

Tatsuo Yamamura / Hanns Stekel

The Happiness in Child-Raising

**A Japanese-Austrian Project
and Family Culture in Japan**

Dr. Hanns Stekel

Preface

This book is first and foremost a text written by Tatsuo Yamamura. For the English edition, we have added a description of a project developed by the Johann Sebastian Bach Music School in Vienna in cooperation with the author.¹

During the course of this project, there were numerous opportunities for interaction, discussion, and deep thought which made it possible for us to gain a better understanding of the Japanese approach to teaching music and the overall education of children. Along the way, a number of open questions arose for which there was a strong desire to have answers.

One day, when the project was in a serious crisis due to the catastrophe in Fukushima, Tatsuo Yamamura presented this text, which he saw as an introduction to and an inspiration for teaching and learning,² a book intended to be given as a handbook to the parents of kindergarten and school children. We had previously attended lectures given by the author to parents in Japan, and thus were better able to understand what he hoped to achieve with this text.

The fact that a book about the day-to-day teaching of music in Japan has now become available to us in translation is remarkable enough. But, in addition, the author is not only a teacher of music, but also an expert in the field of education in general and a man with a great deal of experience. Both of these traits are perceptible in the lectures and make the book especially valuable for those of us who are not Japanese.

1 The Johann Sebastian Bach Music School in Vienna was founded in 2000 under the aegis of the Diakonie of the Austrian Lutheran Church. With almost 2000 students, it is one of the largest private music schools in Vienna. International exchange projects constitute a core component of the school's profile, alongside music programs carried out in cooperation with schools in the Lutheran school system, the promotion of music as a lifelong pursuit, and the preparation for university studies.

2 Tatsuo Yamamura.

The framework of this project continues to have an important influence because our music school learned a great deal during the years of its operation.

A primary insight is that international exchange programs in education should never operate simply on a superficial level; cultural exchange is not a marginal note, but rather it lies at the very heart of such undertakings. There is much to be gained from the sharing of knowledge and experience about how human beings learn and can be taught.

Cultural exchange only works when there is a true dialogue and when the strengths and unique characteristics not only of the other culture but also of one's own can be grasped.

This book is a landmark and also a guide for this and future projects.

Dr. Hanns Stekel

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Tatsuo Yamamura

Overview for rising the initial issue on 50 Clues for Happiness

At some points, people would have been critics against education. And these critical words, against an educational revolution or a school revolution, could have been towards the abilities of teachers and the educational system itself by forcing responsibilities. They have yet to touch the things intentionally, despite many other important factors having a huge influence on children's learning. These are:

- 1) How much children have learnt from their parents.
- 2) If parents rouse eagerness for children to learn.
- 3) How often children have experiences towards self-learning at home.
- 4) How to face intercultural understanding at home.

These are the basic importance elements that must be taught at home with the interactions within family in order for children to obtain a certain result in their growth. There is a limitation where schools, kindergartens, or nursery schools have made enormous effort putting on behalf of their parents. To lead children to success or to have fostered children who have succeeded in their life, the imperative duty at home has to be mentioned without any hesitations. However, it is quite unfortunate that the people who are working in the educational field, such as teachers and also politicians, presumably have not mentioned anything about it.

The 50 clues written in the main content of this book are included to introduce one scholar's idea touched upon Japanese home education translated into English. The original is published in Japan under the title, "*Child-care theory for the age of convenience - Family culture and the cycle of happiness.*"

As the central interest, the author has emphasised the importance of developing children's imagination in this book. Also, the author has understood an effect of the power of music in order to develop children's imagination by experience through the project that is touched upon later.

It is hoped that this book gives a clue to enrich the future of child rearing under a mutual culture by introducing the circumstances and the idea of Japanese home education as cultural exchange through the music that has given a mutual enrichment.

Introduction: Who is Responsible for Raising Children? Is it the parents or Society?

A while ago, an overwhelming majority would have said that the parents were responsible for raising children. In recent years, however, there have been increasing calls to hold society responsible for raising children, despite the fact that much better environments and resources are now available to parents for childcare than they were decades ago.

Granted, children grow up to form the core of that very society; therefore, calling the raising of children a social investment may, at first, sound logical. But I believe that the debate should focus on the family, the very bedrock on which people develop. Moreover, I think that child raising is not just about nice sounding catchphrases like “no scolding” or “not getting angry.” Parents should make the most of all five senses and their sensibilities when raising their children. In that sense, I am confident of one thing: child raising, or being involved in any way with children for that matter, is the establishment of a lifestyle and culture of learning in the home. A happy side effect is that it leads to self-improvement and growth on the part of parents and other grown-ups.

