The transfer, translation and transformation of Froebelian theory and practice

Annie L. Howe and her Glory Kindergarten and Teacher Training School in Kobe, Japan, 1889–1929

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Introduction

This chapter explores how Froebel’s theory was transferred, translated and transformed on implementation by the Froebelian Annie L. Howe (1852–1943). Howe was an American missionary woman and was seconded to Japan by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions of the Congregational Church to establish a Christian kindergarten in Japan. She spent 40 years in this work and devoted herself to disseminating Froebel’s ideas and the conceptualisation of the kindergarten and its pedagogy in Japan. She did so through her Glory Kindergarten and Teacher Training School in Kobe, Japan, as well as her publications, lectures, talks and the organisation of kindergarten associations (Takano, 1973: 1–8). Howe was the first person who translated Froebel’s important works, such as *The Education of Man* (1826) and *Mother-Play and Nursery Songs* (1844) into Japanese. In the empire of Japan, she had to confront various social and political obstacles to keep her Christian kindergarten, due to the highly controlled national policies, anti-Westernisation, anti-Christianity and the centralisation of Japan’s educational system by the Ministry of Education. This situation invokes an historical memory of Froebelian experience. This chapter highlights Froebelian theory and practice and the way in which these involve the interplay of social, political, educational and cultural conditions.

The transfer of Froebelian theory and practice: kindergarten arrives in Japan

In Japan, there are two different types of Froebelian who transferred the ideas of the kindergarten into Japan. First, there were the Japanese Froebelians. They were mostly men who held important posts in the Meiji government or in the Ministry of Education, and had their own views and values regarding kindergarten education (Tsumori et al, 1959). In 1876, Japan’s first
When the concept of the kindergarten first arrived in Japan, modern education had just begun with the Meiji Restoration in 1868. The Meiji government and the Ministry of Education’s initiatives were vigorous, and the development of kindergarten education was an important demonstration of modernisation to the West (Uno, 2009; Tsumori et al, 1959). But, while Froebel’s concept of kindergarten education and its system and curriculum were successfully transferred to Japan, no philosophy supporting this system and curriculum was applied and Froebel’s theory was not translated accurately (Tsumori et al, 1959). Froebel’s Christian ideology had played a significant part in the formation of his educational principles, which was not in line with the national religion of Shintoism and its veneration of the Emperor. Froebel’s Gifts and Occupations were highlighted and used as central activities in kindergarten education (Yoneyama, 2012).

The other group of Froebelians who made contributions to the dissemination of Froebel’s theory and the development of kindergarten education were Christian missionary women from Europe and North America. They arrived in Japan after the Meiji government lifted its ban on Christianity in 1873 to disseminate Christianity in the country (Takamichi, 1996). Although Christian education is not the same as Froebel’s kindergarten education, Froebel’s religious perspective on educational philosophy, in particular, reflected Christian values concerning the education of young children (Sang-Wook Lee et al, 1994). One of these missionary Froebelians was Annie L. Howe. The Christianity-based, American-style translation of Froebel’s theory and practice was transferred into Japan.

The translation of Froebelian theory and practice: Annie L. Howe and her Glory Kindergarten and Teacher Training School

In 1889, the Glory Kindergarten and Teacher Training School were opened in Kobe by Howe and still operate there. They were organised along Froebelian lines from practice developed in the USA and, importantly, were based on Christian worldviews. The curriculum at the Glory Kindergarten embraced knowledge of Froebelian principles and methods regarding the use of Froebel’s pedagogy and Gifts and Occupations, which was largely based on the curriculum and course of study Howe had taken in her training school in Chicago (Takamichi, 1996). The study of the natural sciences and gardening, art, music, physical movements, play and games using Gifts and Occupations were all included in the Glory Kindergarten curriculum in yearly and daily themes. Attention was given to the what, how and why of teaching including knowing about Froebel’s theory and its influence on the practice which Howe took into her Froebelian pedagogy (Takano, 1973).

