article were parents participating in Playcentres in New Zealand and Japan. (1) Those who had experience participating in Playcentres in New Zealand were separated into two period groupings (pre-reform and post-reform) and two regional groupings (major cities and non-urban cities or towns), and the circumstances behind the activities of 19 participants as well as the particular characteristics of these were elucidated. New Zealand's Playcentres have been operating for nearly 70 years. In Japan, however, similar activities have been in operation for just 10 years, and have a low degree of visibility. For this reason, the past experiences of Playcentre participants in New Zealand may prove useful in developing Japanese Playcentres. Also, these participants are familiar with the Playcentres that existed in the early days of early childhood education before governmental reforms were implemented, and this as well may provide us with suggestions regarding future methods of child-rearing support. Thus, the New Zealand survey also encompassed interviews with those who were not current participants. Japan, as described above, has a brief history of practicing these activities, and most current participants were in their 30s. Also, Playcentres in New Zealand take a standard form as government-approved early childhood education facilities, but Japanese Playcentres make use of various official and unofficial methods, with some operated by civilians, some by NPOs, and some by governments. Thus, for this investigation, two varieties of operations were selected, with Playcentre Picaso in Kokubunji City, Tokyo the subject of the investigation of the citizen-led type and Eniwa-shi Playcentre in Eniwa City, Hokkaido the subject of the investigation of the government-operated type. The subjects were 8 parents participating in citizen-led Playcentres and 13 parents participating in government-led Playcentres. In addition to parents, interviews were also conducted with 5 supervisors (3 volunteer staff members and 2 Eniwa City employees) who were assisting with the operation of the Playcentres.

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The above analysis made use of *The Effect of Adult Playcentre Participation on the Creation of Social Capital in Local Communities* by Powell et al. The analysis was conducted with the working hypothesis that "Proactive participation by parents in the operation of child-rearing support sites raises the mutual

profitability and trust which are features of social capital, exerting a positive influence upon the region and individuals."

The investigation was conducted between 2004 and 2010, with three themes subjected to analyses. These themes were (1) individual changes: the influence upon individual awareness and lifestyle attitudes as well as empowerment effects exerted by Playcentre participation and study experiences, (2) cultivation of human resources for education: the effect of changes in awareness brought about by informal study experiences, as well as the added value of qualification conferment, upon future life course and career, and (3) network building: whether or not the networks constructed at Playcentres contributed beneficial social resources to lifestyles and human relationships. To advance the framework of this analysis, this study made use of case studies focusing primarily on interview surveys of participants, and detailed interviews were conducted regarding the parents' reasons for participating, the child-rearing environment, family structure, social circumstances, the effects of adults education upon parents, and relationships between Playcentre participants.

Previous studies conducted in the context of numerous fields encompass surveys regarding child-rearing support systems and networks as well as studies regarding social capital. This study, however, focuses upon the cooperative activities parents carry out at New Zealand Playcentres, seeing the parents themselves as the creators of social capital, in this case child-rearing networks. I feel that this will prove useful not only in the future development of child-rearing support in Japan, but also in regional community revitalization and parents' own consideration of their future life courses.

A comparative examination of Playcentre participants in Japan and New Zealand

In New Zealand, Playcentres have been operating for about 70 years. At Playcentres, parents conduct activities as caregivers while learning about children and organizational management. Recent studies demonstrate that participation by parents in Playcentres plays a significant role in creating social networks which are beneficial to Playcentres and communities, and contributes to the accumulation of social capital.[26] The purpose of this study is to consider the question of whether or not Playcentres in Japan function as a form of social capital, resulting in the trust and connections which are features of social capital for the individual

parents who participate, and playing a mutually complementary role in terms of both. Thus, this report is based upon the study by Powell et al. in New Zealand and comparatively examines investigations conducted in New Zealand and Japan, aiming to determine whether or not results indicating that Playcentres were widely accepted in New Zealand society may be generalized to include Japan. The validity of this will be examined through a comparison of the two countries.

A comparative examination of motivations behind Playcentre participation

In this section, I will compare Japanese and New Zealand participants' motivations for beginning to attend Playcentres on the basis of survey results from both countries.