Today’s younger generations appear to be more self-centred than in previous ages. “Finding yourself” seems to be all the rage, and many youngsters spare no effort if it means that they can better themselves. I heartily recommend child raising and other child-related activities as an ideal way for today’s self-interested youth to realise themselves. Parents enjoy learning from their children, who, in turn, have fun and learn as they watch their parents take pleasure in parenting; it is an endless loop of happiness where both parents and children have a positive influence on each other. Why else would humankind have kept up this process of child raising over millions of years?

We live in an age of information overload. Technological advances may have led to greater convenience, but the all-important work of child raising

is in danger of being swallowed up by the wave of convenience. On the other hand, we are challenged by unprecedented events like natural disasters where we must sharpen our imagination and instincts to deal with these situations. In a sense, we must reconcile these two contrasting aspects of childcare when raising our children, but I think that the required fortitude will be nurtured within that loop of happiness.

The important thing is that parents learn from their experience, enjoy themselves, and evolve.

This book is based on the contents of a radio program, *Mako-talk!*, which was broadcast on FM Tochigi Radio Berry between March and December 2012, with some additions and editing. I served as an advisor on that program. The book gives examples of parents who, by merely changing their perspective, developed new insights and made discoveries that solved their child raising issues. I have also added comments based on my experience as a kindergarten principal and school counsellor. If you are a parent, you will have already discovered the joys of raising children long before you ever picked up this book. If you haven't, the book will hopefully help you make that precious discovery. If you are not yet a parent but may become one in the future, it will surely enhance your anticipation towards the experience of raising your children.

These days, many people avoid having, raising, and getting involved with children for all sorts of reasons, such as having no time, it being too much trouble, and it being too expensive. However, I can promise you that children will repay all investments of time and cost made by their parents and society many times over.

001: Growing Children Do as Their Parents Do, Not as They Say

Growing children do as their parents do, not as they say. Children are constantly watching their parents so no matter how much children are told to take their hands out of their pockets and stand up straight, they will continue to slouch around with their hands in their pockets if they see their parents doing the same.

No matter how much you coax them, children will never simply do as their parents tell them. However, they will always be influenced by what

they see their parents doing; this is especially concerning because they see everything.

But why does this happen?

Children spend their first years under the close protection of their parents, during which time a strong bond is forged. However, at around two years of age, children begin to develop a sense of self and often want to do the opposite of what mum and dad say.

When children say that they don't want to, it is a sign that they are developing their own will that is separate from that of their parents. It is this independent will that stops children from simply doing whatever their parents say.

That said, children base the development of their cognitive selves on their parents, the people who are closest to them. For that reason, children constantly watch what their parents do, and parents' behaviour inevitably infiltrates that of their children. Therefore, parents would do well to understand how children develop their sense of self.

Recently, my son, now a university student, visited my kindergarten. "Don't slouch, boy!" I admonished him. Imagine my shock when one of my staff said, "He walks just like his father."

Could it be that our bodies memorise the behaviour of our parents as we observe them from childhood? This is quite possible and can happen more than we imagine.

In light of that incident, I now know that I need to keep an eye on my son's actions and attitude because they are a reflection of mine. Use your child's bad behaviour as a mirror by which to correct your own.

In that sense, your behaviour and movements as parents are a vital component of how you raise your children.

I believe that the fundamentals of good behaviour should be instilled physically through the insistence of basic manners at home, such as saying please and thank you. The primary means of achieving this is for parents to lead by example; it is much more effective for your children to see you saying please and thank you on a day-to-day basis than for you to nag them into doing so.

You may not realise it, but your children are constantly watching you.

002: Family Culture is More Useful Than “How to Raise Your Child” Books

Children do not come with manuals to explain to parents how to raise them. Certainly, there are many books on the market purporting to tell readers how to raise or discipline their children; however, there are no guarantees or data to say that following the advice in the book will ensure that you can raise your kids successfully. If raising children was a matter of following a manual, we'd all raise perfect children, but half the fun of the human experience lies in those areas where things don't go according to plan. In the end, our parents are our textbooks: If you absolutely must have a child raising manual, think about how your parents interacted with you.

Each child and each parent is unique, and each home has its own circumstances. As a result, there can't be a one-size-fits-all manual, and it is fine for each household to have its own standards and methods for disciplining children. The important thing is for each family to set its rules and enforce strict discipline when they are broken. After all, we all have to live within society's rules when we grow up.

