

The Educational Meaning in “The Mother Songs”

—The expanding and deepening process of “the feeling of unity”—

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to explore the expanding and deepening process of “the feeling of unity”⁽¹⁾ through picking out some songs in “The Mother Songs” written by Friedrich Froebel.

“The Mother Songs” was written by Froebel in 1884. He was a German educational philosopher and practitioner, and a pioneer of early childhood education. He established the first kindergarten at Keilhau in Germany in 1840. But his kindergarten system was not accepted by the Prussian government of his time. After his death, his pupils expanded his thoughts and practices enthusiastically all over the world.⁽²⁾

There are two books considered his masterpieces. One is “Education of Man” in 1826 and the other is “The Mother Songs” in 1844. “The Mother Songs” is an educational family book. It was written for a mother and a child and it was a work of art which united beautiful drawings, verses and songs. There are 49 stories with songs and games in this book. As usual, it was said that this book had the aim to promote physical, social and emotional development of a child through games using the senses, fingers, limbs and body of a mother and a child.

But focusing on Froebel’s educational ultimate aim — his background “Panentheism” — it was considered important for the children to realize a unity with God. Froebel intended to show the process of religious and moral study in “The Mother Songs”, which starts immediately from birth. In addition, he expected a mother’s inner life to develop through playing the songs and games in this book with her child.

Thus, I will explore the expanding and deepening process of the feeling of unity focusing on the actuality of inner life meaning on his metaphysical view of the world.

2. Froebel's educational theory based on Panentheism

Widely known, his educational theory is based on Panentheism. According to Froebel, all creatures of this world are God's creation. All minerals, plants, animals and human beings carry the essence of God within themselves. The essence of God manifests in the natural laws which are in hiding in each creature's inner life. All creatures should endeavor to make this essence of God visible to the world. Froebel said that it is a mission given from God. Flowers come out in spring, animals' offspring grow up, and the wind is blowing, all of which are natural phenomenon in this world and are each an expression of inner life given from God.

At this moment, minerals, plants and animals are living without awareness of God. But, human beings can realize the essence of God and feel a relationship with all creatures through "intuition"⁽³⁾. Intuition is an ability found not only in a child but also in an adult to feel a unity of the entirety life rising from God's creation. So Froebel set up several opportunities for realizing God's creation through "intuition". For example, he had the idea of educational materials called "Gift and Occupations". They are a series of block play including balls and some working materials such as boards, sticks, peas, folding paper, rings and paper ribbon.

According to his metaphysical view of the world, education is a means to help human development by following natural laws in themselves and to give children a chance to feel a sense of unity with all creatures. His ultimate educational goal is not only physical and social development but also realizing unity with God. To achieve his goal, he designed the series of Gift and Occupations, recommended gardening and walking around in the natural environment, and held play festivals with games and dance. Furthermore, he wrote "The Mother Songs" which had one aim of giving the reader the chance to feel and realize a sense of

unity with all creatures.

3. Comparing previous studies with my study of “The Mother Songs”

There are about three approaches to research on “The Mothers Songs”. The first approach is considering his philosophical educational thoughts. E. Spranger placed Froebel as a naturalistic and mystic philosopher in the history of educational thought as a whole through writing Froebel’s life vividly. He explained Froebel’s gift from the view point of his philosophy, especially mineralogy. Bollnow who was an educational philosopher influenced by Spranger who understood Froebel’s theory as a symbol world based on Romanticism.

He tried to describe some songs and games in “The Mothers Songs” symbolically. H. Heiland who was descended from Bollnow developed Bollnow’s understanding of Froebel. In Japan, Masako Shoji introduced Froebel’s thought as a philosopher influenced from Romanticism. Nobuyuki Kishi explained Froebel’s theory from the view point of educational philosophy.

The second approach is exploring the process of physical, social and emotional development of children.

The third is clarifying “The Mothers Songs” from the view point of musical education. It is analyzed based on the history and the composition in terms of melody, scale, rhythm, songs and ethnic roots.

In contrast with the previous studies, I will describe the expanding and deepening process of children’s inner life as a process which gradually lead to a unity with God. It is connected to religious and moral study in early years.

With this in mind, I will adopt the hermeneutic and pedagogical anthropological approach based on O.F. Bollnow. This approach has an insight into the mentality of human beings with tenderheartedness. He developed philosophical anthropology, striving to examine the whole “totality of life” in human existence. By using the hermeneutic and pedagogical anthropological approach, it will bridge the gap between his metaphysical thoughts on “the Unity of Life” and his practices.