First, as an overall trend amongst all participants from Japan and New Zealand, including those in Powell's previous study, Playcentres were seen as "venues for parents and children to spend time together." Also, comments such as "The Playcentre has a warm atmosphere," "I was attracted by the fact that participants seemed to be having fun," and "I like the feeling that the parents are active and so is the Playcentre" demonstrated that Playcentres in Japan and New Zealand shared a warm, accepting atmosphere.

In New Zealand, 73% of parents participated in Playcentres to "cultivate the sociality of children," and this author saw this opinion expressed many times in interviews. However, although opinions such as "I wanted to increase my child's number of friends" and "They educate and care for children other than just my own" were observed in the Japanese investigation, few directly expressed such sentiments as "I want to increase my child's sociality." Also, in New Zealand, many parents participated for reasons related to location, such as "access is convenient," "Because it is located in a school attended by the child's siblings," or "Because it is close." However, since Japanese Playcentres have not been established in all areas, as they have in New Zealand, parents commented that locations were unfavorable, stating, "It's inconvenient, but I like the idea of the Playcentre" and "I wish it were closer to home," but since they wished to participate in the Playcentre, they did so in many cases from other cities or from faraway places. Of course, some Japanese families did participate because the Playcentre was close to home, but border-crossing Playcentre participants were very rare in New Zealand.

Here, I will discuss the distinguishing characteristics of Japanese Playcentre

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participants. In Japan, unlike New Zealand, parents do not have a custom of proactively initiating such activities. Therefore, service-type child-rearing support treating parents as "customers," is practiced widely in Japan. Also, this type of official support lacks the concept of "educating parents by connecting them with each other," and is not intended to foster parental independence.[27] As a result, support venues led by experts, in which parents can participate without burdening themselves, tend to be preferred. Of course, Japanese social structure fundamentally differs from that of New Zealand in terms of the working style and lack of participation by fathers in child-rearing, so we cannot simply criticize Japanese mothers for being overly dependent. However, apathy toward others and avoidance of involvement with others are certainly on the rise in Japanese society in recent years[28], and it is clear that connections between people are growing weaker. Thus, among the subjects of the Japanese survey, I venture to assert that there were some parents who participated in Playcentres due to a lack of trust in present-day child-rearing support facilities. EC at Playcentre Picasso stated, "Child-rearing support services and events are already established, so actually there's no need for me to act on my own, but I'm not happy with them and they seem sad somehow," going on to express a desire to conduct child-raising activities independently and to continue participating in the Playcentre. Also, Mj at Playcentre Picasso would have worked on the service provision side as a supervisor at any other Japanese childcare facility. She stated, "I've always had a problem with the way Japanese child-rearing support systems separate the service providers from the service recipients." She became involved with Playcentre activities as a means of solving this problem. Participants at the Eniwa-shi Playcentre also stated that at other facilities, they were unable to contribute ideas regarding child-raising and care-giving at study events, which became a problem when friction occurred between children. To avoid such problems, they would try their best to avoid interaction with others, ignoring other parents and children and generally playing one-on-one with their own children. Also, when groups did form, they were exclusive, unlike the Playcentres which accept anyone. Many parents found this organizational culture rigid, and switched to Playcentres for this reason. At the Eniwa City Playcentre, partly because it was a public facility, many parents participated due to proactive advertising by the city and invitations by employees. However, there were also many parents who participated because of the problems they saw in traditional child-raising support facilities, expressing such sentiments as "I

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don't dependent on others to care for my children," and "making things easier for parents is not the point of child-raising support." In other words, participants, perhaps subconsciously, draw lines between Playcentres and other facilities. Such reasons for participation which are specific to Japan have acted as motivations for providing important suggestions regarding the conditions of present raising children in Japan, under which independent child-rearing activities are required.

A Comparative Investigation of Educational Effects upon Parents

Next, I would like to clarify the extent to which participation in sessions and study experiences benefited parents participating in Playcentres.

With regard to educational effects, all participants pointed out the effect of "deeply understanding the child." J, an informant of the New Zealand survey, stated, "When a child has done something bad, adults need to understand why the child acted that way." J added that he came to understand how to interact with children by taking Playcentre courses 1 and 2. G also stated, "Now I understand how children play and why play is important for children," boasting that this understanding of children translated into confidence regarding child-rearing.