There is one vital prerequisite for strict discipline: There must be an emotional attachment between the child and his or her parents. The progression from attachment into trust happens until the child reaches approximately three years of age; once that bond is in place, even scolding that may seem quite severe to an independent observer is not a problem between the parent and child in question because a foundation based on love has been established.

For that reason, I think it is important to hug your children or rub their backs after telling them off. Doing so cancels out the psychological distance that opens up between parent and child through the scolding. This repetition of distancing and closeness helps both the child and the parents to learn. Ultimately, raising a child is a process of growth for both parties.

Raising children is a trying business, but it can also be fun if you change your perspective. For instance, let's look at the parents who encourage their children to attend English lessons, karate school, or whatever because they want their kids to develop certain skills. That desire is based on the parents' own experiences and aspirations, rather than those of the children, so when the children inevitably lose interest and want to quit, the parents worry

that the kids will fail to learn about the importance of perseverance and finishing what you started. I know this because I was one of those parents.

But that concern disappeared as soon as I actually tried learning the same lessons as my kids. Learning is challenging and also great fun. Maybe some of that enthusiasm rubs off on the children when they see their parents enjoying themselves. Seeing you set goals and work towards achieving them is, in itself, a learning experience for your children that gradually contributes to your own family culture, your original child raising manual.

003: Children Give a Lifetime's Worth of Love in Their First Three Years

“Children give a lifetime’s dues in their first three years.”

What a nice phrase. It comes from the book *Ano-ne, Daijobu, Daijobu* (“Hey, It’s Alright, It’s Alright”) by Fusae Yoshimaru (published by Chichi).

In the first three years of their lives, children are like little angels constantly hanging around their parents. This continual proximity awakens mothers and fathers to their role as parents and rewards them with the joys of loving and the inimitable wonders of a baby’s laugh and smile. These memories can be treasured for the rest of your life, and that is why Yoshimaru said that children pay their parents a lifetime’s worth of love” in their first three years.

Yet, as their children get older, parents tend to forget the lifetime of joy they received within those initial three years. Their aspirations for their children grow and begin to outweigh the memories of times past – mine certainly did. In fact, by the time their children reach university age, parents’ perspectives have often reversed to the point where they think that their children are inconsiderate and uncaring.

Because of that reversal of perspective, some parents are put out to be told that children have already “paid their dues” with that lifetime’s worth of joy in the first three years. It is certainly food for thought for parents of grown children.

Perhaps some parents will say that they missed out on those joys because their children were in day care all day. As a result, some mothers are indeed hesitant to leave their children in day care for long stretches. However,

surely even children who attend kindergarten or nursery school “pay their dues” by being active and well behaved while they are away from home.

Meanwhile, children “paying their dues” is significant in another way. Having children enables parents to grow as people, and children are “paying their dues” simply by being children. Indeed, parents begin learning how to be parents in those first years. “Child raising is parent raising,” as it were. Parents and their children grow up together, and therein lies the true meaning of the claim that “children give parents a lifetime’s worth of joy in their first three years.”

004: Read Picture Books for Your Own Enjoyment

One question I am often asked is: “What kind of picture books should I read to my child?”

Parents should, in principle, read books for their own enjoyment rather than just for the benefit of their children. In fact, the same goes for everything, not just picture books. If you read a book and don’t enjoy it, chances are your children won’t enjoy it when you read it to them. There may be times when children don’t seem to be having much fun when you read them a book and they may even appear to be bored; however, it doesn’t matter as long as you are moved when reading it. I believe that the sight of parents having fun is one of the building blocks of a family’s culture.

What, then, should you be aware of when reading books to your children?

In my view, you should focus on reading *with* your children rather than *to* them. There is no need to put on voices for the different characters; leave that to professional narrators. Simply read the books aloud using your normal voice, just like you would read a newspaper. If you normally speak in a regional dialect, read the book in your normal, everyday accent. It’s not the way you read that matters; the real significance lies in your children hearing your voice.

When a parent reads, their children imagine the story world unfolding in their minds as they listen, while the parents imagine what is going on in the children’s minds. This process of sensing and imagining what the other is doing nurtures the bond between parents and children.

It is also important that you do not try to explain the picture books too much.

Take, for example, the Grimm Brothers' tale of *The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids*. In kindergarten, we had children make clay figures to depict scenes from the story. One time, a boy making the wolf declared that the wolf would smile. The other children rejected the idea. "Why would a wolf smile?" they demanded, "Wolves are supposed to be scary!"