An understanding of nature was one of the most important elements for her and in her curriculum. Froebel was concerned with showing the interrelationship between animate and inanimate things and the everyday experience of the natural world, so that children could learn to appreciate the wonders of the natural world and understand the interconnectedness of all living things (Froebel, 1886, 2012). Howe also highlighted the beauty of nature and the unity of life. She created a garden in the Glory Kindergarten, believed to be the first garden in a kindergarten in Japan (Asai, 2007). Children planted seeds, watered and cared for the seedlings, observing how, as they developed and unfolded, they sprouted or flowered and grew to maturity. This activity was intended to awaken the senses to what Froebel considered to be the God-given structure underlying all growth – animal, vegetable and mineral – in nature. Howe believed that observing nature, specifically the study of leaves, seeds, silkworms, shells, stones and seasons, was very important for young children (The Kindergarten Union of Japan, 1985b). She tried to transfer
Froebel’s ideas and kindergarten curriculum as authentically as possible to the Glory Kindergarten as she believed that Froebel’s theory and curriculum reflected universal pedagogical truths (Takano, 1973).

The transformation of Froebelian theory and practice in Japan: the education of Japanese children

Just one year after the Glory Kindergarten was established, the waves of imperialism and nationalism created anti-Christian movements as a backlash against Westernisation. The Imperial Rescript on Education was proclaimed by the Ministry of Education in 1890, which supported the development of Japanese imperialism and nationalism. Education dramatically transformed and became top-down in nature and was controlled by the Meiji government (Lincicome, 2009). Additionally, the introduction of Order No. 12 by the Ministry of Education prohibited any religious practice, except Shinto, at educational institutions in Japan. All schools and kindergartens started to celebrate the Emperor’s birthday and embrace Shintoism. The words of the national hymn were memorised while little national flags were being made, which helped children to take a deeper interest in the celebrations on the important days in Japan (Nishida, 2015). There was no exception to this practice at the Glory Kindergarten. While nationalism and state initiatives became strong, Froebelian kindergartens had a comprehensive view of the difficulty of the implementation of Christian-based Froebelian theory and practice for young children in the social and political landscape of the time (The Kindergarten Union of Japan, 1985b). Howe followed the Ministry of Education’s requirements and strived to maintain her kindergarten. She combined Japanese celebrations with Christian religious activities, such as combining the Emperor’s birthday and Thanksgiving Day, and celebrated the blessing of life and the harvest (Nishida, 2015: 290). There seemed to be various issues on which she disagreed with the Ministry of Education policies, especially concerning the education of militarisation. However, her personal standpoint reflects her commitment to dissemination of kindergarten education in Japan. Howe’s understanding was that boys would one day be the Emperor’s citizens of Japan and girls would be the wives and mothers of Japan. While she held Froebelian and Christian views and values, she often considered kindergarten education should be what they needed for Japan and its society (The Kindergarten Union of Japan, 1985c: 81–3).

Figure 8.1 Emperor’s Birthday Celebration at Glory Kindergarten in 1911
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The curriculum prepared by Howe typically sought to reflect Japanese life and culture, allowing children and helping teacher training students to understand Froebel's pedagogy through the experience of their own lives in Japan. This approach could also be witnessed in the publication of Froebel's *Mother-Play and Nursery Songs* in Japanese in 1896. The illustrations accompanying Froebel's *Mother-Play and Nursery Songs* presented daily life and its culture in Japan. Howe's Froebelian theory and practice were embedded in specific a social and cultural context in Japan as Froebel had stressed that education was for the future citizens and nation state.

**Conclusion**

About 140 years have passed since the first kindergarten was established. Going to kindergarten is no longer special for Japanese children and the importance of the early childhood years are acknowledged in Japan. Howe's contribution to the development of kindergarten education and the dissemination of Froebelian theory and practice was paramount as she was, and still is, seen as a pioneer in the diffusion of Froebel's educational and philosophical principles in Japan. Howe's 40 years of effort in Japan were fully rewarded in 1940 when she was awarded the Imperial Decoration of the Blue Ribbon by the Emperor Showa of Japan as recognition of her contribution to early childhood education in Japan (The Kindergarten Union of Japan, 1985). In a letter to her mother dated 24 January 1894, Howe observed of the Glory Kindergarten that, “Froebelism transplanted by way of America to the Far East and flourishing there in its integrity is a marvelous testimony to the soundness of Froebel's Principles and the wisdom of his methods” (Howe, 1894). Howe's Froebelianism and spirit have been deeply rooted and continuously manifested in Japan. As of the year of 2017, 4,872 children have graduated from the Glory Kindergarten and 9,288 students have graduated from the teacher training school.

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