4. The expanding and deepening process of the feeling of unity

(1) The interaction between mother and baby as the first model for the feeling unity

—“Bump! See how my Baby’s Falling!”—

This is the game of lifting up and falling back which is carried out between mother and baby. A mother lifts her baby up gently and then lets her baby fall back down. Again, a mother lifts her baby up and then fall back down. Falling-Lifting, Falling-Lifting is repeated again and again. The baby enjoys this game. The aim of this game is to strengthen the baby’s body. But Froebel pointed out that this game has a much higher aim. A baby falling back down feels worried, because the mother’s face is moving further away. But when he is lifted back up and meets the mother smiling again, he feels safe. Meeting with the mother again makes him very happy. By repeating this game, the attachment between mother and baby develops.

Froebel said that glad “love” lifts the baby up. Of course, this means the mother’s love. At the same time, according to Panentheism, behind the mother’s love, is God’s love, in hiding. The mother and God’s love lift the baby up. Consequently, a baby enjoying this game can feel happiness which is connected to God directly. This interaction between mother and



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baby is the first model for this feeling of unity.

(2) Feeling the unity between father, brother and sister, and child

— “The Flower Basket” —

Based on the relationship between mother and baby, the feeling of unity spreads to the other members of family, for example the father, brothers and sisters. This fact is showed in the song called “The Flower Basket”. A mother and her children cut flowers and make the flower basket together with much enthusiasm. And their father is likely to be drawing picture for his dear children in the summer-house on the hill in the garden.

Why are the children so busy gathering flowers to fill this basket? Why is their mother cutting the beautiful lilies? It must be their dear father's birthday and the flower basket is father's birthday present. These flowers are not any flowers. They are grown with the utmost care. So the mother and her children will give the flower basket with all their heart and love to their father.

At the same time, the father drawing a picture is contented. The air is so mild, the sky is so blue, the birds are singing and twittering so merrily, the field is so gay with flowers and so sparkling with dew. Even the distant old tower in the woods looks as if it was trying to say “Good morning” and “Happy birthday”. All these things help to make the father happy. He thanks God who gave us life. He says to his daughters that

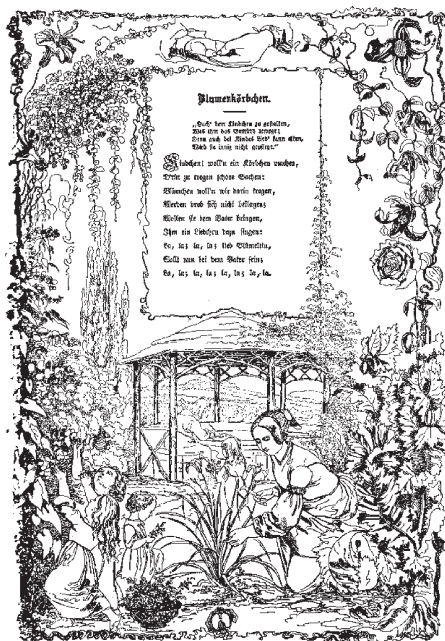


Fig. 2. “The Flower Basket”

God gives life to all and make us so happy today. Let's thank him together.

Thus, this song suggests that the initial awakening of a feeling of unity between mother and baby will be expanded to other familiar people in the baby's life such as the father, brother and sisters, and the local wildlife thanks to the thoughtfulness of their mother and father. The inner meaning of this song is that parents strive to instill a sense of feeling the unity in the child.

Froebel showed the importance for parents to encourage the child from an early age to notice this connectedness in daily life.

(3) Feeling the unity between grandmother, grandfather and child beyond a generation

— “Grandmother and Mother Kind and Dear” —

The title “Grandmother and mother kind dear” shows that the feeling of unity with family expands to grandparents beyond a generation and all natural creatures of this world. This song has the aim of finger exercise. Froebel compares the whole family members to the fingers. For example, he said that “Das ist der Grosspapa. Das ist die Grossmama. Das ist der Vater. Das ist die Mutter. Das ist kleine Kindle. Seht die ganz Familes da.”