When the teacher asked why he wanted to make a smiley wolf, the child replied, "He's happy, obviously, because he's going to eat the goats!"

His bemusement at the others' reaction stemmed from his lack of pre-conceptions: It turns out that he had never heard *The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids* before the teacher read it to the class. On the other hand, those children whose parents had read them the story at home insisted that the wolf was scary. Their image of the wolf was probably planted in their minds by their parents as they read the story.

It is fine for children to create mental pictures on their own as they listen to stories; the problem comes when parents plant pre-conceived images in their children's minds and foist their values onto the children. Such excessive parenting hinders the development of children's sense of self. Parents should not tell children that the wolf in the story is scary; the kids should develop and feel this for themselves.

You do not have to ask questions as you read them stories (i.e. "What do you think about this story?" or "What do you imagine the main character is thinking?"). That can wait until children start elementary school. Until then, parents should read picture books with their children purely for fun. By reading together, a priceless bond develops between parents and children that can only be created at that particular time of life. You don't want to miss out on it because of some misguided effort at development.

005: "He/She's Got to Think for Himself/Herself" Is Not Good for Your Kids

When children run into problems or are forced to make choices, many parents want the children to think for themselves; their first instinct is to foist the problem onto the children and say, "Sort it out for yourself."

Obviously, empowering children to think and choose for themselves is an important part of growing up; however, children are immature and inexperienced. Even when they do try to think for themselves, they will struggle to arrive at a solution unless their parents ultimately show them the end-point.

In this case, the “end-point” refers to the point at which the child can reasonably reach an acceptable solution to the issue at hand. The important thing here is that the child learns how to come to terms with a given situation.

That sounds complicated, but it’s just a fancy way of saying “compromise.” In life, it is important for us to develop a sense for what is a reasonable line and to say, “Oh well, I guess this will have to do.” There are times when we put our views across even when we know that we have to yield some ground or that a solution can never be reached. In that sense, I think “Can’t be helped” and “There’s nothing else for it” are good phrases, and it is your job to teach them to your children.

The specific point of compromise will depend on the situation and even the individual family. But if parents have clearly defined principles, the judgment about where and when to compromise will not waver. Therefore, when your children come to you for advice, I hope you listen with sincerity and advise them based on consistent principles, such as that we must not cause trouble for others, that your suggested course of action is for the greater good, and that we should be honest and never sneaky.

006: Promises Without Action Are Meaningless

Let me tell you about an article I read in the Asahi Shimbun newspaper titled *Minna Egao de Iru Tame Ni (So that Everyone Can Be Happy)*. The article detailed the story of the headmaster of an elementary school in Osaka who made everyone promise that they would not do or say anything they wouldn’t want others to do or say to them.

The most interesting point was that the promise was not just a promise; it led to specific action. Children who broke their “do unto others” promise would come to the headmaster’s office on their own volition and confess their transgression. Anyone who was told to report to the headmaster by someone else had to “rewind” to the point in time immediately before the

transgression took place and figure out for themselves how the incident might have been avoided.

The article made me wonder what parents are really doing when they repeatedly insist that their newly self-aware toddler or rebellious adolescent do what he or she is told. Perhaps they are actually just smothering their children's nascent ability to reject something that feels wrong to them. But this article showed me that it is important for children to be able to say "No!" when encountering a crisis of the mind.

In kindergarten, we encourage children to think about the promises they make to themselves during each particular activity. I believe that it is important, at school and at home, to make promises and guide children's behaviour towards keeping them. The problem lies in the lack of a link between promise and action; the educational goals we set at school or kindergarten, for instance, are forgotten and not used as a connection to specific behaviour.

Promises should not be just words; they should be a vehicle for developing actions and behaviour into positive habits. To achieve that, families need to turn promises into rules that children can adhere to. It may be neatly arranging your shoes when you come inside, it may be replacing things after you've used them, and it may be greeting everyone properly in the morning. The point is that you make sure that your children carry those actions out once the promise has been made. If, for instance, your child kicks off his or her shoes and leaves them in a mess by the door, call him or her back and make him or her arrange them properly; if he or she fails to put something back on the dining table that he or she was using, encourage him or her to put it away by saying, "None of us can eat dinner with the table in this state; it feels better if the place where you eat is clean and tidy." The important thing is that you make your child follow the house rules and keep his or her promises every day, no matter how bothersome it may be. It is vital that parents enforce these rules in their children from a young age. I hope that you will keep an eye on your children's actions and behaviour as part of their daily routine at home.