Japanese participants also identified this effect in the form of an increase in knowledge regarding children. Tm at Playcentre Picasso said that before having a child, she disliked children. However, as she came to understand children through the Playcentre adults education and sessions, she realized that "Playing like this makes children happy, and when they're happy, I'm happy. That's the change that has taken place in my own feelings." This demonstrates that her view on children underwent a gradual change. Before studying the education courses, Ko often compared her own child's growth and development with others, but participating in the educational opportunities and daily sessions made her realize that "A child has a pace of his or her own, so now I take the long view. I know my child will learn how to do it sooner or later." Thus, upon looking back, she realized that the burden of child-rearing had become lighter. When her son was 2 years old, Fu was concerned about her son's frequent tantrums. To solve the problem, she was considering temporarily placing her son in a nursery school. Ultimately, though, she decided to participate in a Playcentre, and after 4 years, she now says that at that time, directly interacting with her son at the Playcentre transformed tantrums into an enjoyable activity. Also, as Gc in Eniwa-shi Playcentre says that as she gained more knowledge about children by studying at the Playcentre, she began

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to focus on the question, "What kind of play is best for children?" Tc and Ty report beginning to think about ways of warning children about their behaviour, wondering, "How do you avoid telling a child 'no?'" Also, frequently looking back on the ways they educated and cared for their children and improving upon these became a habit for parents, who say that these tasks had a positive influence upon themselves and their children. Thus, in both countries, the knowledge gained through Playcentre experiences translated into an understanding of children.

What of the differences between the two countries? In Japan, many subjects reported that sharing in the idea of the Playcentre allowed parents to exchange views regarding child-rearing without any awkwardness. In New Zealand, however, Playcentre activities have a history of nearly 70 years, and the facilities have spread widely, numbering approximately 500 throughout the entire country. Partly for these reasons, we may assume that when participants chose to participate, they already understood the idea of a Playcentre. In Japan, however, many participants choose to participate without a deep understanding of Playcentres. As a result, they tended to deepen their understanding of Playcentres while participating in Playcentre sessions and educational workshops. Further, in New Zealand, a very large number of participants stated opinions like, "I have gained confidence as a parent regarding my own abilities and my role at the Playcentre," making it clear that their self-respect in themselves had increased. Of course, multiple Japanese participants also stated that they had "gained confidence." Such cases were particularly numerous at Playcetre Picasso. Perhaps owing partly to the length of time Playcentre Picasso has been operating; Japanese parents had overall a lower sense of self-respecting. Statements by parents regarding a feeling of encumbrance or isolation regarding child-rearing were seen often in Japan, but infrequently in New Zealand. Japanese participants made statements like, "The feeling of isolation that used to go along with child-rearing is gone," "I realized it's okay to just be myself," "I don't escape anymore from face childcare-related challenges and difficulties," and "Now that I've been set free from housework and childcare, I can relax," offering a glimpse of the exhaustion brought about by child-rearing. However, it is clear that participation in the Playcentre and mutual learning activities by parents lightened the burden of child-rearing and led to a feeling of relief. This tendency was also seen amongst parents from New Zealand, but they were not as negative toward child-rearing as were Japanese parents. Interestingly, though, the results showed that participants in the 1960s and 70s

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shared a "feeling of being restricted by child-rearing" with present-day Japanese mothers.

A Comparative Investigation of Network Formation in Regional Communities

Here, I will examine regional communities of participants and the relationships that exist within interpersonal networks. Firstly, there was rich exchange between parent and child participants among informants in all regions, and both parents and children succeeded in gaining friends and acquaintances. Also, few child-rearing difficulties occurred due to ideas shared at Playcentres, with participants making such comments as, "The Playcentre itself is the community," "My own activities contribute to the community," and "We are cooperating to create a community of parents and children." Thus, it was clear that individual participants consciously served as educators of children or as the parties responsible for regional activities when they participated in Playcentres.

Next, I will discuss points on which the opinions of parents in Japan and New Zealand diverged. As indicated by the countrywide survey by Powell et al., nearly half of all participants in New Zealand answered that there was a Playcentre located within 0-2 km of their homes. Also, some Playcentres in New Zealand are located within or adjacent to primary schools, and many parents praised their cooperation with local primary schools. However, as Japan has a very small number of Playcentres — about ten throughout the entire country — cooperation and connections with other local educational institutions were weak.

