What Do You Want To Communicate and Teach?
The roles of seniors and children as seen through intergenerational exchange activities

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Introduction
Active aging is defined as “the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age” (WHO, 2002). Here, being “active” refers to continued participation in social, economic, cultural, moral, and public affairs, suggesting the possibility of continued contribution to society by seniors and people with disabilities. To promote such active aging, the EU designated 2012 the European Year for Active Aging and Solidarity between Generations, collecting information and assessing examples (ECORYS, 2014).

The Generations@School program is one such attempt. Designed to raise teachers’ awareness to stimulate dialogue between generations and promote intergenerational understanding, this program enables participation by students and community residents. The program was implemented from 2012 through 2013 in the EU, with 450 schools signing up (as schools or individual classes) and approximately 18,800 participants. It generated the following two outcomes (ECORYS, 2014):

1. Verification that seniors and young people could share knowledge and experience through organized initiatives at schools
2. Advancing the concept that active aging and empowerment of young people go hand in hand, without prioritizing policy generation

We ask for the same opinion, particularly on the point of organized initiatives at school, we have studied intergenerational exchange activities for the sharing of knowledge and experience in schools and nursery schools.

Purposes of this study
To improve intergenerational exchange programs through examining what seniors and children want to communicate and teach to each other within the same environment and culture.

Subjects
The subjects are 12 nursery-school students and 20 seniors attending the same combined welfare facility. The seniors have cognitive or physical disabilities that require medical and welfare services.

Methodology
Children and seniors in the same environment were interviewed separately about what they would like to communicate and teach to each other regarding “treasures of nature (plants, animals, etc.)” they found when going outdoors together. A game was then played using field bingo cards prepared based on the interview results.

Findings
(1) From results of interviews
As shown in Table 1, the interviews made clear what children and seniors would like to communicate and teach to each other. The children noted many subjects concerning plants and insects that they had found while playing with the students who conducted the interviews. The interviews showed that they wanted to communicate or teach about the things and places they found, chatty things that the children themselves enjoyed, such as touching shameplants (four examples) and finding insects like grasshoppers and butterflies (four examples). The seniors also noted numerous subjects concerning plants and insects they had found while walking with the students who conducted the interviews. While on this point their results did not differ from those of the children, many of their responses also reflected the seniors’ own experiences, and they were characterized by their own individuality. Also, it was clear that their individual responses reflected consciousness of a desire to teach more to communicate (for example, wanting to teach the children about a papaya tree, to teach them the names of flowers, or to pin white flowers to their clothing).

(2) Utterance analysis
Based on the results of the interviews of children and seniors, the nine students created a field bingo card as shown in Fig. 1 and played a game with the children, seniors, and students all taking part. Part of this activity was recorded on video (about one minute from each of the three examples). Table 2 shows the results of utterance analysis (Tables 2–4) and grouping and labeling of characteristic utterances based on these recordings.

Fig. 1: Field bingo card

The utterances of the seniors included educational guidance such as “Try doing . . .”, “Confirmation of things the children had discovered, questions and praise in response to the children’s” actions, and assertions based on the seniors’ own knowledge. The children’s utterances were characterized by surprise upon discovering insects and flowers, demands about things they wanted to do, and verbalization of their own actions. Also apparent were words of agreement and communication with regard to the words of the seniors and students.

(3) Conclusions
Although the utterance analysis involves the issues of the small number of only three cases used and the fact that recordings were short at only about one minute per case, it would seem to have been able to identify one type of direction for securing opportunities for interaction. The suggestions from the interviews and utterance analysis are listed below.

Children tried to communicate to seniors their wonder and joy at the treasures (bugs, flowers, grasses, etc.) they found in the environment, while seniors tried to teach about more and uses of treasures (flowering plants etc.) found in the environment and about intention to nature. These findings seem to have demonstrated the mutual roles of children communicating their feelings to seniors and seniors teaching experiences.

Topics
In many cases it was difficult for seniors with cognitive disabilities to understand questions or speak smoothly, and facilitators were essential in intergenerational exchange. While in this study childcare training students played that role, inadequacies were apparent on some points. A topic in implementing intergenerational programs in the future will be training of human resources with the ability to understand both children and seniors simultaneously.