At the centre of this picture, there is a family, father, mother, brother, sister, and baby in a house as a whole. Froebel said that a whole consists of some



Fig. 3. “Grandmother and Mother Kind and Dear”

parts and each part has its own role. Each part is responsible for the whole. For example, the father is working, the mother is knitting, the brother is studying, the sister is taking care of a baby and so on. And surrounding the family, there are several kinds of other creatures as complete family units: an insect family, a horse family, a rabbit family, a fish family, a waterfowl family, and a bird family.

The inner meaning of this song is realizing the circle of the family. It is the relationship between Grandfather, Grandmother, Father, Mother and Child. And children are able to realize the relationship to lives that are not only human but also the lives of all creatures in this world. Through enjoying this finger play, children can feel a member of the Whole which is sharing lives from God.

Thus, the feeling of unity starts between mother and baby, and gradually expands to encompass the father, siblings, and grandparents. Moreover, it spreads not only to other human beings but also to all natural creatures in this world.

(4) Changing stance of a child from receiving help to giving care

— “The Little Gardener” —

For Froebel, while the feeling of unity with all living creatures gradually expands, children at the same time gradually deepen their understanding of sharing life from God.

It means that children can realize the essence of God in their own inner life. In other words, children’s self-identity is strengthening. The title “The Little Gardener” shows that a child changes stance from receiving help to giving care.

In a centre of this picture, there is a child who is watering the seeds in the garden. On both sides, there are lilies, growing higher and higher and beautiful flowers are blooming. There is an old man and a child talking about plants. At the top of the picture, the figures of hands represent the watering of the seeds. The left hand is in the shape of Watering and the right hand is a seed and an opened flower. Children enjoy to pretend watering the seeds. The seeds develop into a blooming flower.

Through taking care of plants, a child can get several kinds of information, for example, some plants like a sunny place and some plants like to grow in the shade. In addition, a child learns the process of the plant's life-cycle from seed to flower. But the most important reason why I choose this scene is because the picture shows the changing stance of the child from receiving care to giving care.

The young child has been under the care of the mother and family. But in this picture, the young child is standing giving care to the plants. Froebel said that “the child cares for the plants. In return, the plants repay by blossoming and giving off a good aroma. These are sweet rewards from plants”. This is an interaction of life between the child and plants; a child growing up from the receiving help to giving help. It means that a child who once enjoyed a feeling of unity previously unconsciously, can now consciously feel the unity.



Fig. 4. “The Little Gardener”

(5) Collectedness toward inner life with clasping hands on heart
— “Happy Brothers and Sisters” —

In the song “Happy Brothers and Sisters”, there are five children sleeping on a sofa with a spiritual peace and a mother watching over her children. In addition, the mother and one child are clasping their hands as if praying. Froebel comments that clasping hands reflects a concentration on one's inner life. And it is a symbol of praying to God.

The big curtain behind the children symbolizes the protection from

God. The mother realizes this fact by lowering her head and clasping her hands, thankful to God for her happy family. She reflects on herself and her inner soul. Therefore, the praying mother probably is giving thanks for having a happy and peaceful time with her children. At that moment, she realizes God. At the same time, the children have peace of mind surrounded by their mother's love. Moreover, they are protected by the existence which transcends beyond mother and her child. Thanks to God's guidance, the mother's gentle and modest manners will further enlighten her children about the unity between mother and child, and the connection with God.

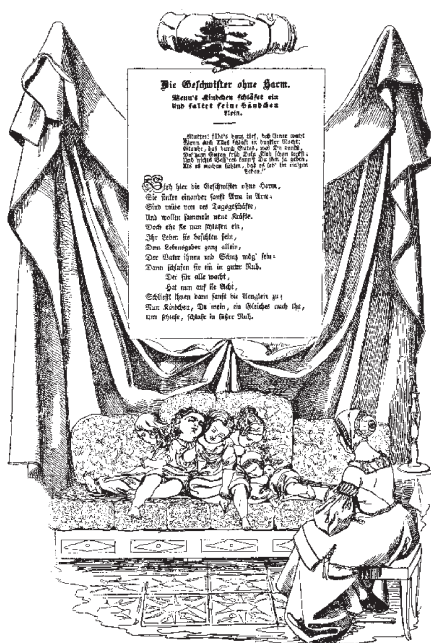


Fig. 5. "Happy Brothers and Sisters"

The sense of enlightenment of her children will be cultivated through her gentle and modest manners with thanks for something beyond herself. Froebel shows that there is a chance to act upon an intuition with the interaction between a mother and a child in daily life.