Relationships enabling mutual child-rearing and housework support outside of Playcentres had been constructed at all Playcentres aside from the one in Eniwa, and many parents offered high praise on this point. L, a participant in New Zealand who decided to have a third child because of access to mutual aid at Playcentres, commented, "The people at this Playcentre are like a family. When there are problems or difficulties, mothers who are Playcentre member bring us dinner, or they might help me pick up or drop off my child. Everybody does that kind of thing." L stated that such experiences helped build community solidarity. Such answers were also seen among Japanese members of the Playcentre Picasso. When Yc was pregnant with her second child, she realized that the child she carried was sick, and was forced to go the hospital. Another member of Playcentre Picasso who learned about Yc's situation looked after the grandmother

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and eldest son who came to the Playcentre, also offering encouragement to Yc through letters and conversations. Ultimately, the second child died soon after birth, but Yc commented while rubbing the stomach in which she carried her third child, "If I didn't have Picasso, I might not be carrying a child right now." She says that aid from other Playcentre members offered her emotional support. Also, M1 learned that her third and fourth children would be twins, and was ordered by a doctor to rest in bed, at which point another member of the Playcentre took charge of picking up and dropping off her eldest daughter from kindergarten. M1 herself felt that her family had successfully overcome a crisis. This cooperative childcare network had arisen naturally in the course of the activities conducted at the Playcentre.

Although a child-rearing assistance network had not yet formed at the Eniwa Playcentre, independent meetings regarding the Playcentre were being conducted. It is clear based on the examples of Playcentre Picasso and other Playcentres in New Zealand that family-related mutual aid networks form on the basis of activities conducted outside the centre, and in Eniwa as well, there is a high likelihood that this will occur. Mj, a supervisor, states that it is important for parents to transition from being recipients of service to service providers, observing that the Playcentre system is possible only owing to cooperation by parents. This repetition of mutual assistance became the origin of the "sense of belonging and spirit of cooperation" spoken of by parents in New Zealand, further developing into an ability to think about the surrounding community and society.

Through Playcentre activities, parents at Picasso felt that their own perspectives "expanded to include not just own children but the whole of society," proving the phenomenon described above. Japan resembled New Zealand in that participants pointed out that Playcentres helped them build emotional ties, or in their words, "sentimental connections" and "deep friendships." Participants from New Zealand rarely mentioned such emotionally intense feelings, perhaps indicating that this problem stemmed from the unique child-rearing environment in Japan and from weak relationships between parents.

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Conclusion and Consideration: What sort of place is a Playcentre?

In previous studies regarding social capital, weak links themselves were seen as playing a "bridge-building" function and as enriching the lives of individuals.[29] However, as Matsuda (2008) observes, the links in child-related networks are

effective when they are appropriately loose and possess both diversity and autonomy.[30] There is a tendency to think that Playcentres, as organizations operated by parents, are child-rearing groups with a high degree of restrictive closeness. In fact, relationships between parents are not as deep as those among kin, but not as shallow as those among acquaintances. One parent said the following. "At the Playcentre, I like the fact that no one pries into anyone else's business. If you don't want to say everything about your own family, nobody minds. But when you want to get your troubles off your chest, you can say everything directly. All the members are kind enough to listen, and sometimes they even cry. Maybe what I like is that there's just the right amount of distance." Members at Picasso call such relationships "loose relationships." As Matsuda (2008) suggests, unforced "middle path child networks" may in fact be necessary in order to reorganize child-rearing networks.

This study has focused upon the research performed by Powell et al. and its observations regarding the importance of parents' access to child-rearing networks, conducting a comparative investigation of the functions and effects of the social capital created through mutual aid and study experiences by parents by examining participants in playcentres in Japan and New Zealand.

In pre-reform New Zealand, owing to the lack of child-rearing networks, mothers assumed responsibility for full-time childcare and housework. Fathers, on the other hand, assumed the role of breadwinners, refraining from participation in domestic tasks such as housework and childcare. In this sense as well, for pre-reform participants, Playcentres served as "windows on society." In other words, mothers struggled between expectations from their husbands, society, and the media that they play the role of "good mothers" on the one hand, and the desire to be freed from childcare and housework on the other. Playcentres, for mothers like these, were suitable venues for being both temporarily released from childcare and housework, and for connecting with the regional society. Further, at that time, it was not customary for married women to pursue studies in addition to their domestic duties, and post-marriage / post-childbirth study experiences not only enriched women's knowledge, but acted as the driving force behind the social movement of the Playcentre.

Post-reform participants in New Zealand did not tend to choose Playcentres as methods by which parents connected to society, but chose Playcentres as the best venue for socializing their children, with the expectation that the human rela-

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tionships at the centre would impart sociality to their children. Further, parents participated in Playcentres as venues for participating in the education of their children and as community activities which were close to home. Also, at a time when the birth rate is declining and the age of the population is increasing, study opportunities at Playcentres gave mothers, members of a generation with little opportunity to interact with children, a chance to learn about children and about parenting, the knowledge and techniques one needs to become a parent. Especially, as participants in rural locations did not possess the educational background of parents in large cities, they were pleased to be offered these free study opportunities, which exerted a significant influence upon individual self-confidence, that is, empowerment of parents.

Many Japanese participants took part in Playcentres because they were searching for a place where they could spend all day together with their children. Among these, some stated that the sense of shared ideas toward child-rearing in the Playcentre was helpful in overcoming child-rearing problems. The Child-rearing Support Centre and Get-Together Project's facilities which are presently spreading throughout every part of Japan are mainly planned and operated by specialized caregivers and staff. Thus, some are concerned that the greater the extent of the childcare provided at these sites, the more parental independence is hindered. Some participants also have misgivings regarding the separation between service providers and service receivers, with some choosing playcentres because they felt parents should also take responsibility for providing services.

Studies of child-related networks in Japan have mainly analyzed the influences of kin, non-kin, the region, and degree of connection upon increases and reductions in childcare-related stress, and few experimental studies have been performed. In other words, very few studies have focused upon parents as educators, that it is parents as social capital. Ōmiya (2006) points out that parents themselves "are the experts on their own children," [31] that it is important for parents to observe the "present lifestyles of their children," and that these tasks maintain the quality of child-rearing. In this sense as well, we may view the cutting-edge activities conducted at New Zealand Playcentres as bastions of the social capital of parents and children. By conducting a comparative investigation of Playcentre participants in both countries, this article has illuminated not only the characteristics of parents who participate in Playcentres in these countries, but the social significance of the Playcentre. In doing so, I have clarified that in

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both countries; resources possessed by parents form social capital which is important to regional communities, and in this sense, the study may prove highly significant in revitalizing regional communities and considering policies to empower parents. In the future, it will be necessary to make concrete policy suggestions to answer to the question of how the knowledge gained in this study may be developed into Japanese family policy.

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19) Kaneko, Isao. 2007. *Kakusa Fuan Jidai No Community Syakaigaku: Social Capital Kara No Syohousen.* Kyoto: Minerva Syobou.

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21) Matsuda, Shigeki. 2008. *Nani Ga Ikuji Wo Sasaeru No Ka*: *Cyuuyou Na Network No Tsuyosa,* Tokyo: Keisou Syobou.

22) Regional Child-rearing Support Centres are public institutions which are mainly operated together with nursery schools, and are core establishments which provide support for child-raising in the region as a whole.

23) This term refers to projects which are operated to allow primarily parents with babies (0-3 years old) to gather freely and converse in an open atmosphere, thus achieving emotional security and grasping the beginnings of solutions to problems.

24) Children's houses are one of the child welfare facilities specified under Article 40 of the Child Welfare Law, aiming to allow children to play safely, promote their health, and enrich their sensibilities.

25) Nakatani, Natsuko. 2008. *Chiki Kosodate Shien To Hahaoya No Empowerment.* Okayama: Daigaku kyouiku Syuppan.

26) Powell et al. Ibid, 1)

27) Nakatani, Natsuko. Ibid, 25) p.22-25.

28) Kadowaki, Atsushi. 2003. Oyato Ko No Syakai-ryoku: Hi-syakaika Jidai No Kosodate To Kyouiku. Tokyo: Ashahi-shinbunsya.

29) Granovetter, M., 1973, "The Strength of Weak Ties," American Journal of Sociology, 78:1360-1380.

30) Matsuda, Shigeki. Ibid, 21) p.161-164.

31) Ōmiya, Isao. 2006. *Hoiku No Shitsu Wo Takameru: 20seiki No Hoikukann, Hoikujyouken, Senmonsei.* Tokyo: Hitonaru Syobou.

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