(6) Awareness of a great natural force through a terrible experience — "The Children on the Tower" —

The title "The Children on the Tower" shows the connection to an awareness of a great natural force through a terrible experience. When people get through a crisis and are saved, they feel relieved, happy, modest, trusting and thankful. And they feel awe for the great natural forces beyond their control.

The story of this picture is the following. There are two grand-

mothers visiting a church and children going upstairs to the top of a tower. Suddenly, the children fall down into a deep hole. The two grandmothers are nearly crushed by the tower too. But in the end, all of them are rescued safely. The group in the lower left-hand picture shows two grandmothers greeting each other. The lower right-hand picture shows the children chatting together about the flower basket, the bird's nest, the egg, the pigeon house, the ball. The grandmothers sitting quietly on a balcony rejoice in the happy play of the children. In the third picture the two grandmothers are going to church, and children are climbing or preparing to climb the tower. The forth picture shows the fallen tower, while from the church the grandmothers and all the little children emerge unharmed and grateful.

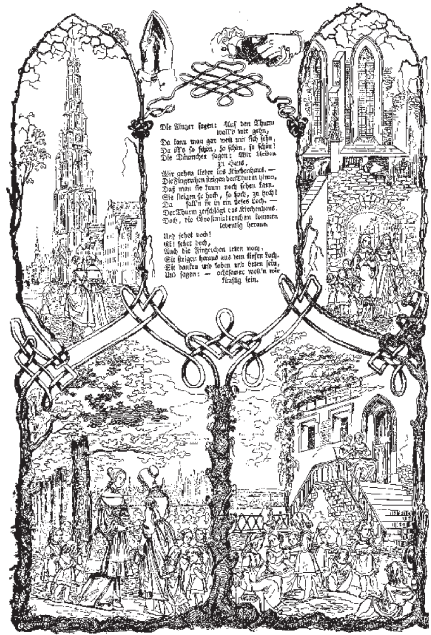


Fig. 6. "The Children on the Tower"

It is a terrible experience for children to fall down into a deep hole. When people get through a crisis, they feel a sense of relief, happiness, modesty, trust, thanks, and they feel awe for great natural forces beyond themselves. The same is true for children and the grandmothers praying. At that time children are no longer conscious just of their inner life, but also of natural forces.

It means that children being unaware of God were reborn as a living person now conscious of a great natural forces. Through the arrangement not only cheerful experiences but also terrible ones, Froebel allows people to feel invisible great natural forces and their connection to them.

(7) A sense of conscience

— “The Cuckoo” —

The title “The Cuckoo” shows that the feeling of unity deepens in the inner life of the child and it connects a sense of conscience.

“The Cuckoo” is a Hide and Seek play in which the mother and the child call out “Cuckoo” to each other. It is very simple and popular play for children. But Froebel pointed out that its aim is not only to allow discovery of each other’s whereabouts but it is the process of developing a response with oneself in one’s inner life.

In Hide and Seek, Cuckoo, the calling of the bird, represents the call to tell somebody where you are. When a child is far away from his mother and cannot see her who he loves very much and who he completely trusts, he starts to worry. Through calling Cuckoo to each other, the mother and the child realize the existence of each other, and feel relieved. They enjoy calling out to each other.

The child will eventually fly the nest. But Froebel said that the mother’s calling will become the dictate of his conscience. Thus the child will be able to judge right from wrong, and make sure of the fact based on a deep relation with his mother in his inner life. The voice of his mother’s calling in Hide and Seek play will gradually change to become his own voice, which leads to an awareness of his self-conscience. For Froebel based on Panentheism, finally, it continues the calling from God. Froebel pointed out the important meaning that such as a simple play



Fig. 7. “The Cuckoo”

has with symbolic meaning connects to an intuition of God.

(8) Feeling of harmony with all lives and a unity with God

— “The Church Door and Window” —

Lastly, the picture titled “The Church Door and Window” introduces the meaning of the church. The lower side picture shows an outside of the church which is seen from door. There are grand majestic doors in front of the church. A lot of people are gathering and entering the church. At the center of this picture, two children enter the church. The upper side picture shows the inside of the church which is viewed from the window. People sit down on the chairs and the minister stands and prays. In the right hand picture, there is an organ. The whole page is covered with a church and two big bells and two children ringing them on either side.



Fig. 8. “The Church Door and Window”

Froebel said that the church is the place people together in assembly, thoughtfully, taking counsel with each other and singing. Children learn the meaning of stirring in their hearts when they go to church. Through songs, praying, the sound of an organ, and the ringing of a bell in the church, Froebel shows that people feel Oneness and Harmony with Life-Unity — the foundation and source of God. As a result, he suggest to children that “when you are older, we’ll go to church hand in hand.” Froebel arranges this picture at the end of the series to make people feel the reality of God most vividly and intensively.

5. Conclusion

Through picking out some songs in the book “The Mother Songs”, I have explained the expanding and deepening process of “the feeling of unity”. The first model for “the feeling of unity” is the interaction between a mother and a baby. “Bump! see how my Baby’s Falling!” showed this. According to the expansion of the child’s life with his/her development, the interaction between a mother and a baby expands to include the father, brothers and sisters, and grandparents as a whole family. It is connected to the feeling of harmony with all creatures in this world and a unity with God beyond a generation. “The Flower Basket” and “Grandmother and Mother Kind and Dear” showed this.

While “the feeling of unity” expands, it deepens in the inner life of the child. When a child nurtures the plants, he/she has the opportunity to change the stance from receiving help to giving the care through the responding of life between child and plants. “The Little Gardener” showed this. We can find that “the feeling of unity” is connected to a prayer for the Absolute who is beyond human beings and watching over a mother and her children in “Happy Brothers and Sisters”

In addition, “The Children on the Tower” showed that the terrible experience let the children feel the natural power beyond human beings. And then, Froebel pointed out that there is a chance to grow up a sense of conscience in a simple child’s play like hide and seek.

Finally, there is an opportunity for a child to feel the harmony with all lives and a unity with God in the church in “The Church Door and Window”.

Froebel arranged the songs to show the expanding and deepening process of “the feeling of unity” in “The Mother Songs”. And he let a mother and a child realize the relationship with all creatures in this world.

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Notes

- (1) “The feeling of unity” is translated English into German language “Lebenseinigung”. “Lebenseinigung” is very important Froebel’s key concept for understand his educational thought. It signified not the static state but dynamic movement because of this word is the progressive form in German. In view of the sense of this word feeling, I tried to describe the reality of “The feeling of unity” which has the expanding and deepening development that Froebel would like to tell us with his all heart.
- (2) Baroness Bertha von Marenholtz-Bülow and Henriette Schrader-Breyman are famous persons for the transmission to expand Froebel’s theory and practice to Europe and USA.
- (3) “Ahnung” is the German language by Froebel. Ahnung can put “intuition” into English. He said a baby can feel God by intuition. He believed that even a baby, human beings have an ability of realizing the essence of all things in the universe sharing lives from God vividly as a whole by intuition. He called it “Ahnung”. Based on Froebel’s theory, human beings can only continue to endeavour for the unity with God through repeating “the feeling of unity” consciously. He considered that its ability is not settled at the first level of the development of the recognition but the foundation of the recognition of all things. So intuition by Froebel is his original key-concept which has an inner connection with the feeling of unity of his ultimate aim.
- (4) E.Spranger, “Aus Friedrich Fröbel Gedankenwelt”, 1953
- (5) O.F.Bollnow, “Die Pädagogik der deutschen Romantik“, 1952
- (6) H, Heiland, “Friedrich Fröbel in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten, Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH“, 1982
- (7) Masako Shoji “Froebel’s educational theory”1944, “The research of Froebel” 1953.
- (8) Nobuyuki Kishi, “Philosophical thought in The Mothers Songs”, “Research on Education of Man”, No.2, Japan Society for the Study of Pestalozzi and Froebel, 1989. p.45-61.
- (9) Mituyo Nishigaki, “The implication of Educational Concept in Fr. Froebels’ “Mutter-und Koselieder” for Today”, “Research on Education of Man”, No.1, Japan Society for the Study of Pestalozzi and Froebel, 1986. p. 51-66.
- (10) Kinuko Kodama “Development of a Child’s Personal Relationship in Froebel’s Mother Play“, 1991
- (11) Christiane Konrad, Die “Mutter-und Koselieder“. Untersuchungen zur Entstehungs-und Wirkungsgeschichte“, 2006.

Key words Froebel's theory and practice, “ The Mother Songs ”, the feeling of unity